

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **JEAN MCCORD BABINEAUX**

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*Jean McCord Babineaux, left*

GOODSILL: Jean, will you tell us your name and date of birth?

BABINEAUX: My name is Jean Frances McCord Babineaux and I was born February 25, 1929 at Laura Eldridge Hospital, Sugar Land, Texas. Dr. Carlos Slaughter was the doctor. We lived on Sixth Street; the third, fourth house on the right going down Sixth Street from Main. My mother and dad were from Rusk, Texas. They came to Sugar Land to say goodbye to my Aunt Monnye Smith Rozelle and Aunt Minnie Smith Jenkins [mother's older sisters] because my parents were going to Borger, Texas; Daddy was gonna work in the oil fields. When they got here Aunt Monnye said "John you are NOT taking and leading those children to Borger, Texas!" And so he got a job in the refinery in Sugar Land as a mechanic. That was 1921.

GOODSILL: What was your mother's name and the names of your siblings?

BABINEAUX: Hattie Lee Smith McCord. My sister, Emily Andre, she just passed away a couple of months, on the 8th of September, a week before her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday. And Sammie (sister) and Ralph. They were all older than I. John Lee is my younger brother, then my sister Monnye Alice and sister Carolyn, who is the youngest. There were seven children. We had a high-ho good time, I tell you. (chuckling)

KELLY: The seven lived in the house on Sixth Street?

BABINEAUX: Noooo. When I was born we moved to Second Street. The house sits where Jean Boehm and Wayne Boehm, live now. Audrey Wooley and Verge lived next door to us. And Mrs. Boyer lived on the other side. And then in 1939 we switched houses with Dorothy Gandy's mother and daddy and her grandparents.

KELLY: That would be the Shultz's. And the Brocks?

BABINEAUX: Yes, the Shultz's and the Brocks. We moved into the third house on the right on Second Street. We just switched houses. 'cause they wanted a smaller house and we needed a bigger house. (Chuckling) I don't know if anyone said anything about the Mr. Adam Varnau.

KELLY: Who married Bythard Stallings?

BABINEAUX: Yes, but this is Mr. Bennie Varnau's brother. You've seen in the Sugar Land book a picture of the Varnau boy? It's his dad, and they lived on the other side of the Woolley's there on Second Street. Verge and Mr. Varnau made moonshine.

KELLY: During the Depression ...during Prohibition? How do you know that?

BABINEAUX: Yes. (laughter) Because they gave my daddy some. (laughter) And my mother poured it down the sink! (laughter)

KELLY: Where was the still? Where did they keep it?

BABINEAUX: In the bathtub.

KELLY: Bathtub gin.

BABINEAUX: I guess. Anyhow that was a story that was always told. And I know my daddy came home with some and put it in the old icebox and my mother said "No sir". Down the drain it went. (laughter) Oh dear.

GOODSILL: What kinds of things do you remember about growing up here?

BABINEAUX: Well, I remember the carnivals that we always had. The school carnival where we had the grab bag! That was big old bag of a thing and you paid your penny and you reached in and you grabbed you something.

KELLY: Do you remember what you grabbed?

BABINEAUX: (laughing) Some kind of little toy or a handkerchief or something. You know, everybody had handkerchiefs in those days. They had it in the circle at the school. Later they would have it in front of the old café then it was at the Lion's Club. But this was the school. They furnished everything.

I don't know if you know Blas Rodriguez, he worked in the refinery for years and years. Well, we were in the same grade. And when I started working at the credit union, he came in one day and he said, "Jean what are you doing in here?" I said, "Well I'm working Blas." He said, "All I remember about you in school is that I would get mad at you!" "What did I do?" "When we were in the fourth, fifth, sixth grade said they'd come say, 'Can we borrow Jean? We need her to play for us.' You got to get out of class and go play that piano and we'd all have to stay there and study! But not you. They need JEAN to come play the piano."

KELLY: Your sister Emily was a musician, you're a musician and I know Monnye Alice was. Where did that come from?

BABINEAUX: My mother and my dad too. My mother played the piano by ear and my dad played the violin and the guitar. Just for his own pleasure. One time George Andre made my daddy a steel guitar, I still have it. He made the amplifier and everything. My dad retired from Nalco Chemical. [Visco in the early days]

He put up the first building, and the first vessel, and helped run the first batch of oil additive that Visco ever produced here in Sugar Land. It was a chemical to break down, emulsify, the oil. Mr. T. B. Wayne started Visco here in Sugar Land.

KELLY: Well now somebody told me that one of the sugar chemist developed that product. Do you know anything about that?

BABINEAUX: No. I just know that Mr. Wayne, he was a chemist. He came out from Tretilite in Houston. I don't know if he worked in the refinery or not. Daddy was working at the refinery and he worked part-time with Mr. Wayne until they got things going at Visco.

KELLY: Do you know how it came about that Imperial Sugar allowed Visco to set up in Sugar Land at that site? [along Highway 90-A between Ulrich Road and Highway 6.]

BABINEAUX: I don't know, but they let 'um have that brick building down there, which still stands. Daddy built a shed onto the side and they started Visco and he retired from Nalco. When he retired they flew him to Chicago to the corporate offices and gave him a banquet. He and Mrs. Patsy Benner, who was the first secretary for Mr. T. B. Wayne.

KELLY: How old did your father live to be?

BABINEAUX: He was seventy-six when he passed away in 1971. My mother was eighty and she died in '74.

KELLY: We were just talking about Emily. She was married to George Andre and you were just telling us he made a steel guitar. He was an interesting person. What was his position at Imperial?

BABINEAUX: He could do anything. He was Executive Vice President, Secretary Treasurer. He started out as a chemist. He worked in Mississippi in a sugar plant and he also worked in Cuba. He and Emily went to Havana a number of times.

KELLY: How did he and Emily meet?

BABINEAUX: George was sixteen years older than Emily. He said she was so beautiful. He watched her grow up and when he thought she was old enough he asked her out.

KELLY: Is that right! (Laughter) That's true love.

BABINEAUX: Yeah, yeah, but they never had any children. They didn't have any children, but they had a wonderful life.

KELLY: Now Emily worked for Imperial as well? Right?

BABINEAUX: Yes. She retired from Imperial. You've heard of Mr. Guyer?

KELLY: Yes, he was the labor boss.

BABINEAUX: Well she was his secretary. That was her first job with Imperial. And she stayed in the labor department. She worked for Mr. Hall, and she worked for Albert Grohman until she retired. She was the organist and music director at the First Presbyterian Church for thirty-five or forty years. Just like I was the organist and pianist at First Baptist.

KELLY: Well ya'll had all the churches covered. (Laughter)

BABINEAUX: Just about. I played in all of 'em, you know.

KELLY: You infidel! (Laughter) Did you get paid to play it or was it a volunteer thing?

BABINEAUX: It was a volunteer thing.

GOODSILL: And you played at all the different churches. And if they needed someone to play for a wedding, or a funeral they would call. You started playing early?

BABINEAUX: Yes, I was thirteen years old when I played for the big service in the sanctuary. But I started playing when I was five years old at the Methodist Church.

KELLY: Five years old!!

BABINEAUX: Yes, for the little children on Tuesday afternoon after school. We called it Baptist Church Sunbeam Band. I would get up on that round little stool and play *Jesus Loves Me* and the *B-I-B-L-E* and all the little children would sing. Buddy Blair and I went to the Methodist Church and my cousin Mildred taught us. There was a little semi-circle table and she sat here and all the little children sat around and she taught us Sunday School; we were in third grade. Aunt Monnye and Uncle Tom lived on Third Street, TC Rozelle's mother and daddy. Buddy was walking down Third Street going home to Main Street and Aunt Monnye was watering her flowers. She said,

"Buddy, if you will pull this hose around to the back of the house for me; I'll dance at your wedding." And Buddy said, "That's all right Miss Monnye, you're gonna be at my wedding 'cuz I'm going to marry Jean." (laughs)

KELLY: He had his eye on you early.

BABINEAUX: Oh dear, so many things that happened over the years! It was really nice to be part of the tale.

KELLY: Any other stories about your early years in the Methodist Church?

BABINEAUX: Nooo, I just know that everybody had their own pew (chuckling) and you didn't sit in their their pew. An old friend of mind, I won't name anybody, but she and her mother went and sat in Aunt Monnye's place. Aunt Monnye told them that it was her seat. Well, EXCUSE her. (Laughs) Aunt Monnye was TC's mom.

KELLY: Tell us a little bit about the Rozelle family, your aunt, Monnye Rozelle, her husband Tom and their children.

BABINEAUX: They lived on Third Street. Aunt Monnye was very prim and proper. You know, she had on her white apron, a long white apron every day, starched! She was really a sweet lady! She was more like a grandmother to us because my mother's mother passed away when mother was ten. Aunt Monnye was twenty when her mother passed. And so she raised my mother and her two brothers until momma was old enough to take care of poppa and the two brothers, Marvin and William. Uncle Walter Smith was older; he married Aunt Leitha May Kelly, your granddaddy's sister.

KELLY: Walter Smith



*Bell Matlock and Monnye Alice Smith Rozelle at Blue Ridge State Farm in Fort Bend County*

BABINEAUX: Half sister. Uncle Walter was older than mother. Here is a picture of Aunt Bell and Aunt Monnye when they first came to Sugar Land. It's an old, old picture. They are out at the Blue Ridge prison farm. Uncle Tom ran that prison farm. Later they moved over to Flannigan. Later Uncle Tom was the night watchman for the Sugar Company. When we went to Aunt Monnye's house we had to be very quiet because Uncle Tom was always sleeping. He was a wonderful person, but he's very to himself he didn't have much conversation. But my younger brother John would sit on the steps with Uncle Tom and they would talk for hours when he was a little boy. John looooved to talk. Mr. Woolley and Mr. Varnau and all those men, he would just sit and talk to them for hours.

KELLY: Is John still alive?

BABINEAUX: No John died in 1995.



KELLY: Who were Tom and Aunt Monnye's children?

BABINEAUX: The oldest was Mildred Rozelle and then Mary Rozelle Kinard.

KELLY: I never knew Mary. Did she move away?

BABINEAUX: Yes, they lived in Refugio. Did you know the Bennie Kinard's that moved here he worked at Nalco, at Visco? Well, she married Bennie's brother. Arthur Kinard worked out at the Humble camp. Here is a pictures of their



*John L. McCord pushing Tommy and Nickie Kinard, Late 1930*



*Sugar Land Telephone Switchboard*

too. I remember her telling me that at one time Mildred hand wrote every bill and itemized every bill of every customer each month for the Sugar Telephone Company.

BABINEAUX: My mother worked for the telephone company too during the Second World War. She would work mostly from 11PM to 7 AM. On Friday nights she'd let me go stay with her. I used to get to plug it in the switchboard and I'd say, "Number please!" She had a rollaway bed. She and I would get on the rollaway bed and we'd sleep awhile. The phone would ring occasionally, somebody calling the doctor or something.

My little brother John is trying to push the wheelbarrow. It's cute. I have another picture of Marie Muehr's youngest brother and John sitting on Aunt Monnye's steps with the twins. T.C. was their next child and Helen is the youngest. I don't know that she every worked in Sugar Land.

KELLY: Mildred was the head telephone operator.

BABINEAUX: She always worked for the telephone company.

KELLY: My grandmother was an operator

KELLY: Probably didn't get too many calls at night.

BABINEAUX: Not at night. The phone station was upstairs over the old drugstore.

BABINEAUX: The doctor's offices were in the front until they built the clinic.

KELLY: Don't use any names, but so you know any interesting switchboard stories?

BABINEAUX: No! I don't remember mother ever talking about any of the calls.

KELLY: If there was a fire in town, I suppose people just picked up the phone and the operator took care of it. Is that correct?

BABINEAUX: Yes, and the whistle on top of the Char House would blow. Everybody would stop, how many whistles are blowing? Oh my, there's a fire down in the Flats. There was a different whistle, for the Hill, for the Quarters, the Flats, the Refinery. And they would blow the whistle out at the prison farm if a prisoner escaped. They also blew in the morning just like the whistle blew here. [To signal start of shift, change of shift, end of shift] I miss that whistle! I really do. I wish they'd blow that whistle. We'd be out playing and mother would say, "alright, you be home before the whistle blows." And we knew it blew at 5 o'clock and then it blew again at 6 o'clock. And she meant before the 6 o'clock whistle blows you be home 'cuz we're gonna eat. When that thing would first start blowing at 6 o'clock, oh boy would we run!

KELLY: I know you've held several jobs in your time. Take us through them.

BABINEAUX: The first one I had is when I was fourteen. They put new windows in that brick building down there at Visco and Nalco. And so they needed somebody to clean the windows, and daddy said, "Well Jean can do that; she's fourteen years." And then they paid me 50 cents an hour. And I cleaned the panes. They were the small panes you know. And then for the summer I washed chemical bottles.

KELLY: Is that right! What was that process?

BABINEAUX: Well, we put the laboratory beakers through a special wash.

KELLY: So you'd take a bottlebrush and cleaned them out?

BABINEAUX: No they were pretty big. I had big old gloves.

KELLY: Were there any hazards about that job other than just broken glass?

BABINEAUX: No, it was pretty simple. But that was the first job I had.

KELLY: So far it's all dealt with soap.

GOODSILL: Don't forget at five years old she played at the Methodist Church.



KELLY: (laughs) That's true!

BABINEAUX: Mrs. Spain was our teacher at the Methodist Church. She lived on Fifth Street next door to the Catholic Church. The second house was owned by Margie Taylor's mother. That's where Mrs. Spain lived and then Billy Vic Krehmeier and his mother and daddy lived in the next house.

BABINEAUX: Then the summer before I was a senior I went to work in the grocery store.

KELLY: The old mercantile.

BABINEAUX: In the old mercantile, the grocery part. That was back when the cans were up on the shelves and you would take the thing and you'd grab a can. People would come and give you their list and you'd just grab the can they wanted and put it on the counter. If they wanted a dozen eggs you'd go in the back and you would candle the eggs before you gave them the dozen eggs.

GOODSILL: What does that mean, candle the eggs?

BABINEAUX: You'd put it up to a light to see how many yolks are in there... if there's no chickens in that egg, you know. (laughter) We'd look at those eggs like that. And then they had the big block of cheese. And you'd cut it and you'd weigh it and then you'd wrap it up.

KELLY: Did you have any trouble with that pole pulling those cans off the shelf?

BABINEAUX: Sometimes Mr. Willie Dirks and Mr. Bainman had to come get the high ones. Mr. Willie Dirks lived on Fifth Street.

BABINEAUX: Through my senior year I worked at the grocery store after school and on Saturdays. When I got out of school I went to work at the medical and surgical clinic as a bookkeeper running the posting machine.

KELLY: I remember seeing you in the office when we'd come in for appointments

BABINEAUX: Well this was way before you were born, my dear (laughs).

KELLY: But you still were working after I was born weren't you?

BABINEAUX: Yes, when I came back to Sugar Land I went back to work there. I graduated in '47. I went to work in the summer of '47. Dr. Slaughter was there and Dr. Much [or Muche]. I worked there until Kelsey [Babineaux] came to Sugar Land I left with him. (chuckles) I was gone for two years.

GOODSILL: Where did you go?

BABINEAUX: We went to Port Arthur.

KELLY: Before we get into your life with Kelsey I want to ask you a little bit more about the medical clinic. Do you recall what year it moved from above the drugstore to the new facility at the corner of Ulrich and Sugar Land Street? [now Kempner Street]

BABINEAUX: I think it's '39 or '40.

KELLY: You never worked in the office above the drugstore?

BABINEAUX: Oh no.

KELLY: The new clinic was called the Carlos A. Slaughter Medical and Surgical Clinic.

How did he get his name on it?

BABINEAUX: He was the doctor for the company. Later they changed the name to Medical and Surgical Clinic, but he was still the doctor!

KELLY: Do you have any stories about Dr. Slaughter you would feel okay to share?

BABINEAUX: Well, in 1959 I was working there and I somehow got the measles, again. But I still worked. I went to work every day with the measles. I was in the back there, where you remember seeing me, running the posting machine. And Dr. Slaughter came in and he said, "Sister! Don't contaminate the help but you can sit out there with the patients." He called everybody Sister. "Sister, don't contaminate the help but you can sit out there."

KELLY: Get the whole town sick. (laughter) He was a character wasn't he?

BABINEAUX: He was a character, yes, he was. And he was influential. He sent Dr. Jenkins through school to be a doctor.

KELLY: Dubbo? [nickname for Dr. Jenkins] He actually came back and practiced in Sugar Land for a while.

BABINEAUX: Yes Dubbo was my doctor when Kelsey James was born.

KELLY: Did Dr. Slaughter run a really tight ship or did he have a nurse that ran the clinic for him?

BABINEAUX: My boss was Evelyn Ferguson. She was office manager. And you remember Mrs. Wappler from the Humble camp, Walter Wappler's mother?

KELLY: Yes.

BABINEAUX: Iris Hinchey from Rosenberg was Dr. Slaughter's nurse for years, and years, and years, and she did the doctoring (chuckles) and he okayed it. More or less.

KELLY: She was an assistant.

BABINEAUX: Yes. There were a lot of doctors that went through that clinic.

KELLY: Not too many people have told us about the Laura Eldridge Hospital when it was on Wood and Lakeview, across from the school. What was that building like?

BABINEAUX: It was wonderful! That's where I had my boys.

KELLY: With the two entrances facing the front. Walk us through the hospital.



*Sugar Land Clinic*

BABINEAUX: Okay. You just go in the right entrance and there was a big area where people could sit. Behind that were two patient rooms. And behind that was the operating room. On the left-hand side there were two Treatment Rooms where they took people that weren't too critical.

KELLY: Kind of like the emergency room.

BABINEAUX: Yes and that's where they birthed the babies. And then there was the nursery where the babies were kept. You could also go into the hospital from the side off of Wood Street. And behind

that was where all the food was cooked and dining room for the staff. Then there was long bunch of rooms called the annex. Back there were some individual rooms. It was like a ward where they put men.

KELLY: Sugar Land was a segregated community until the mid-60s. How did that affect medical care? Was there a separate waiting room?

BABINEAUX: Well they [minorities] sat in the back. But they treated everybody just the same medically in the hospital.

KELLY: Did you ever have occasion to work with Miss Nema, the head nurse at the hospital?

BABINEAUX: No, but when I had surgery in '54, Dr. Slaughter and Dr. Kuydendall were operating on me and I had my arm up like this. I was talking or something (giggles) and she said, "Hush your talking! You're gonna get sick! Now hush your talking!" (giggling) And I said, "Okay." Dr. Slaughter was leaning on this arm and Dr. Kuydendall was doing

the surgery and he told Dr. Slaughter, "Close it up." I was awake and everything, under a local. Dr. Slaughter started stitching me up and I could feel it. And he said, "Grit your teeth sister! Grit your teeth, few more stitches, a few more sticks."

KELLY: He didn't bother to anesthetize you anymore, it wasn't worth it?

BABINEAUX: Nope. (laughter) But Miss Nema was wonderful. She was a wonderful, wonderful nurse. And she ran a tight ship. Tight, tight ship up there at that hospital. You went in, you were quiet, there was no noise in that hospital. She really knew what she was doing.

KELLY: As a little boy I remember the clinic being configured in one way and then it seems like they remodeled it maybe late '50s early 60s. They changed around the treatment rooms, the waiting rooms and all. What was the old configuration? Was kind of a nurses' station in the center of the clinic and were there banisters?

BABINEAUX: Yes, because that's where the office was. When you walked in on the left there was an aisle right here and these were Dr. Kuykendall's patients or the treatment rooms. Dr. Slaughter's treatment rooms were over here. But the hallway went all the way back to the back door. And on the left was the office area where we pulled charts and all this kind of stuff. And you turned and went down that way and there was the fluoroscope room. And then you went on back and turned to the right and it was the laboratory and the x-ray room and everything. At one time the x-ray room was up front and when they re-did it they put everything to the back.

KELLY: And there was also a dentist office in the rear for Dr. Wheeler. He was interesting man. You didn't really have a lot of dealings with him because he ran his own office in his own building. So he wasn't really a part of your operation?

BABINEAUX: Correct. He was a character.

KELLY: Now I hear that he called everybody Pasquali is that correct?

BABINEAUX: Yeah (laughing) Oh, golly, yes. He was a wonderful dentist. I'd never gone to another dentist than Leslie Wheeler and then I started going to his son Buddy Wheeler. But he was the best. (laughs) He really was so sweet. Dr. Slaughter and Dr. Wheeler, you get them started and oh boy. Dr. Slaughter lived on Brooks Street.

KELLY: In the first block on the West side?

BABINEAUX: Yes. Dr. Slaughter and Verabelle lived in that first house. The house was moved over to Belknap, it was the first house past Belknap Court. I lived in the first house and that was Dr. Slaughter's house when it was over here on Brooks Street.

One time Dubbo was home. He would always drive Dr. Slaughter down to the Balinese Room in Galveston. While they were in Galveston Dr. Slaughter bought himself a travel trailer! He hooked it up to the car and pulled it home. And he had Dubbo drive it in the driveway. Mrs. Slaughter almost had a stroke. "Dubbo you take that thing back where you got it from! You know Carlos doesn't know what he's doing!" And so Dubbo did.

KELLY: I guess Dr. Slaughter thought it was his winnings.

BABINEAUX: (laughter) Yep.

KELLY: When we interviewed Carlos Tarver recently we heard that he is named after Carlos Slaughter. [See Carlos Tarver interview in Fort Bend County Historical Commission Oral History series.] I think there other babies too.

BABINEAUX: Yes, there's Carlos Medrano and quite a few that are named after Dr. Slaughter. Carlos Alba Slaughter was his real name. He was from Whitewright, up by Sherman, Texas. He graduated from Austin College in three years.

KELLY: They say he was a brilliant doctor and a skilled surgeon.

BABINEAUX: Yes. Nowadays you have to chase all over everywhere to get this doctor to do that, that doctor to this. Dr. Kirk and Dr. Slaughter just did everything. And they did it beautifully.

KELLY: People got good medical care here?

BABINEAUX: Medical care was wonderful.

KELLY: Since you were the billing person at the clinic, you are the one that would know most about how payments were made. Tell us about insurance and how the company handled it. Let's say you came in for an exam at the clinic...

BABINEAUX: You just paid \$3.00.

KELLY: That's all you paid? No matter what they did?

BABINEAUX: If you had to have lab work you paid \$5.00 (laughs).

GOODSILL: Anything taken out of your paycheck each month?

BABINEAUX: Yes, for the company employees it was taken out of their paychecks and they weren't charged when they came in.

KELLY: So if you worked for Imperial Sugar so much was taken out? But if you were a non-employee?

BABINEAUX: People came from Richmond, Rosenberg, Damon, and West Columbia. They came everywhere to see Dr. Slaughter. They paid \$3.00, or \$5.00 for labs or \$10.00 for an x-ray. But back then that was a lot of money.

KELLY: Could you put in on your Sugarland Industries credit account?

BABINEAUX: I don't think so. The doctors were paid so much a month to treat the company employees. Has anybody told you about the wreck?

KELLY: NO! Tell us about the wreck.

BABINEAUX: In July of 1946, Walterine Stephenson and Colleen Hall and I were walking to Jean Watson's house on Lakeview. We would just go walk to the root beer stand. It was a summer Saturday night we didn't have much to do. So Faye Hassell, the beauty operator, drove up and said, "Let's drive over to the Richmond Drive-In, get something to drink." So we said, "Okay." So we got into her car. It was me, Jean Watson, Colleen Hall (Waylan Hall's sister), Walterine Stephenson (Louise Hall's sister) and Faye. They were building this side of 90A.

KELLY: The south two lanes?

BABINEAUX: The south two lanes. And so we went, we got us something to drink, visited. You know how it was when you would go to Richmond Drive-In, there were always other kids there and you would visit and all this. We started back and because of the construction they had the road all dug away on the north side of the highway.

KELLY: There was kind of a drop-off?

BABINEAUX: Yes! A big drop off. Coming home we just past Central Prison Farm when her wheel dropped off the road. She corrected and hit this side of the abutment, the bridge, and nosed back and hit this side.

KELLY: Wow!

BABINEAUX: I was sitting in the rear on the right and Colleen Hall was between me and Jean Watson. Walterine was in the front with Faye. They were hurt really badly, Jean and I weren't. But Colleen was! For her whole senior year she was in hospital bed. She didn't go to school but she graduated with us. They brought the teachers that lived on Second Street, next door to us, to tutor her. And we brought her the lessons. She graduated. Everybody would refer to "The wreck. Oh! The wreck!"

KELLY: That's awful! Never heard about that.



BABINEAUX: Colleen's teeth were all knocked askew. Walterine too, her jaw was broken. Dr. Wheeler put all of Colleen's teeth back in and re-wired her mouth. He had to wire Walterine's mouth shut because the jaw was broken. They worked...the doctors worked all night and half of this Saturday night and half the day on Sunday on those two.

KELLY: Wheeler was doing oral surgery? And the other doctors were doing what they could?

BABINEAUX: Yes. Colleen's arm was broken, her eardrum was broken, her leg was broken, all of her teeth were askew. They saved her life (pensive).

KELLY: When the wreck happened were you knocked out?

BABINEAUX: I got hurt...see this scar right here on my head? And I hurt my knee that was all. This man and woman stuck their head in the car and said, "Can anyone talk?" I said, "I can." (chuckles). So they got me out. And they brought me to Sugar Land and I said, "Take me to Faye Watson's house," because she was a nurse. She was Jean's stepmother and lived up on Lakeview. I went in and told Faye because I knew she could help 'em if she could get out there! My brother Ralph and maybe your daddy [Charles Edward Kelly] and a bunch of guys were going to the midnight show in Rosenberg and they came upon the wreck. They saw who it was and they were down in the ditch looking in the water for me. They didn't know where I was. And then the couple got back out there and told them they'd taken me to Sugar Land. Then Faye got out there. They brought all of them to the hospital.

KELLY: What a story! In those days there was no ambulance service. So people just had to transport you on their own.

BABINEAUX: Yeah. And it was "The Wreck!" (chuckles)

KELLY: "The wreck."

GOODSILL: Is must have been awful that your girl friends were hurt.

BABINEAUX: Yes, yes and I was so blessed that I wasn't hurt. Well, Jean wasn't either. She wasn't even hurt as bad as I was.

KELLY: How do you think it affected the young ladies at that time in their lives to be so close to death? Did it affect you?

BABINEAUX: It did, it did. On Monday morning, Faye had to go to work so she brought Jean to the house and she stayed with us. Mother said, "Bring her to the house and let her stay with us. She can lay in the bed with Jean." You know because she was sore and

banged up and everything thing. We told John to go to the store and get us a Black Cow. You know what a Black Cow is? It was caramel with chocolate on it and you'd suck on it. And so he did. Oh! He ran into the store and got us a Black Cow (chuckles) and came back. And we were laying there laughing, and talking, and sucking on that thing. And I bit in like that [chomp] and there my tooth was sitting on the blanket (laughter). Oh, I had to go to Dr. Wheeler to get him to cement my tooth back in. And this is a false tooth. Dr. Wheeler put it on there. That's the biggest damage I had beside my head.

But the accident stayed with me for a while. It did, a long time, yeah. Walterine and Colleen were hurt...well Faye was hurt too, the gearshift went through her leg and tore it up. Good thing we were in a big old Pontiac. It was a big old car.

KELLY: Now you mentioned the Root Beer stand and I haven't been able to get anybody to describe it to me, where it was, what it looked like, who worked there.

BABINEAUX: Okay, the Root Beer stand. It was where the old Humble station was. Kind of behind the Chevrolet Motor Company which Mr. Stabler ran. On past that was the Root Beer stand in the parking lot where the Imperial Sugar office building is now. It had a window and you would just go up and order you something. Or you could sit in the car they had carhops. Emily, my sister, carhopped there when she was sixteen or something like that, during The Depression to make her a little money.

KELLY: It had no dining room?

BABINEAUX: I don't know if did. I think it did, a small one to the side.

BABINEAUX: Has anyone told you about you about the *Alligator Splash*?

KELLY: That was the school newspaper, right?

BABINEAUX: I've got a bunch of them because I was editor of the *Alligator Splash* my senior year. I was associate editor during my junior year. Frances Tise and I made copies of them years ago. And I thought this would be interesting to you. This was in '46 and it's a dedication to Miss Lema Johnson. She was going to retire after 25 years.

"Dedication to Miss Lema Johnson, the first grade teacher who has served faithfully in school life here for twenty-five years and guided us through our first days of school life, who by her patience and enthusiasm has inspired us to go on to this happy day of graduation. We dedicate this senior edition of the *Alligator Splash*."

BABINEAUX: Bertha Lee Blair was the editor and I was the associate editor and your mom (Sally Rachuig Kelly) wrote for the freshman class. And Mamie Rachuig Bass Hause (Sally's sister) wrote for the sophomore class.

KELLY: Fantastic! These are great!

BABINEAUX: That was the '46 edition that the junior class did. And this was the senior class of '46. I have '47 also. We put it out every six weeks. It's funny. (chuckles). I was reading it last night and I'd laugh remembering things. We had typist. And Mr. Borden wrote an editorial every six weeks.

KELLY: You wrote some biographies on Pansie Klechka, Wilbur Muehr, Faye Roberts.

BABINEAUX: This is the junior class and we write how we started with Miss Johnson in 1935 in first grade and who came each year. And who left.

GOODSILL: Only in a small town!

BABINEAUX: In '46 we were talking about having a student council. And so we wrote and asked what people thought of it. Lou Payton, Billy Buls, Jimmy McFadden, and Taz all wrote.

KELLY: In this one that you wrote Service News about Charles Kelly receiving his military discharge on May 7, 1946 in Camp Waller Texas. It was all the talk about Earl Tise's discharge.

BABINEAUX: Yes, when they all came out of the service. And over here it has my brother, Ralph. We had the town news. We had the Campus Chatter and the honor rolls, and the staff news. It was neat.

KELLY: Here's a long poem: "I'm a Senior" by Wynnell Laperouse.

GOODSILL: Why didn't that one person want student council?

BABINEAUX: Oh, (heh heh) this is anonymous. "I won't be here next year myself. Knowing some of the kids in the other rooms, however, I would say definitely not. Some of the classes would appoint representatives that would just try to show off. It would cause hard feelings among the kids."

KELLY: Here's on about Georgy, her favorite thing is strawberry shortcake. "It was the first day of my first job. I was to be soda jerk. I'd sit behind the counter just as nervous as I could possibly be. Had my very first customer. And my very first customer was a haughty old woman who seemed to enjoy being grouchy (Babineaux laughs). She ordered a cup of coffee and all of the worst things that could have happened I spilled the cream right into her lap. With the eyes of my boss and several other smiling spectators, I managed to offer my apologies and handed her a napkin. All I got in return was an icy, cold look. After all this confusion with my mind still in a turmoil the old battle-axe

handed me a twenty dollar bill. Leave it up to me to shortchange her (Babineaux and Kelly chuckling), five dollars at that. After calling my attention to this little mishap, she finally got off the stool and marched heartily out the drugstore. Ever since that day have I not seen her in the drugstore again.”

KELLY: Do we know who the battle-axe was?

BABINEAUX: No, no.

BABINEAUX: When we started in '35...it says, “The juniors were all scrubbed clean and raring to get started to school on the morning of September 7, 1935. Miss Johnson enrolled twenty in our class and started us on our way. The charter members of our class are: Buddy Blair, a very bashful soul; James Franklin Miller, who tried to stay out of trouble; James Vavrecka ready to learn; Burt Dearing, scared to death; Jerry Tallas and Frank Tallas, repeated victims of hand spanking; Jean McCord, a demure little lady; Walterine Stevenson, easy to embarrass; Agnes Urban, Janie Borowski, and Edna Cothorn, stiff starched and ready to learn; Alaan Lemke, Ray Anhaizer, little co-workers; and Taz Watson, well dressed up and ready to go. Everyone was anxious to get started on the little journey. Everyone liked school. My heaven! Things changed. The years of elementary school are dotted with many interesting memories. Colleen Hall and Richard Dierks joined the class in the third grade. In the fourth grade our troubles began. The class had somehow acquired a mean streak, and Buddy Blair was caught shooting spitballs at one of the little girls. Miss Curtis punished him by folding and wrapping his ears with rubber bands (laughter). She did across his nose (laughter) with rubber bands. Buddy sat through the entire morning this way. In the fifth grade the class was entertained by Miss Fraziers giving someone a whipping every day. In the sixth grade two other students were gained. Jean Renfrow came into the class. (Now Jean Renfrow lives in Dequeen, Arkansas. I visit with her quite often and we talk about one or twice a week. So we've been friends since the sixth grade.) All prim like she was ready for the trip ahead. Ophelia Cazarez joined the class also. And she's the only Spanish out of our class. She was a great help to the Spanish students. When we were promoted from the sixth grade to the seventh grade it was more than an ordinary promotion, it was a graduation.

By the way, Patsy Rushing, Jimmy McFadden, and Frank Tallas joined the class in the seventh grade to finish the journey with them. Junior high school life was very interesting indeed. Girls were being noticed by the boys for the first time. Some found it quite pleasant. From junior high school into senior high...”

GOODSILL: Did a boy or girl write this?

BABINEAUX: I think this was written by me because I was the editor. "From junior high school in senior high we crossed another bridge, freshman-fish. We had already begun to look forward to senior year and senior day. Come freshman day, wow, what a time. I think perhaps Taz Watson was initiated harder than any of the rest. Anyway he had lipstick on him days afterwards. Then came sophomore year. At least revenge for the treatment we had received from the upper classmen. We really had the fun pointed on the freshman of '45. Royce White and Neila Jo Spencer joined the class in their sophomore year. That brings us to our junior year and next to the last lap of our journey. It was not until we became juniors that we had the privilege of having with us such students Minnie Roberts, Jack Curry, Jean Watson, Verna Kelly, married to James Farrell, Billy Jean Hawkins, and Clementine Molonosky. This completes our class, which now has a membership of twenty-nine. We think it is the best class in the school."

KELLY: Who was your favorite teacher?

BABINEAUX: Oh, I don't know I liked them all. The only time in my school life that I ever had to stay after school was in the seventh grade. And it was math. And I couldn't write one million, five hundred thousand two hundred and fifty. Mr. Kaderley was the math teacher. And it was in the last room of the first circle. I had to stay after school and write on the board until I learned to write all of those. I was just crushed because that just didn't happen to ME (chuckles).

GOODSILL: Did you learn it? It would be important in your future career as a bookkeeper. (teasing)

BABINEAUX: Yes. Oh, and I remembered it too. We had Sadie Hawkins parties. Did your mom tell about those?

KELLY: No! I don't know about that. But I guess the girls invited the boys to the dance?

BABINEAUX: Um hum and then the boys would go hide and the girls had to go find them.

KELLY: If you had a dance, where would they have it?

BABINEAUX: In the gym. Jean Renfrow and I were laughing about that. She said do you remember that we couldn't walk on that basketball court in bare feet or in shoes? You had to wear socks so you wouldn't mess up the floor. But when we had dances we danced on the basketball court. During the day they would tell us "Walk around the edge don't dare get on that floor with your shoes, don't dare get on that court."

KELLY: I guess they thought once in a while it was okay.

BABINEAUX: (laughs) Yeah. We had a nickelodeon in there, you know, to dance to.

KELLY: Did you enjoy the pool?

BABINEAUX: I did.

KELLY: You liked to swim.

BABINEAUX: Yes, yes. And Jean Renfrow says, "Do you remember that crazy Margie Wappler?" (chuckling) That was Walter Wappler's sister.

KELLY: She married a Buchanan.

BABINEAUX: Yes. The boys would swim...

KELLY: Without their clothes

BABINEAUX: Um hum. Margie said, "Why can't the girls?" I thought, "Oh my gosh, Margie, hush your mouth." I never had to swim in those black wool swimsuits. Oh! Scratchy. They were scratchy.

KELLY: My mother hated to swim, maybe it was the wool suits? (laughter)

BABINEAUX: And then you'd have to leave everything in your basket. And then you'd have to go through that shower before you could ever get into that pool. I don't know if they were disinfecting us or what!

KELLY: They had a footbath.

BABINEAUX: I know that you had to step into a footbath, and then you could go into that pool. But you had to go through that shower and you had to have a cap on, a swimming cap. (sighs) But I never learned to dive off the diving board. I could dive off the side, but I didn't like the diving board.

KELLY: Did you ever remember going there in the summer and swimming? I heard it got kind of hot in there, in the summertime.

BABINEAUX: (laughing) It did, it did. But my kids swam in there.

KELLY: Well we did too. Dugan [Hightower] taught us.

BABINEAUX: Yeah. Carroll Ray told him, "I can swim!" when Dugan was asking, "Who can swim, and who can't swim?" "I can swim!" Cause he was swimming his tiny swim pool out in the backyard.

KELLY: His baby pool?



BABINEAUX: Un huh. "I can swim." He jumped in the deep end and almost drowned. Dugan had to go in after him. Oh mercy. He was always into something.

KELLY: Now you got married in what year?

BABINEAUX: In '48

KELLY: And how did you meet Kelsey?

BABINEAUX: He was working in the refinery as an insulator. They were insulating the vessels in the refinery. And I met him and knew him from the fifteenth of March until the end of April (laughs).

KELLY: Did you get married in April?

BABINEAUX: Um hum, twenty-eighth of April. We married in Port Arthur.

KELLY: So a whirlwind engagement.

GOODSILL: Six weeks

BABINEAUX: My mother didn't look kindly upon me for a long time. He was living with sister and brother-in-law in Port Arthur so that's where we married. Well the weekend before we married, we went to Louisiana for me to meet his parents.

KELLY: And where in Louisiana was he from?

BABINEAUX: In New Iberia. He and George Andre both were from New Iberia

KELLY: Were the Laperouse's from New Iberia?

BABINEAUX: Yes. Kelsey worked in Estorg's drugstore when he was fourteen. And he knew Mr. Laperouse's sister. She worked as a bookkeeper for the Estorg drugstore.

KELLY: Was New Iberia kind of a sugarcane center? With a mill? Did they recruit people from Louisiana to come to Imperial?

BABINEAUX: Yes. Lynell was born was born in '49 in Port Arthur.

KELLY: Was Kelsey involved with asbestos insulation?

BABINEAUX: Yes. He never did have any problems because he didn't insulate for that many years. We came back to Sugar Land and he went to work in the refinery. He worked in the Char House with the sugar boilers.

KELLY: Do you know what floor he worked on in the Char House?

BABINEAUX: Pan floor. That's where he worked. Where the sugar boilers were. Daddy wanted us to come back to Sugar Land and I didn't want to come back. But he talked to

Mr. Bennie Varnau and he said, "Oh yeah, I'll find a job for him." So we went back to Sugar Land. I didn't want to come back to Sugar Land (chuckling) I liked Port Arthur.

KELLY: Did you like it because it was Port Arthur, or did you like because you were away from family, or a little of both?

BABINEAUX: Both! I had been in Sugar Land long enough. But we came back! Got two years reprieve! (chuckling)

KELLY: When you came back to Sugar Land where did you live?

BABINEAUX: We lived with my mother and daddy for about two months. And then we lived with Ma'maw Starr on Gunther Street.

KELLY: Now Ma'maw Starr, are you related to her?

BABINEAUX: No. My Aunt Monnye and my mother and Aunt Minnie played 42, dominoes all the time. And they quilted during the depression. They had a quilting frame that hung from the ceiling in the dining room over the dining table. And that frame would come down. And mother and Aunt Minnie and Aunt Monnye, and Ma'maw would sit there and quilt once a week usually on Thursday afternoons. I've got a picture that Helen gave me of the Methodist ladies; Mrs. Boyer, Aunt Minnie, Aunt Monnye, Mrs. Borden, Mrs. Al Jenkins, Joy Jenkins' mother, and Jack Starr's wife, Jerry, and one lady that I don't know.

KELLY: Now where was the Starr Hotel?

BABINEAUX: On First Street.

KELLY: Was that originally called the Gandy Hotel?

BABINEAUX: Well it was, after the Starr Hotel it was called the Gandy Hotel. Mr. Starr worked at the Prison Farm I think but Mrs. Starr ran the hotel. She lived on Main Street where Second Street goes into Main. It's been remodeled and it's blue. That is where Ma'maw lived when I was in high school. When Jerry and Jack moved away she was kind of scared to stay by herself so either Monnye Alice Carolyn or I would go sleep with Ma'maw at night to keep her company. After Roy (her youngest son) was killed she built the house down here.

KELLY: Was Jack living there at the time when ya'll lived there?

BABINEAUX: No, he was in the service.

KELLY: Oh, so you stayed there for a couple of months and then a house opened up?

BABINEAUX: Yes, we moved in Mr. and Mrs. Matledge's garage apartment on the corner of Venice and Guenther until we got us a company house up on Lakeview.

KELLY: Tell us a little bit about the Matledges'. What were they like?

BABINEAUX: They were real sweet. When you'd go in the old drugstore he was always standing there. All the people in Sugar Land were kind to us kids. When we lived in that apartment he made a swing in the backyard for Lynell. We just loved living there. His wife, Sally, was such a sweet lady.

BABINEAUX: Yes, she was. She and Mrs. Jim Sheppard were sisters and Nell Rose Doyle was their sister. The Matledge's had two children, a girl and a boy. And when I was born on Sixth Street Mrs. Sheppard lived across the street from us, on Sixth Street. About the second or third house on the left. Mother said I had colic and I cried and I cried and Mrs. Sheppard would come over and she would rock me. Mother said I'd just hush crying for Mrs. Sheppard.

KELLY: Was she kin to Bob Sheppard?

BABINEAUX: Yes, Jim and Bob were brothers. She was their mother.

KELLY: Okay. And later Bob married Miss Nima

BABINEAUX: Yes, but he didn't marry Miss Nima until his mother died. He was quite up in years when he and Nima married. She was Nima Durgan and she had a daughter named Betty Durgan.

KELLY: So you stayed in the Matledge apartment and then a house opened up?

BABINEAUX: Up on Lakeview, right across from the school, the little yellow brick house. It was a three-room house.

KELLY: Is that where James was born?

BABINEAUX: Yes, James, then we moved to First Street next door to the Garnosky Hotel. We lived in the first house next to it when Carroll Ray was born. And then we moved out on Belknap. We built our house in '59 and there's where I've been ever since.

KELLY: I can remember visiting your house on Belknap as a preschooler.

BABINEAUX: Yes, I've got pictures of you and Chuck at birthday parties. Oh, we use to have good times. We'd all grown up here and we were raising our children here. And we had our birthday club.

KELLY: Tell us about the birthday club and how it got started.

BABINEAUX: Just so we could have a night out from kids and husbands, you know.

KELLY: Can you remember the charter members of the birthday club?

BABINEAUX: Well it was Louise Hall and Martha Jo Muehr and your mom Sally Rachuig Kelly, and me and Mayme Rachuig Bass and Tuggie Laperouse Krehmeier and Betty Sue Lubojasky and Barbara Batton and Bettie Jenkins and Marilyn Bourg. There were twelve or fourteen. We would have our birthdays at different houses. I remember one time when Barbara Batton hadn't been here too long, she was from England, you know, everything was new to her. We went on a picnic; all of us, and our husbands went down to Rocky Falls on the Brozos River in Richmond. We had the best time. And of course the guys had beer. And Wayburn Hall says, "Okay guys, shall we gather at the river?"

KELLY: Spoken like a true Baptist. He was a singer wasn't he?

BABINEAUX: Yeah. Oh dear. But we had a good time.

KELLY: Tell us stories of your children.

BABINEAUX: Lynell says, "Mother go to the computer and write everything down." I said, "If went and sat down I couldn't think of a thing." She wants me to put all this down for the grandchildren.

KELLY: Let's go back to Second Street. The Muehr's lived on Second Street. Someone told me it was the first Teacherage. That was the house with a front porch and two front doors.

BABINEAUX: Now I don't know about that. The Muehr's just had one front door. The next house may have been the Shriver house, it had two doors. It kind of looked like a boarding house. The Shrivens were related to the Woolley's. I don't know how, but they had a daughter and her name was Tootay. And I was just in awe of Tootay. I thought she was the prettiest thing. She had blond hair and she would sit and talk to us. Right across the street from our first house from the Harringtons, lived Dot Bryant. They lived on one side of the house and they shared the kitchen and the bathroom with her parents. The Sloans lived on the other side Sammy Sloan was my age. There was big cottonwood tree there and big old beetles in that cottonwood tree. They would come on the front porch of the Sloan's side. Sammy and I would stir up cocoa and sugar. We'd put it in our mouths and we'd spit it at those beetles. (laughing)

KELLY: Like tobacco juice?

BABINEAUX: Yeah. That's how we'd entertain ourselves. We would spit the tobacco at those beetles. We weren't but four or five years old. We would sit up underneath those houses 'cause it was cool. And we would play paper dolls. And we would make mud pies. There were cobwebs and spider webs but we'd crawl underneath there and played. It didn't matter.

KELLY: That's where Nell [Jean's daughter] got it 'cause she was adventuresome too.

(laughing) I remember playing with her. She wasn't afraid to do anything.

BABINEAUX: (laughing) I know it. And she is still not. Oh Lord!

KELLY: Well I know you're too young to have done it, but did you ever hear any stories about the dances on top of the auditorium?

BABINEAUX: I heard that but I never went. I know there were dances at the recreation hall. You know, what they called the Lions Club eventually.

KELLY: The old salvage building?

BABINEAUX: Yes, that's where most of the dances were. Mr. and Mrs. Pauler lived in the apartment above the auditorium because he was the janitor. And we would go up there and visit Mrs. Pauler because she would bake cookies and give them to us. George and Edwin, his brother, were wonderful musicians. And Mrs. Moore was the piano teacher. And that's who I took from. And when we would have our recitals. George and Edwin would play twin pianos on the stage of the Auditorium. They were so good! We thought they were fabulous, you know. They were really good musicians.

GOODSILL: When you gave your piano recitals in the auditorium everybody would come?

BABINEAUX: Oh yes. It would be filled.

KELLY: Emily was how much older than you?

BABINEAUX: Twelve years.

KELLY: So she might have had occasion to go to a silent movie in the auditorium?

BABINEAUX: Oh yes. She played piano for the silent movies sometimes. She and Bunny Ward and Otis Enquist's wife too.

KELLY: Did Katie Bowen play for the silent movies? You know, she played piano as well.

BABINEAUX: I don't know if Katie did or not.

KELLY: John Pirtle told us that his father was the projectionist at times.

BABINEAUX: I think Mr. Pirtle was.

KELLY: I was just a little curious as to why your family stopped going to the Methodist Church and started going to the Baptist Church? Do you mind telling us?

BABINEAUX: My daddy was raised Presbyterian and my mother was raised Christian Church. When Aunt Minnie and Aunt Monnye came to Sugar Land there was just a Methodist, a Presbyterian, a Baptist, and a Catholic Church. So they went to the Methodist Church 'cause they thought that was closest to the Christian Church. Well daddy said he had to work six days a week so he went hunting on Sundays. He wasn't going to church! Mr. Irvin Nelson used to teach



*Baptist Church, 1914*

chemistry at the High School and he went to work for Nalco as a chemist. Daddy and Mr. Nelson were good friends. Irvin and his wife, Roxie, went to the Baptist Church. Well daddy went to a men's prayer meeting on Friday night with Irvin. And he was converted. He came home and mother was so elated that he wanted to be in a church. That Sunday morning instead going left to the Methodist Church we walked right to the Baptist Church. I was about eight or nine years old. At that time the Baptist Church sat next to the alley, it was the little white wooden frame.

KELLY: Which was once the school building?

BABINEAUX: Yes, it was the school building. I was twelve when I was baptized. They had to take the chairs off the pulpit and raise it up and there was a tank underneath. That's where I was baptized, in the tank. In that Sugar Land pictorial book, they have the picture of the Baptist Church and they said it was built in 1939. That's incorrect. That church was not built until the early fifties.

KELLY: The one with the brick façade?



BABINEAUX: Yes. The church that was built after the schoolhouse. My daddy was the project manager for that building.

KELLY: I had no idea that it looked that way. Very attractive. It had a bell tower.

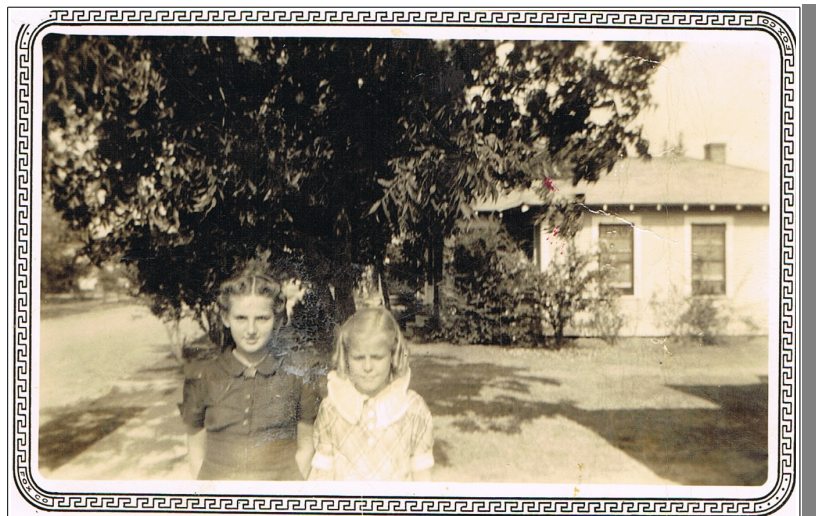
BABINEAUX: It was a big white frame church. In the photo are Colleen Hall and me and Johnnie Linenburg. She lived where Sienna Plantation is now. It was originally the House Plantation, Johnnie's dad ran that plantation. She rode the school bus in. She to school with us in the third grade. We would go out on the weekends and Jean and Renfrow would come from Fresno where she lived and spend the weekend with Johnnie Beth out on House Plantation. We'd go fishing. It was fun! They built the old the big two-story house that's still standing.

KELLY: The Scanlin house? They moved parts of that from Houston out there.

BABINEAUX: Yes, they did. And the nuns would stay there. And they had big strawberry patches. Mrs. Linenburg would takes us out and the nuns would let us pick strawberries. But it was more fun to go out to Johnnie Beth's House Plantation. Now it is Sienna Plantation. Kelsey took me to see if we could find the Scanlin house. And the way you get to it is to go past Arcola and go in the back way. But we couldn't get to Johnnie Beth's house 'cause they had the road blocked off. It's still a gravel road down through there. First time we went fishing we were fishing off this bridge and Mrs. Linenburg gave us all cane poles. What did I catch but an eel? I have never fished again.

BABINEAUX: This 1938 photo is of Johnnie Beth Linenburg and me on Second Street. Her mom took her to tap dancing in downtown Houston. When I'd spend the weekends, Johnnie Beth I could go with them downtown. I thought that was the neatest thing; to go downtown and watch the tap dancers.

BABINEAUX: Somewhere I have a photo of me and my three siblings on Second Street in the second house we lived in, me with with John and Monnye and Carolyn. Ralph was older, he was away in the Navy when that was taken – 1942.



*Jean McCord Babineaux and Johnnie Beth Linenburg, 1938*

You went down from my house and there was Mr. Varno's stucco house and then Pansey Klechka's stucco house and then a stucco duplex and then the house that Mrs. Manning lived in.

KELLY: And who lived in this house?

BABINEAUX: The Vasek's. I'll tell you a funny story about that. Daddy called him Pomalee (laughs). And so mother was sitting on the front porch swinging one afternoon waiting for daddy to come home and Mr. Vasek was walking home from the refinery. She said, "Good afternoon Mr. Pomalee" (laughter)

KELLY: Did Mr. Vasek know what she said?

BABINEAUX: He said, "Good afternoon." and kept on walking. (laughter) Do you remember Mr. Babenger who raised all the vegetables for Sugarland Industries? His picture is in that Sugar Land book. Here is a photo of his adopted daughter, Ruth Ann.

GOODSILL: What year was this taken?

BABINEAUX: I don't know. But anyhow she would come to the house with my older sister Sammie. And mother said that she would sit and play with me and play with me and she'd say, "Can I take her home with me, Mrs. McCord?"

KELLY: You were her doll.

BABINEAUX: They lived in the first house on this side where, where the credit union was. On the corner of Gunther and Brooks where Dick Loper lived. There's a photo of Mildred standing on Sixth Street. And this is Carlos Tarver's mother, Sophie Pauswang when she was a little girl.

KELLY: And she lived out on a farm. Was she Emily's age?

BABINEAUX: Uh huh. And that was her birthday party. She is on her front porch way out in the country.

KELLY: South of Sugar Land. Out kind of near the levee.

KELLY: They, they managed the Sugarland Industries lands out in the First Colony area. Did she and Emily did they stay friends through the years?

BABINEAUX: Oh yes. Do you know what I have in my own mother's stuff? I have a Christmas card from Mrs. Boyer to mother with a one-cent stamp on it. "Mrs. McCord city." That's how it was mailed. I thought you might want to see this, it is ...

KELLY: My great-aunt that I never knew.

BABINEAUX: Her name was Letha May. This is when Uncle Walter died, her husband.

KELLY: I regret that we never got to know them.

BABINEAUX: They were sweet people. Aunt Polly raised Aunt May. Their mother died or something and Aunt Polly raised them.

KELLY: My recollection is that my grandfather was three years old and both parents died of a fever. When Polly was old enough and she married somebody and raised all the kids.

BABINEAUX: Yeah. I think she was the oldest sister or something like that. I remember Margie and Livian and Patsy talking about Aunt Polly.

BABINEAUX: Did, did anyone tell you about the Whirleegigs of 43? I've got the school program and everything. Our band director was also a dancer. It was during the war and she was a woman. We gave this musical - Whirleegigs of 43. It was dancing and it was wonderful. I played all the music from *Latin Jealousy* to *Chicken in the Reel*. We put it on twice at the auditorium. And then we put it on between the late show and the midnight show over in Rosenberg at the Cole Theater. We also took it to the U.S.O. and put it on for the soldiers and the sailors and everything in Houston. I was so frightened when I had to walk across that stage to the piano in front of all those sailors and soldiers. This is the card that they gave me and they all signed it on the back.

KELLY: I don't know the second one.

BABINEAUX: Whop! That's, that's what we called Walter Wappler.

KELLY: Oh, Whop. And Daniel Prikkyl, Stanford Sheppard, Billie Vic Krehmeier, Don Snell, Wilbur Mueher, Charles Laperouse, Louise Stephenson, Naomi Landin, Vernell Blaschke, Catherine Schinko, Wynell Laperouse, Mary Edna Walker, Marsha Kirkpatrick

BABINEAUX: Yeah, she was the little ballerina

KELLY: And Mrs. Watson, Taz's mother and Betty Walker.

BABINEAUX: She was the band director and the dancer. She did all this.

KELLY: And Taz, How about that. It's dated 1943 on the back.

BABINEAUX: When we would have assemblies, we would sing all these songs.

BABINEAUX: And I think the funniest one is this one right here where it sings to "Auld Lang Syne." Sing that for me. (laughing)

KELLY: "With someone like you the fish that never [inaudible]. You know what we need to do.

GOODSILL: [singing] “to surprise, oh surmise. Don’t hide your light bulbs, blow your horn. It pays to advertise.” (laughter)

BABINEAUX: We used to have sing-a-longs in the Auditorium. Then we’d sing “The Star Spangled...” from the fourth to the sixth grade. I was the director. (chuckle) We sang at county meet over in Rosenberg.

KELLY: That was great they’d let a student direct it. [reading from the program] Jean McCord, Colleen Hall, Catherine Schinko, Laura Houser, Harold Warner, Charlie Cheany, Gloria Ann Laperouse, Jackie Ann Klahn, Ellen Pausewang, Carlos Boehm, Clara Ruth Sembre, Ella Mae Vavrecka, Walterine Stephenson, Lee Fowler, Fanny Ruth Sims, Dorothy Goehring, Gorrum, Taz Watson, Wynell Laperouse, Dorothy Mae Liemam, Pansy Klecka, Jessie Mae Benson, Dorothy Vavbreka, Lorraine Doty, Marjorie Wappler, Louise Nulisch and Evelyn Abbott. How about that? 1938. And did you win?

BABINEAUX: Yes, we did.

GOODSILL: So where are you in this picture?

BABINEAUX: Right here. That’s Walterine. No, no, that’s Johnnie Beth. They look alike.

Walterine and I lived on Main Street and we were friends from... You remember Steven Farrel? That’s his mother.

GOODSILL: Where did you get your little dresses?

BABINEAUX: Mother made ‘um. There’s Charlie Cheaney. Charlie was always balling around.

KELLY: Did you ever have occasion to visit your friends out at the Humble Camp?

BABINEAUX: Oh, the Humble Camp. They had a wonderful recreation hall. We had slumber parties on Friday nights, your mom and all of us. The boys would come out and we had dances and then they’d go home and we’d stay and slumber and giggle. And one time you know they had the park out there. Did your mom tell you about that? There was a pool in the park by the recreation center. They had a little Ferris wheel. And they had swings and slides and everything. We decided that “Oh about 2:00 tomorrow we put Tuggie [Laperouse] on that Ferris wheel!” Well the top of her pajamas got hung up on the thing and we couldn’t get it to stop. She was going 90 to nothing (laughter). And we almost choked poor little Tuggie!

KELLY: Oh my!

BABINEAUX: Then one Saturday morning your grandmother made us all pack lunches and we walked the levee to the river. We had to take off our shoes 'cause we just walked through the mud and everything, but we lost Tuggie's shoes coming back. (laughter) We had a stick with the shoes hanging over it but we lost Tuggie's shoes. Poor old Tuggie she always got the worse of it. We just had a good time out there at the Humble Camp.

KELLY: Mother says Mrs. Standerford oversaw the recreation hall. She was a little strict

BABINEAUX: Yeah, yeah but she allowed us to do things. We had good times out there. We really did. One time we were in Neila Spencer's car and her boyfriend, "Piller" Miller...

KELLY: Was that he real name?

BABINEAUX: His name was James Franklin. He started school with me in first grade. We were all in her daddy's big Oldsmobile. We were coming into town and Piller slammed on the brakes and we...you we know the gravel road and we just [waving motion with hand]

KELLY: Fishtailed?

BABINEAUX: Yes and he was just dying laughing. (laughing) That big old car...

GOODSILL: Yeah. You must have scared to death.

BABINEAUX: We were...

GOODSILL: Was after the wreck?

BABINEAUX: Yes! After the wreck.

BABINEAUX: But it's just crazy things like that (chuckles) we did, you know. We weren't too destructive, but we had fun.

KELLY: Do you remember what you were doing when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

BABINEAUX: Yes, I do! I was walking up the steps going to the Post Office. It was about 1 or 1:30 in the afternoon, a Sunday afternoon. Walterine and I were going to town to see if we had any mail. Our box number was forty-eight. And we were going up the steps and someone, I don't remember who, said, "Did you hear about 'em bombing us?" We said, "What?" And we got so scared that we turned around and ran all the way back home 'cause we thought they were coming to bomb us again and we had to be home, you know.

KELLY: Did you know any young men who died in the war?

BABINEAUX: Yes. Jack Albritton, Annie's stepson. And Roy Starr was killed. He and his wife were killed in Louisiana. And T. J. Williams, he lived at the Humble Camp and went to Baptist church. And Gilbert Kadliceck's brother, who lived on Fourth Street on The Hill. Gilbert was a grade behind me. His sister, Helen Solomon, lives over on Belknap, South Belknap. All the boys were just...the young men were gone.

KELLY: Did your brother Ralph served in World War II

BABINEAUX: Yes he was in the Navy.

KELLY: What was that like for your family?

BABINEAUX: Very stressful. We just waited for his letters. You know, he was on a supply ship, the Hyperion. And they pulled two gasoline barges from California across the Pacific.

GOODSILL: Valuable commodities. A big target.

BABINEAUX: Without any escort or anything but they arrived safely. And Kelsey [husband] was in the Navy in World War II. He lied about his age. Said he was seventeen, but he wasn't but sixteen. And his daddy agreed to it. He wanted to go in the Navy so bad. He was in Pedalu and Mogmog in the South Pacific.

KELLY: Did he see combat?

BABINEAUX: Yep. He was so young he was mainly on a recreation island, Mogmog, where they came for R&R. But he said when they got off the ship to storm the island they had run out of ammunition and guns so they gave him a machete. To defend himself (laughter). Oh me, oh me.

KELLY: Well during the war your mother was an operator.

BABINEAUX: Yes because Edna Shindler went to California to be with Otto. He was in boot training or something out there. And so mother was a telephone operator before she and daddy married.

KELLY: Did Ralph call home ever?

BABINEAUX: Oh yes! We'd all stand around the telephone, you know, it was up on the wall. "What's he saying mom? What's he saying mom?" (chuckles) Yes and when he came home... I've got moving pictures, sixteen millimeter pictures of Walterine and me walking down Second Street with Ralph in his Navy uniform. And I've got sixteen millimeter film of Dot Harrington walking down Second Street pushing Judy when she was a baby in her carriage.

George made them. I have a sixteen millimeter pictures of George and Mr. Kempner boarding the train in Sugar Land going to California. George [Andre] took pictures of the orange groves. They went to San Francisco and he took pictures of San Francisco with the old cars.

KELLY: Hold on to those.

BABINEAUX: I have a video tape of the McCord when we were little...on Second Street. And some of George's people over in Louisiana. Way back. Well anyway, it was out in the garage that's deteriorating and Kelsey thought he might...he tried to splice it all back together and get it, but it became so brittle that he was afraid to do anymore with it. Did you know that I was the last person to work in the depot before it was moved?

KELLY: You didn't tell us about that job. What were you doing there?

BABINEAUX: Well I managed Boots, Boots Helmkamps Insurance Agency for eighteen years in the old depot.

KELLY: Across from the clinic. It was pretty dilapidated by then wasn't it?

BABINEAUX: No, it wasn't too bad. Jane McMeans came in and took pictures of Boots and us before they moved it. I was sitting there one day doing my work and all of a sudden I heard CRASH and I looked out the window and here comes a train with a car on the front of it. Oh gosh. Here it comes screeching trying to stop and I thought oh my Lord what if he runs into this building?

KELLY: Did that building shake a lot when a train came by?

BABINEAUX: Loud, it was loud. I'd be on the telephone and I'd say, "Hold on a minute, here comes the train." "Where are you," they'd ask.

BABINEAUX: I'm on the railroad tracks. (laughter)

BABINEAUX: People from the insurance companies, the underwriters would come and we'd sit, "just, just hold up a minute here comes the train." But it was, it was neat. I worked for Boots from '69 to '84. He died in '83. And so I took care of the business. His heirs sold the business. In '84 when they were to move the train station and the depot I took his business home and finished it up.

KELLY: Who took over his agency?

BABINEAUX: A man in Houston bought it. An agent in Houston.

KELLY: I didn't know if Barbara did, or...

BABINEAUX: No, Barbara Youngblood and he were partners for a while and then they split partners and she started a Rural Insurance Agency. I worked for Barbara in 1950 when she ran Imperial Agency. We moved Imperial Agency from the old bank building over to the new building.

KELLY: Next to the stairway that went up to the Imperial offices

BABINEAUX: Yes. We were on the second floor as you come off the elevator. And when we came to work every morning well Mr. Gus Sterl was in the end office standing at his door noting you coming in. And Robert Shafer sat out in front doing his posting you know. He was so funny. Oh, he was so funny. I helped Barbara and up there until she went into partnership with Boots. When they split I was working at the clinic and she started Rural Insurance Agency and Mrs. Mercer worked for her. They were out in Mrs. Dryer's house. Mrs. Mercer decided to quit working. So Barbara came in the clinic and asked me if I'd come back to work for her. So I worked with her at Rural and then she built a little building on the freeway over there.

KELLY: One of the first little businesses on the freeway out in Sugar Land.

BABINEAUX: And then she sold Rural to J. L. Wright, and I worked for J. L. Wright from January until the end of May. And Boots called me. "Jean, Pam's getting married, come manage my agency for me." Dorothy Jenkins was working in the agency too for Boots. So I went and I stayed there until '84. I'm kind of proud to say this. I never had to go apply for a job. People called me. It's unusual.

KELLY: But you had a reputation from a young girl of being dependable, smart, being able to play the piano, work under pressure.

BABINEAUX: I played for Wynnell Laperouse's daughter, Mary who was married in the Catholic Church. When they kneeled I played the *Ave Maria* on the organ. After the wedding the Priest, Donaldson I think was his name came up to me and said, "What Catholic church do you, do you play at?" "Well I'm the organist at the Baptist church on the other corner." He said, "I just wanted you to know that's the most beautiful I've ever heard the Ave Maria played. And I just knew that you played in the Catholic Church."

GOODSILL: That's a nice compliment.

BABINEAUX: Yes. And I was just playing a lot of it by ear! I took music for two years. Mrs. Moore taught me. I was eight. And she would play little tunes and I would get 'em in my ear and I would not read the music. So mother caught me at home; I didn't have any music in front of me, I was just playing. She said, "Mrs. Moore I don't think Jean is



learning to read music. She's just playing it all by ear." So she started me on Bach and you can't play Bach by ear. (laughter) So I had to start reading music. That's how I learned to read music. And then I played in the band. There is an article in one of these Alligator Splashes about us all going to Conroe. The band went to Conroe for Southeast Texas competition. And I played baritone.

KELLY: You and my mother.

BABINEAUX: Yes. And I was one of the ones chosen to be in the All-State Band, Southeast Texas Band, under Ford Lane. He was a big director out of Orange High School. They had the Bengals, you know, a big thing in Texas. I was chosen first chair and all these boys were behind me, and they said, "We have to tune to a girl." (laughter)

KELLY: You might have been the first student from Sugar Land to make state band.

BABINEAUX: I don't know. But I've got the certificate. And then we went to Sam Houston and I got a first division. I was the only one that got first division in baritone solo. I've still got my critique.

KELLY: We're in a club together. I made state band too.

BABINEAUX: Did you? Wonderful! Well ours wasn't the whole state, it was just the southeast Texas but it was held in Conroe and I made it. And I have a list of all of us that made it. Oh, we thought we were just so special.

KELLY: Did you choose the baritone or was it chosen for you?

BABINEAUX: No, I started playing the alto horn, the little baritone. Then I played the baritone. Then I played the French horn. Then I played the bass horn. (chuckles) then Ms. Walker decided they we needed a bassoon. And nobody knew how to play the bassoon, so she said, "Jean, you take this home and you learn how to play the bassoon."

KELLY: A double reed

BABINEAUX: A double reed. I didn't even play a clarinet or anything and I taught myself to play that bassoon. I did (she made a honking sounds). And that's just what it sounded like. (she made honking sounds) Mother said, "Oh my Lord, go out to the garage" (laughter)

KELLY: Your younger sister Monnye Alice she was a pianist too, right?

BABINEAUX: Mother gave everybody music. Monnye Alice and Carolyn took from Mrs. Verdi Hassell. But they didn't like it all that much. Monnye had a wonderful voice. She sang, she could really sing.

KELLY: I understand the Hall family liked to sing too. Did you ever accompany them?

BABINEAUX: Oh, yes. A cappella too. Stamps, stamps songs

KELLY: What is a stamp song?

BABINEAUX: (chuckles) It was a quartet, stamps quartet way back in the 30s, in the 40s.

They were wonderful gospel music. Mr. Hall had the most wonderful bass voice you ever wanted to hear. And he would get his cane chair, his straight chair and he'd lean it up behind the garage, in the alley, and sing, and sing (chuckles). And Matthew Hall lived across the street from me down the street. And Matthew would be walking down that street singing just like his granddaddy. What comes back to mind is listening to Mr. Hall on Second Street singing those hymns in the back alley.

KELLY: Only in a place like Sugar Land would you have that happen to you.

BABINEAUX: And only in a place like Sugar Land where everybody had plum trees in their backyard.

KELLY: Plum trees?

BABINEAUX: Plum trees, yes, little yellow plums. Yes, and we had ... what's that fruit that you eat it and your month puckers up.

KELLY: A persimmon?

BABINEAUX: Persimmon. We had persimmon trees...and oh they were messy.

The Woolley's had persimmon, but we had plum trees. Mrs. Bessie Terry lived on the corner and she dared anybody to mess with her plums. So we would crawl in the ditch (chuckles). Isn't this terrible? We had a back yard full of plum trees. But we had to crawl in that ditch and get some of Bessie's plums! (laughter). Then we would run back down the back alley.

KELLY: You're talking about the dark side of Sugar Land.

BABINEAUX: (laughing) yes, weren't we bad? I'm telling you. Yes. Oh. But we didn't go in Mrs. Herder's yard. She lived on First Street.

KELLY: Why not?

BABINEAUX: She was Mrs. Herder!

KELLY: Was she Minnie's Ulrich's sister, or sister-in-law?

BABINEAUX: Sister-in-law. We just all revered Mrs. Herder. We didn't bother anything Mrs. Herder's yard. But we'd go down to Bessie's to steal her plums (chuckling). She'd get so mad at us. Lord, have mercy. Oh gosh. We were bad, we were bad. Then we decided one time we'd go, you know where Dr. Slaughter's house sits? Back in there on Cleveland Drive? Well we would swim in Cleveland Lake and cross to the Pecan Grove and swim back. I never did that; I was too afraid but they goaded Walterine to get in there. (chuckling). She almost drowned, bless her heart, because it just got too far for her. It's a long way from that bank to that bank 'cuz that's in the curve. But she swam (chuckles) Cleveland Lake. And by the school bridge that concrete thing is still there. That's where everybody swam. They'd dive off there, or dive off the bridge. But I never did; I was too afraid. I'd like to swim too, but I didn't want to get in that water.

KELLY: Charlie Tise's dad?

BABINEAUX: (chuckling) Yeah, his daddy threw him off, Charlie had to swim. Mr. Tise just dumped him in there.

KELLY: Well, you know, he lived in Sugar Land; you needed to learn to swim with all the water around us.

BABINEAUX: We would walk behind the Laperouse's house up on Main Street. We'd walk from the Laperouse's house along the creek bank down to Bertha and Buddy's house, you know. And in this article Wynnell tells about when she and her friend undid a boat. (Chuckling) They start paddling down the creek with a stick. (laughter) And the wind came up and they couldn't get back. So they got finally got to one of their friend's houses. Got them a paddle so they could get back and tie the boat up on Oyster Creek. It wasn't their boat (laughing). And we use to get in a boat and we would paddle across over to the Quarters. A black couple, Mary and Frank Williams lived in the Quarters. Mary would be sittin' on the bank fishing. And she had all these little children. And we'd paddle across and we'd say, "Let us take 'um boat ridin' Mary." "Naw, you'll drown them, you'll drown them. No they can't, they can't go boat ridin' with you." (chuckling) So we'd paddle on off. We'd paddle up and down the creek.

KELLY: Did you ever have any black friends at all? How would you get to know them? Where would you see them? Other than trying to pick them up on the creek bank?

BABINEAUX: Well we'd see them in town. And we'd paddle across the creek to visit, you know. Behind where Ryklic lives now, there on Main Street, the Morgans lived there. We'd get in Mr. Morgan's boat.

KELLY: Did you ever remember Rosamay Jones? She was nice.

BABINEAUX: She was the nicest lady. I got to know them when I worked at the clinic. I'll tell you a funny story about the clinic. Dr. Kuykendall's nurse was Martha Goss from Richmond and there was a big black man that worked in the refinery. His name was Louchas Richardson. He came to see the doctor. They sat on the wall in the back. And Martha came out and she said, "LUSCIOUS (chuckling), LUSCIOUS Richardson!" (laughter) All I had to do to keep a straight face because I knew Louchas. He was married to Irene Miller. And Irene Miller's mother, Gertie Miller, was the first black lady that worked for my mother. Her daughter's name was Urtie and her other daughter's name was Irene and her son was John. When we lived on Sixth Street Gertie worked for mother, Aunt Monnye and Aunt Minnie. "LUSCIOUS, LUSCIOUS Richardson." (laughter) Oh golly! He got up, he got up. Here he comes. Big, big black man. I thought that was so funny. But I could talk forever.

KELLY: Thank you for your time, Jean!

Interview End