

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Tim and Hal Husbands**

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Transcriber: Marsha Smith

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10 Pages



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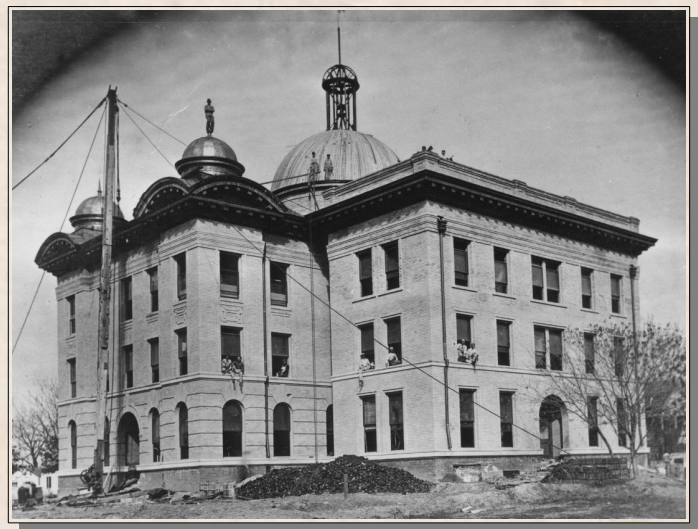
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Transcript

HARGROVE: I am JoAnn Hargrove and I'm with the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. We're at the Riverbend Country Club in Sugar Land, Texas, interviewing the Husbands brothers today starting with Tim. I want to start with where and when you were born?

HUSBANDS TIM: I was born in Houston at the Catholic Hospital. We grew up around Houston up until I was about nine years old, when we moved out to the Central Unit. We grew up on the Central Prison Unit. Dad was the warden of the Central Unit and was there for, I'm thinking, eighteen years, something like that. Then he was transferred to the Retrieve Unit down by Brazoria, and then went to the Walls Unit as the warden.

As a matter of fact, he was the warden there whenever that Carrasco incident happened, in 1976, I think it was. But, anyway, growing up on the prison farm was just a wonderful life for three kids, my older brother, Hal, and my younger brother, Bob. It was a very unique place to grow up because we had a house boy and a cook, and a yard boy. We didn't have to do ANY of those things, you know? We woke up in the morning and our blue jeans were always starched and our clothes were always washed and we always had food on the table and we were served. We certainly didn't have any money. You know a warden doesn't make any money, it's just that he had those amenities and so it was really kind of unique for us.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The 1974 Huntsville Prison siege was an eleven-day prison uprising that took place from July 24 to August 3, 1974, at the Huntsville Walls Unit of the Texas Department of Corrections in Huntsville, Texas. The standoff was one of the longest hostage-taking sieges in United States history. "Fred" Carrasco, the most powerful heroin kingpin in South Texas, was serving a life sentence for the attempted murder of a police officer. Carrasco negotiated a release but a plan to recapture the men before they made it out of the Walls Unit went astray and two volunteer, female hostages and one of the three accomplices were killed. Carrasco committed suicide rather than be caught. The third accomplice was sentenced to death and executed in 1991. -- Wikipedia

We spent a lot of time around the prison proper. Around the building and got to know a lot of the inmates. There's a little story about one of the inmates. His name was Lester Wayne Nelson and when we moved there, Lester Wayne Nelson was doing fifty years for armed robbery, and he had tried to escape three different times.

Lester was a mechanic and he was an electrician. He was really a good hand at all those things. He really knew what he was doing. But he was a wild, young kid, you know, and when we first moved there, the canning plant was inside the fence and, I think it was one of the compressors broke down; some big machine. But anyway, Dad went out there and was talking to an officer and the officer said, "Well, "the bearings are out in this machine and it normally takes two or three weeks to get them in, so this machine is going to be down for at least that long." And Dad said, "No it's not. We're going to get it fixed and it's got to run. This is a pacing plant and we've got to put out our material."

The officer said, "Well, no, sir, that's not the way it works." Dad said, "Yeah, it IS the way it works. "Find somebody that can fix this." There was an inmate standing close by and it happened to be Lester Wayne Nelson. Lester stood up and said, "Warden, I can fix this machine. You know, it's going to take a little while, but I can fix this machine. I can have it going by tomorrow." Dad turned to the officer and said, "Put this man on it and let him fix this machine." The officer said, "Warden, he's tried to escape three different times." So Dad said, "Lester, he says, you gonna run off if I leave you out here fixing this thing?" Lester said, "No, sir, I'm not". So they put him on it. Lester was a welder. He could do anything. I mean, there was nothing he couldn't do mechanically. So the next morning they got up and that machine was running. They didn't have to order any parts or anything like that. It was probably less than three weeks after that, Dad made Lester a Class One trusty and put him out to work, outside the fence, as the farm mechanic. Back then they had what they called a Warden's Trusty, basically a Class One Trusty. That was one of the things that I'll always remember about my father and us growing up there.

HARGROVE: Your brother Hal is now joining us.

HUSBANDS, TIM: This kind of sums up my father, all in one and gives you a little idea of how he was and how he thought and how he affected people. One morning he was driving his car around the back of the building outside the fence. Central Unit was really a farm/industrial unit. We had a cotton gin, we had a horse-shoeing place, we had our dogs, we had a canning plant, we had a feed...

HUSBANDS, HAL: It was the most industrial one of all the units.

HUSBANDS, TIM: It was a feed mill and it had all those things. All those were under Dad's responsibilities and purview. He drove around, and so the farrier, his pen name was Blackie, comes running out from the barn and waved dad down.

Dad stopped and said, "Blackie, what's wrong?" Blackie says, "Warden, just go ahead and just go on and put me in solitary confinement. I almost messed up. You just go on and put me in solitary confinement and leave me there for a couple of weeks and I'll be all right. But I REALLY almost messed up." And Dad says, "Well, what did you do so bad, Blackie?" And he said, "Well, Warden, this morning, real early this morning, I ALMOST saddled up Old Goat (a horse) and run off in the dark, and escaped. But, just go on and if you lock me up, I'll be all right. Just for a couple of weeks, I'll be all right." And Dad says, "Well, Blackie, 'I'm really disappointed in you.'" And Blackie said, "Yessir, I know, Just lock me up." And dad said, "Oh, no, that's not what I'm talking about, Blackie. Listen, next time you feel like running off, you go on over there and saddle up my horse, Old Freckles. He's a Hell of a lot better horse. Then dad said, "You know, Blackie, I thought you was a better horseman than that."

HUSBANDS, HAL: (laughs)

HUSBANDS, TIM: (chuckles) And he put the in car in gear and drove away. When dad told me that story, I said, "Weren't you afraid he was gonna run off?" He said, "Oh, no. It's not what a man says that's important. It's what he does." Blackie already showed me what he was going to do. He just needed somebody to talk to.

HARGROVE: Did you both graduate from Dulles?

HUSBANDS, TIM: I did.

HUSBANDS, HAL: First year. First graduating year.

HARGROVE: The first graduating year. How many people were in your graduating class?

HUSBANDS, TIM: Sixty-seven?

HUSBANDS, HAL: I thought it was a hundred.

HUSBANDS, TIM: No. It was like sixty-seven or seventy-three or something like that.

HUSBANDS, HAL: I thought that's what it was before we consolidated and it was close to one hundred the first year. But I'm not sure.

HARGROVE: I don't think that's right. I think it was less than that.

HARGROVE: Did you marry a girl from Sugar Land?

HUSBANDS, TIM: I did, yes. I married Marjorie Meyer. Marge and I got married in 1964.

HARGROVE: Do you have any children?

HUSBANDS, TIM: We have two boys, Jeff and Jonah. Jeff isn't married; he lives with us in Richardson, Texas. Jonah lives in Thibodaux, Louisiana and has four children now.

HARGROVE: Are you married, Hal?

HUSBANDS, HAL: No, I'm not married now but I've got 2 boys and 5 grand kids and one one the way.

HARGROVE: Do you live in Sugar Land?

HUSBANDS, HAL: No, I live in Houston.

HARGROVE: Tell me about your grandparents? What kind of business were they in? Did they work for the prison?

HUSBANDS, TIM: No. My mother's parents, Colonel H. R. Schwecke and his wife, Madelyn, our grandmother, were in the service. He retired a Lieutenant Colonel out of the army. As a matter of fact, when he first went into the service in the early 1900s, he was horseback in the cavalry. Down chasing Pancho Villa, back during the early part of the last century.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Francisco "Pancho" Villa was a Mexican Revolutionary general and one of the most prominent figures of the Mexican Revolution. Villa was a military-landowner of the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua. Villa's decisive military victories lead to the ousting of Victoriano Huerta from the presidency in July 1914. Villa then allied with southern revolutionary Emiliano Zapata and they came together to take Mexico City. Later, Villa's heretofore undefeated Division of the North, collapsed as a significant military force after losing several battles. Villa subsequently led a hit and run raid against a small U. S.-Mexican border town in March 1916 and then retreated to escape U. S. retaliation. The U. S. government sent U. S. Army General John J. Pershing to capture Villa, but Villa's guerrilla tactics were successful and he continued to evade his attackers. When the United States entered World War I, Pershing was recalled.

In 1923, as presidential elections approached, Pancho Villa re-involved himself in Mexican politics and was assassinated shortly thereafter.

-- *Wikipedia*

HARGROVE: What about your other grandparents?

HUSBANDS, TIM: Our other grandparents were in Greenville, Texas. Hal Husbands, Senior, was the mayor of Greenville for a while. He worked for the city of Greenville and also during his younger days, he did a lot of cotton farming and stuff like that.

HARGROVE: All right. Did you ever live anywhere in Sugar Land other than the prison?

HUSBANDS, TIM: I didn't.

HUSBANDS, HAL: No, I didn't either.

HARGROVE: What would you say a normal day in your childhood was?

HUSBANDS, HAL: (laughs) Well, we'd come home from school and go hunting. Or go work at the airport. I worked over at Hull Field for a while. From, I guess, it was about fourteen, fifteen, something like that. The first day there, my boss crashed with four buddies in a Cessna 182 on prison property.

The next day, my job was to go out and clean up parts of the bodies that was left. They had already gotten most of it but there was a lot of small pieces here and there. Shoes and things like that.

Another typical day would be to go ride horses. On the weekends we'd go to the Three Camp and work cattle. We got to do that a lot! (chuckles) We worked cattle out there on the farm. We'd get a shotgun or a twenty-two and go hunting sometimes in the afternoons after school. Of course, we went to school. We had that 1935 Ford. We dug lead out of the gun range, melted it and sold it. Or pick blackberries,

HUSBANDS, TIM: That's what we used to do to make money for the prom. They had a firing range down on the Brazos River past Two Camp. We'd go down there and pick all the lead out of the hillside and take it up to this inmate who melted it down for us, into twenty-pound bars. One time, dad had a friend from Refugio, Texas and we told him about it. He said, "Boys, I want you to send me some of that lead. I need some of that lead because I load my own guns." We said, "Okay! How much you want?" He said, "Just as much as you can send me."

HUSBANDS, HAL: (laughing)

HUSBANDS, TIM: Junior Harkins, you know. He said, "Just as much as you can send." So, we loaded up all of this lead and put it in the back of this 1935 Ford. You remember that Ford? The back end of this sucker was sitting back down like that, and we took it down to the railroad station at Sugar Land, and put it on the scale. We sent him 439 pounds of lead. (laughing)

HUSBANDS, HAL: (laughing) To shoot through his gun!

HUSBANDS, TIM: I mean, we had bars and bars and bars. But he said just as much as we had. We gave him everything we had!

HUSBANDS, HAL: Dad told us later, "Junior called," and said, "What the HELL are you sending me so much lead for!" (laughing)

HUSBANDS, TIM: Then several years later, Junior said, "You know", I STILL have some of that lead!"

HUSBANDS, HAL: Before he died, yeah, he said he still had lead! That was funny.

HARGROVE: Now tell me about Dulles High School. Were you in sports?

HUSBANDS, HAL: Yes. Football. That's about all I played.

HUSBANDS, TIM: Yes, I played football, basketball and ran track.

HARGROVE: Did you have a winning team?

HUSBANDS, TIM: No, we had a good basketball team. You know, with Lockhart, and Charlie and Robert Johnson.

HUSBANDS, HAL: Yeah, that was a good basketball team.

HUSBANDS, TIM: We went to Bi-District and won District.

HUSBANDS, HAL: I think the problem that year was because of the consolidation, they elevated our status that we couldn't compete in yet. We didn't have the people yet and because we didn't have the numbers everybody did.

HARGROVE: Okay. Any extra-curricular activities?

HUSBANDS, HAL: Well, we went to Future Farmers of America (FFA) Rodeo. We were in the rodeo stuff. As a matter of fact, dad was in charge of part of that.

HARGROVE: Did you ever raise an animal for the fair?

HUSBANDS, HAL: I didn't, no.

HUSBANDS, TIM: No, we did not.

HARGROVE: Did any of your classmates get married to each other?

HUSBANDS, HAL: Yeah. I remember a good friend named Darryl Couvillion. He's the one who married his high school sweetheart.

HUSBANDS, TIM: No, he married a girl from the big city, from Bellaire High School. Yeah, those good-looking girls.

HARGROVE: Did any of your classmates go to college?

HUSBANDS, TIM: Most of them did. Yeah, most everybody that we graduated with did.

HUSBANDS, HAL: I went to college but didn't graduate from college.

HARGROVE: What about the service? Did any of them go to Vietnam?

HUSBANDS, HAL: No, I was in the service but I didn't have to go.

HUSBANDS, TIM: No. But I don't know of anybody that went to 'Nam. Well, you know, back then, if you were married, you didn't have to go in the service.

HUSBANDS, HAL: For a while. But there were some guys, when I was in basic training that were married that got drafted, and they had to go.

HUSBANDS, TIM: Yeah, but they didn't have children.

HUSBANDS, HAL: Yeah, he did. A couple of them did.

HUSBANDS, TIM: Really?

HUSBANDS, HAL: Yeah. But this was later on. This was after everything was getting real hot and heavy. I was in the Guard, the war was escalating and they started doubling our time. I had to spend twice the time going because they were talking about us going over there. They made our unit Airborne, which is paratroopers, so I ended up going to school for that.

HARGROVE: How many years were you in the service?

HUSBANDS, HAL: Six.

HARGROVE: Okay. Did any of your classmates work for Imperial?

HUSBANDS, HAL: Bobby Borowski did.

HUSBANDS, TIM: But he wasn't in our class.

HUSBANDS, HAL: No, that's right.

HUSBANDS, TIM: Heitmans did, Carlos and Henry Heitman.

COUVILLION: Well, when we joined Dulles, I want to say it doubled. Forty? Or was it...?

HUSBANDS, TIM: I'm thinking sixty-seven or seventy-three or something like that. It wasn't many.

HUSBANDS, HAL: Get the yearbook out.

HARGROVE: Do y'all have a favorite memory of Sugar Land?

HUSBANDS, TIM: I do. We actually lived with it every day because we are SO close with the people that we graduated with. Last night, my older brother and my younger brother and I had dinner with Charlie Kamp and Bobby Borowski.

HUSBANDS, HAL: Buddy Wheeler said today that if we don't call him next time, he's going to kick our ass.

COUVILLION: It was only last night. You didn't call me last night.

HUSBANDS, TIM: Not last night, but last time. This was a spur of the moment thing. It's not that we were trying to leave you out. I mean, we're all really close, and we keep in contact with each other. We care about each other and so it's really meaningful, you know?

HARGROVE: Life-long friendships?

HUSBANDS, TIM: Yes. It really is. But, everybody is that way with everybody else, you know.

COUVILLION: It's proof that it's easy to do.

HARGROVE: Like a niche.

HUSBANDS, TIM: Yeah.

HARGROVE: Close-knit group.

HUSBANDS, HAL: Well, we did a lot of things together and we got to know each other really well.

Interview ends