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A REMEMBERED UTOPIA

by *Buck A. Young*

When you are young, you lack the ability to see your surroundings as they really are. It takes years to gain this understanding, and by then, unfortunately, your memory has gone through a filtering process where your bad experiences have been eliminated or greatly reduced in severity, and your good experiences so amplified that you are left with an utopian outlook. As you let your memory go back in time twenty, thirty, or forty years, you inevitably place yourself on a lazy summer day when the world was at peace, nature was bountiful, and you lived on a hill that was occupied by god-like people. Such is my remembered utopia.

When I was growing up, I thought I lived in a unique place. We had our own town song, and today I can really be sure someone was raised in "Deep Pelly" if he sings "Dixie" to me thusly:

"Oh, I wish I was in the land of Pelly, sitting on the curb and scratching my belly, look away, look away, look away Pelly-land."

We also had our own town slogan: "Pelly, where seventeen sewers meet the creek," an odorous take-off on Houston's claim of their many railroads meeting the sea.

As far as my brother Dick and I could ascertain, there was no other city or town in the entire U.S.A. or Canada named Pelly. We searched all the atlases we could find at school and the public library, and the only Pelly listed was a river by that name which started in Alaska and flowed into Canada or vice versus.

Our Pelly was named after a Fred T. Pelly who came to America from England in about 1889, and married into a tract of land located near the confluence of Galveston Bay and sluggish Goose Creek. Mrs. Pelly, the former Lucy Alice Wiggins, had inherited part of about 350 acres her father, Daniel Wiggins, had bought from Mrs. Anson Jones, widow of the last President of the Republic of Texas. Pelly cultivated the 71-acre tract his wife received, and it was on this site the City of Pelly developed.

Although there had been several pioneer families living in the area of east Harris County between the San Jacinto River and Cedar Bayou since the early days of Texas history, it was oil discovered by John Gaillard near the mouth of Goose Creek in June 1908 that set the stage for what was to eventually become the City of Baytown. That oil well,

Buck A. Young, a retired Air Force officer, originally wrote these memories of growing up in Baytown for the Webb Society's essay contest. He won first prize.

known as Gaillard number 1, was a small, shallow one, and further activity was slow until a gusher in 1916 started a "boom." Thousands of "roughnecks" and their rowdy followers crowded into a hastily built settlement called "Old Town" on the east bank of Goose Creek. The community was comprised of tents, crude tar-paper shacks and mud streets. Nearby, in the Evergreen woods, once Dr. Ashbel Smith's plantation, several rows of identical "shotgun" houses were built for the employees of Gulf Oil Company. The houses were long, narrow dwellings with the rooms located one behind the other. A dock and warehouse area, called Busch's Landing, was constructed beneath a bluff on the creek to serve as the commercial center for the oil field. The roads to Houston, via Lynchburg and Crosby, were deep rutted and muddy.

In late 1916, a gas explosion in the oil field convinced the workers and their families that they were living in an unsafe place, so "Old Town" was abandoned and everyone shifted either a few hundred feet eastward to Pelly's land, or out on the salt grass prairie to a 100-acre townsite being platted by Ross S. Sterling, one of the founders of Humble Oil and Refining Company, and later, Governor of Texas. Sterling called his settlement "New Town" and the one on Pelly's land became "Middle Town," even though its post office was known as "Goose Creek." Sterling and his associates also built a railroad northward to connect with the mainline at Dayton, and then went west across the creek about two miles and bought a 2,000 acre rice farm on which to build a small lubricating plant and its bedroom community of Baytown. My father told me the fledgling Humble Oil Company ran out of money before it could finish the first crude oil battery and went to the big Standard Oil of New Jersey for financial backing and kept going back for more until, finally, Standard had controlling interest in the refinery.

In late 1919, "New Town" incorporated after a group of its citizens literally stole the post office, building and all, from "Middle Town" and took the name Goose Creek. "Middle Town" followed suit in early 1920 by becoming the City of Pelly and promptly elected old Fred as its first mayor. The community of Baytown stayed unincorporated and dependent on Humble Oil until 1947, when after several attempts, the three towns, known as the Tri-Cities, finally agreed to merge and became the City of Baytown. That name was selected since it was the one best known outside the area because of the refinery and the name wasn't as hick sounding as Pelly or Goose Creek.

It was to "Middle Town" that my paternal grandmother and step-grandfather came in early 1918 as they followed the oil boom about the State of Texas. My father, Alfred L. Young, had left them in Nederland, near Spindletop, when he had volunteered for World War I. My grand-

parents settled in a small frame rent house on Cleveland Street, two blocks off Main, and my step-grandfather, Mr. Wade, found work on a nearby oil derrick. My grandmother wrote to my father that there was plenty of work available in the Goose Creek Oil Field, and that he should join them there after he "mustered out." After the Armistice that fall, my father received his discharge in Rosenberg, Texas, and travelled to "Middle Town" by train, boat, and "jitney bus," going by rail from Houston to Morgan's Point, by boat to Busch's Landing, and open car to his mother's house. He worked in the oil field for five years, then joined Humble Oil, working at the refinery for 35 years until his retirement in 1958.

By the late '30s, when I was a boy, the boom days were long since over, and Pelly was quite civilized. All evidence of "Old Town" had vanished with the exception of a large tin warehouse on the bluff above Busch's Landing, and traces of the ferry road and dock on the creek, the route between Pelly and Baytown until the bridge had been built in 1930.

In the boom days, boats had been the most dependable transportation in and out of the Tri-Cities. Slowly, all-weather roads were built, and permanent bridges replaced the ferries and pontoon bridges. The Market Street bridge over the San Jacinto River in 1928 provided a direct link to Houston, replacing the circuitous routes through Crosby and Lynchburg. A shell road, later paved and designated State Highway 146, was laid out to Barbers Hill and Dayton. In 1933, a causeway was constructed over Tabbs Bay to Hog Island, and ferry service was instituted by the county from there to Morgan's Point, providing a permanent southern route over the Houston Ship Channel from the Tri-Cities. There was talk of a tunnel under the channel as early as 1941, but plans were delayed by the war and its recovery until the early 1950s. In September 1953, a \$10 million underwater traffic artery was opened, and the distance between Baytown and LaPorte was shortened to 10 minutes.

In between the early boats and underwater concrete highways, two railroads served as the major transportation facilities for the area. Ross Sterling's spur line to Dayton was operated as the Dayton-Goose Creek Railroad until it was sold to the Southern Pacific Railroad. People and supplies poured into the area on that line to build the Tri-Cities and the refinery. Freight trains still use the line.

In 1927, Harry Johnson built an electric interurban route from Goose Creek to McCarty Street in Houston, a distance of about 30 miles, then sold his railroad to Missouri Pacific. The tracks ran from Texas Avenue, through Pelly, over the creek to the refinery, north to Highlands, an unincorporated village on the San Jacinto, across the

river, and westward through the small communities of Channelview, Cloverleaf, Greens Bayou and Jacinto City. At the Market Street barn near McCarty Street, it connected with the street car lines to Union Station in downtown Houston.

During my youth, the Interurban had 52 passenger runs a day, plus several freight trains. The electric trolleys gave way to gasoline-driven cars in about 1943 and the electric lines were removed. I remember watching the cars come and go, carrying Humble employees to and from work, and housewives to and from shopping trips in Houston. Some of the Highlands and Channelview kids would ride the Interurban to and from our high school but I do not recall ever riding the trolley. I hopped freight cars for short rides, but never rode the Interurban. Instead, I use the electric cars to crush objects I would place on the tracks. One of my prized possessions was a smashed penny that I wore around my neck on a leather thong.

The Interurban tracks ran near my elementary school, Anson Jones, and crossed the route we walked. At one point, the tracks ran down the middle of a street, the railing lined with thick timbers as borders. One day, on that short street, I was involved in my first life-saving experience. My girl friend, Erma Lee, and I were walking home from school when, somehow, she caught her foot between the rail and the timber. As we attempted to remove her foot, we suddenly heard the shrill whistle of an approaching car, only a few blocks away. Panic-stricken, we struggled fruitlessly to unstick her foot; almost at the last moment and in desperation, we unbuckled her shoe and pulled her free as the car rumbled past.

The Interurban and Southern Pacific lines crossed the creek just four blocks from each other over long, wooden trestles. As youngsters, Dick and I defied violent death, our parents' instructions, and the railroads' posted warnings by playing on the trestles. Occasionally, we would have to run to beat a coming train, or get off on one of the small platforms the railroad had strategically placed along the crossings. On the west end of the Interurban trestle was a platform under the tracks, and we would climb down there in order to look up the dresses of the Negro girls walking the trestle between the Baytown Woods settlement and Oak Addition.

From the peak of 52 runs a day, cuts were continually made on the Interurban until by 1956 only about a dozen trips were made each day. Claiming losses, Missouri Pacific further cut down to two round trips daily, then in October, 1961, the last car left Baytown and the passenger era was over. Only an occasional freight train now uses the 30 miles of track.

The City of Pelly was well established and thriving, when I was a boy. The city's population was about 5,000 and its borders stretched from the creek east to the Evergreen woods, and from the Southern Pacific tracks south to Tabbs Bay. The street lay-out was irregular and disjointed, having evolved over time, rather than planned at the beginning as had Goose Creek's. City blocks were long in some places and standard in others. The major streets bend and curved seemingly without reason.

Our business section was scattered and stretched out over a six block length of Main between Causeway Road and Pruett Street. At both ends of that section, the businesses were in single buildings with wide spaces in between, then came clusters of two and three buildings together, then almost two blocks of solid structures. The center of town was at King Street at the only traffic light in town. There, under the huge "Welcome to Pelly" sign, stood the city hall, our two-story red brick center of city government. On the King Street side of the building was the one unit fire station with a wooden rack in the back used to stretch and dry the fire hoses. One day, rich with 50 cents, Dick and I bought a dozen doughnuts and a quart of hand-packed vanilla ice cream, and sitting on those fire hoses, proceeded to eat ourselves into a glorious stomach ache.

The one-pumper station, with its one permanent employee who lived in the rear of the station, and its many excellent volunteer firemen, remained in the city hall until 1946, when a new \$15,000 fire station was built on Nazro Street. It was a two-story cinder-block building and housed two pumpers and their equipment. The old station was bricked in and used to store records.

Our city hall was much more than just a place where the city council met and you paid your water bill. The upstairs auditorium was used by civic and church groups too, and downstairs a large room housed a branch of the Harris County Library. (Goose Creek had a small municipal library on Texas Avenue.) Dick and I spent many hours in that book-filled room, for we made a pact one day that we would read all the books there, starting at the As and going straight through to the Zs. Naturally, we failed in our pact, but did manage to read many, many books. One summer, Dick received an award for reading more books than anyone else in his age group. A library card I still have shows that between November 3, 1945 and October 14, 1946, I checked out 66 books. I read Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew mysteries, the complete West Wind series, Max Terhune's adventure stories of dogs, classics such as *Tom Sawyer*, *Huck Finn*, *Treasure Island*, the Bobbsey Twins series, the Five Little Pepper series, and a book entitled *Country Editor* by Henry Beettle Hough that started me down the road to a career in journalism.

In addition to the many books, our library had a good stock of slides and several stereoscopes that made the pictures stand out in three dimensions. Dick and I spent many hours looking at the wonders of both the ancient and modern worlds through those binocular instruments. There were also many magazines, our favorite being the *National Geographic*, since it featured technicolor photos of far away places, and occasionally, pictures of half-naked women from Africa and Polynesia.

Across King Street from the city hall was the U.S. Post Office. There we received our mail at the general delivery window for several years, then in a numbered box with a three-place combination lock. There was no home delivery on my street until I was in junior high school, when the city at long last decided we were in the city limits after all, and we were assigned a street name and numbers to go on the houses.

Up to that time, we had listed our address in various ways. Old school registration cards I have show "Thompson Street," "Pelly Hill," "Across from Gulf Hill," and "Duke's Hill," though that last designation properly belonged to the street west of ours where the 100-year-old Duke House, oldest dwelling in the area, is located.

Next to the Post Office was Pelly's department emporium, the Miracle Store, owned and operated by the Davises. There, for a price, was everything one needed in men's and women's wear and dry goods.

Completing the almost block long building was a beer joint-pool hall-domino parlor whose name I can't remember. It was a dark, dank, evil-looking place where the town's undesirables hung out with a few of the so-called respectable citizens. One of the latter was Allie Clark, father of my good friends Ed and Tom. Mr. Clark was a carpenter, but he supplemented his carpenter's income by playing dominoes for money. He, along with three or four other "old" men, would sit around a table, clicking and clacking those slick, dark plastic rectangles all day and into the evening, playing such games as "42" and "moon." Their table was just inside the front door which stayed propped open except for really cold days, and we small boys would stand out on the sidewalk and watch the "old men" play until the owner of the place would come and chase us away.

Other stores and businesses along Main Street were the Ice House, Bush's Cafe, Mr. Katz's Grocery (where my father traded), Mr. Ledner's Second Hand Store (who I remember for his round, dark unleavened bread), the Sunbrite Bar, Modern Cleaners, Wainscott's Five and Dime, Leggett's Drug Store, Eat-A-Bite Cafe, Stephenson's Grocery, Creel's Barber Shop, the Alamo Theater, Kaiser's Hardware, the Good Luck Store, the Red Cab Station and others.

Everyone's favorite hangout was Leggett's Rexall Drug Store where Eddie and Sally Cleveland adopted every kid in town, and later, the kids' kids. Images of strawberry ice cream sodas, cherry phosphates, root beer floats, and hand-packed, store-made ice cream placed in square containers run through my mind when I remember that all-American corner drug store. The world moved slowly and unchangingly in that pharmacy. The physical lay-out remained the same over the years, as did the prices. When I was a boy, coffee was a nickel a cup; thirty years later, with inflation and all, the price had risen to a dime.

Dick and I used to read all the action comic books from the magazine rack, those 10 cent "funny books" that are now collectors' items. We seldom bought them, just read them and put them back. Years later, Dick and I brought our sons into the drug store. I noticed them rummaging through the comic books and cautioned my son, "if you're not going to buy them, don't handle them."

"Did you buy them when you were his age?" Eddie asked, and seeing my spreading grin as I remembered, added, "then leave the kid alone." And so, the latest adventures of Superman, Batman and Robin were hungrily devoured by a young boy who slightly resembled another youngster who had stood in the same spot some thirty years before.

Eddie, who was mayor of Pelly at the time of the Tri-Cities consolidation, and became Baytown's first mayor, called all us boys "Pelly Rats," though not in a malicious manner. At the time of the comic book incident I was home on leave from the Air Force wearing my uniform decorated with my navigator wings, several rows of multi-colored service ribbons and the insignia of a Major.

"Well," mused Eddie, "there's one 'Pelly Rat' who made good."

Up the street next to the vacant lot where the Nu-Gulf Theater had stood before it was destroyed by fire in 1935, was Creel's Barber Shop and Beauty Salon. There Dick and I went for haircuts when we finally graduated from our father's hand-operated clippers and dull scissors. Pete Rankins was my barber, though I remember his name more because he had a boy named Buck, than because of his tonsorial skills. More memorable was the Negro shoeshine man, Tamp, who "walked" by using a low platform equipped with wheels upon which he kneeled and pushed by hand. As a young man, Tamp had lost both legs at the knee when a train ran over him. He wore thick, hinged leather covers over the stubs and used his "scooter" rather than crutches. Tamp knew everyone, black and white, in town and always had a smile and kind word for all. His greatest accomplishment to an impressionable youngster such as I was the way he handled his shoeshine cloth. He could really make that blackened rag sing as he popped it back and

forth over a customer's shoe. The musical "Chattanooga Shoeshine Boy" had nothing on Tamp, and we boys would sit and watch him work long after our hair had been cut. His actual greatest accomplishment was putting a nephew and a niece through college with his shine money, though I didn't learn about it until the early '60s when I read Tamp's obituary in the *Baytown Sun*. The story was on the first page, then quite a tribute to a black man.

Next to the barber shop was R. C. Stephenson's Grocery Store. The two-story wooden structure was the first business establishment built in "Middle Town." In the early days, the store sold practically everything—groceries, hardware, dry goods, gasoline, rooms for rent, and tickets on the "express" to Houston. When I was a boy, it had been converted into a regular grocery, although it still had floor to ceiling shelves and the original scales and cash register.

On the adjacent corner from Stephenson's stood our chief source of entertainment in those pre-television days, the Alamo "picture show." Dick and I went every Friday night, deliberately missing the noisy Saturday kiddie matinees. The Alamo changed its double-feature bill three times a week, on Sundays, Tuesdays and Fridays. On those Friday nights, there was always a Western, grade B or worse, starring Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Johnny "Mack" Brown, Buck Jones, Tim McCoy, "Wild Bill" Elliott, Tim Holt, Don "Red" Barry, Charles Starrett, Lash LaRue, Crash Corrigan or a dozen other "cowboy" stars in such classics as "In Old Cheyenne," "Cyclone on Horseback," and "Law of the Range." The plots were all the same, the bad guys wore black hats and couldn't shoot worth a flip, the good guys wore white hats and could fire their six-shooters a hundred times without reloading. The good guys always won at the end of the picture, but never got the girl, preferring to ride off into the sunset. The second feature was either a Charlie Chan mystery, with number one son calling Chan "Pop," or a Tarzan adventure with Johnny Weismuller saying, "you Jane, me Tarzan," or a Laurel and Hardy comedy with Ollie saying, "here's another fine mess you've got me into," or a war epic such as "Submarine Patrol" or "Bombardier." Completing the bill was a "Looney Tunes" or "Merry Melodies" cartoon, and a chapter from a serial we called the "continued piece," classics such as "Buck Rodgers of the 25th Century," "The Green Hornet," and "The Mysterious Dr. Satan" which left us dangling each week for 15 weeks. Sometimes on Sunday afternoons, Dick and I would go to the show to see a contemporary feature such as "Each Dawn I Die" with James Cagney and George Raft, or "Blood and Sand" with Tyrone Power and Rita Hayworth. Admission price was nine cents for kids under twelve. I stayed eleven until my fifteenth birthday.

Then we had five indoor theaters in the Tri-Cities, but with the

advent of television, attendance began dropping, and one by one the theaters closed, each having its "last picture show," until only the newest, the Brunson, remained open. Sometime after I joined the Air Force and left home, the Alamo presented its last feature and became a cabinet shop.

Next to the Alamo Theater was Kaiser's General Store where my father bought his tools. The place was full of rakes, shovels, axes, hammers, hoes, and picks. In the rear of the store were rows of metal bins full of nails and staples of all sizes, and a large, hanging scale with which to weigh them. I remember my father taking me into the store and lifting me onto that scale. I also remember a blonde saleslady named "Boots" sliding the weights around and asking me, "how much do you weigh, Buck?" and my reply, "thirty-six pounds." I was six years old at the time.

Off Main Street were the churches of Pelly, including my mother's, Faith Temple United Pentecostal Church. That house of worship at the corner of Kern and Bolster has played an important role in my family's history. Its ministers have performed our marriages, baptized our children, and preached our funerals. Over the years, the building has been remodeled several times and the front door has faced both Kern and Bolster, but the original timbers still support the roof, timbers my father carried from the wastes of the oil field when the men of the church erected the building in the early 20's. It was this apostolic church the Ku Klux Klan visited in turbulent days of the Klan, and left an offering on the altar. My mother told me the preacher, Brother Matney, was in the middle of his Sunday night sermon when the front door opened and several men dressed in white sheets and hoods walked in, and without saying anything, placed the money on the bench. After they had left, there were some protests from the congregation about accepting the money, but Brother Matney supposedly said, "we need the money. What difference does it make where it comes from?"

When I was a boy, I went to Sunday School and Services almost every week. We trooped into Faith Temple a little before 9:45 a.m. and stayed until sometime in the afternoon the exact time depending on the preacher's inspiration and perserverance.

I was aware of the other churches in the Tri-Cities, but only vaguely. The Catholics were dark and foreign, answering to some Italian prince far overseas. Whatever the Pope said, they had to do. The Jews were a displaced tribe, our shopkeepers and merchants who spoke with funny accents, and who tried to cheat us Gentiles. But, my mother taught me, they were God's chosen people, and if I mistreated any of them I would incur His wrath. In my youthful innocence, this could only be a deadly bolt of lightning straight from heaven to the top of my head.

I did incur someone's wrath, but not the Almighty's. It came, instead, from one of the Jewish storekeepers, when, unthinkingly, I gave him a Nazi salute and a loud "Heil Hitler" during the war, and quickly received a sharp open-hand slap across my face. I was so ashamed about the incident that I never told my parents. I also never went into the man's store again.

There were also other Protestant churches in the Tri-Cities since my playmates went to them and told me a little about them. In our town, as throughout the South, there were churches for every persuasion—fundamentalist, independent, alliance, interdenominational—and we had them all. In fact, we had so many churches and so few people I wondered if some people went to more than one.

At the top of the Clerical heap were the Episcopalians and Presbyterians, then in descending order came the Lutherans, Methodists, Christians, and 16 kinds of Baptists, usually categorized as soft-shell or hard-shell. I often wondered why there were so many paths to Glory.

I still carry many pleasant memories of that oneness apostolic church in Pelly. Most vivid are those of Sunday night services during evangelical revivals when the "spirit" would move the brothers and sisters to shout and sing and march around the church to "When the Saints Go Marching In." To this day, I acquaint this rousing music to a Pentecostal revival, not a New Orleans jazz festival. I especially remember my Aunt Ohma, my father's sister, a large, jovial matron, standing and singing in her rich, deep voice, "I'll Fly Away, O Glory." I remember the hard wooden benches we sat on, and upon which I fell asleep on a homemade quilt. When we were small, Dick and I would crawl under those benches and be several rows down before our mother would miss us. I remember the busy paper fans donated by Paul U. Lee Funeral Home being used on hot, muggy summer nights. The windows would be open and the joyous singing would drift out all over the town. I remember young mothers breast-feeding their infants, modestly placing a handkerchief over themselves and the child's head. I remember altar calls, the praying, and the full-submersion baptisms, most of them in the large tank behind the pulpit, some in the bay at Evergreen beach. I remember a memorial plaque at the entrance of the church, listing the names of the boys and men of the church serving their country during World War II. I remember a minister named A. J. Thompson, and the one and only musical composition created by me and my brothers. Brother Thompson was leaving Faith Temple to go to a country church outside Cleveland, Texas, and in tribute we produced and performed for him and the congregation, "Oh Won't You Tarry, and Come to Tarkington's Prairie." My oldest brother A. L. played his "fiddle" and sang along with Dick and me. After that solo performance, we retired from the song writing business. I remember

singing other songs such as "Jesus Hold My Hand" with my voice changing and cracking so badly I really needed my hand held. I remember the brown paper bags full of apples, oranges, nuts, and hard Christmas candy. Nothing else so reminds me of the holiday season as those simple gift bags. I remember Easter egg hunts out in the country after the traditional morning services. Most of all, I remember my mother's abiding faith, her all-encompassing faith that rules her daily life, and has sustained her, her husband, her children, her grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren over the years. Her faith shows in her face like a beacon, and she doesn't have to tell people she is a Christian or advertise by bumper sticker. It is there for all to see.

As I roamed through my hometown, first with my father, then my brother Dick, I came to know many "characters." I'm sure every town has its share of colorful personalities, but for our size, we seemed to have had an overabundance. "Kill-a-Bear Jeff," a large simple-minded man, hung around the drugstore. He wore over-sized, slouchy overalls, and carried a toy pistol in a holster. When people would meet him on the street, they would ask, "killed any bears today, Jeff?" and he would answer, "killed two." Hence his nickname. Another hanger-on around the drugstore was a small, sickly woman we called "Paragoric Annie" who had developed a narcotic need for the medicine and tried every way she knew to obtain the drug without the required prescription. She was the only "addict" in town that I knew, though there were rumors of marijuana being grown in "nigger town." Down at the local tavern, we had not one town drunk, but several. I remember going by the Sunbrite Bar on warm summer nights and stopping to talk with "Gopher" Jackson and "Goats" Elliott as they sat outside on benches. These men were friendly, harmless souls who I enjoyed talking with, for often in their drunken stupor, they made more sense than their sober counterparts. "Inez" was the local rag-picker who lived in the woods in a run-down shack that had no electricity, gas, water, or sewage. Pushing her hand cart around town, dressed in mismatched, hand-me-down clothing, she made her living collecting things people threw away. (This was before the days of the garage sale.) "Juan" also pushed a cart around town. He was our "hot tamale" man, and in the cart kept a large pot of beef tamales warming over a small fire. His tamales were wrapped in corn shucks and were always served on a page of the *Houston Press*, the area "scandal sheet" newspaper. The paper seemed to add to the tamales' flavor. Lee Allen was the official junk man, and his place of business was on the Baytown-Pelly Road at the bottom of the hill upon which I lived. In addition to buying and selling junk, he sold gasoline, auto parts, and ice. Next to the service station-office was a wooden building with thick walls, behind which great chunks of ice were stored. During the really hot days of summer, Lee let us kids

sit in that ice house and munch on broken pieces of ice. He bought everything from iron, copper, and brass to bones, rags, and bottles. He would pay us pennies for this junk, then haul it in to Houston where he collected market prices. We kids knew he was cheating us, so we retaliated by occasionally retrieving our merchandise at night and reselling it a few days later.

Our junk money was usually spent just across the street at a small grocery. Mrs. Bradshaw operated a store out of the east end of a building that housed her husband's radiator repair shop. I'm sure she stocked bread and milk, some can goods, and the usual staples, but what I remember most clearly is the great gobs of penny candy—brick bats, jaw-breakers, tootsie rolls, red-hots, candy corn, fudge, divinity, peanut brittle, candy kisses, Baby Ruths', Butterfingers, and many others. With just a few cents, we could load our pockets with goodies and munch all day. I often wondered why my teeth didn't rot.

Unlike Pelly, the Baytown I moved to in 1946 had not gone through an oil field evolution, but an oil refinery development. Baytown was a 100 per cent "company town," owing its complete and total reason for being to Humble Oil and Refining Company.

The community began in the spring of 1919 as a group of old Army tents and hastily built barracks for the refinery construction workers, with meals being served in an old farm-house. By January 1920, new bunkhouses and mess halls were accommodating a thousand men. Married supervisory employees and some skilled workers were supplied with small stucco houses in a nearby company addition, but others had to commute from neighboring Goose Creek and Pelly. In 1922 Humble built many one and two room rental houses for the unskilled minority workers in a segregated area. Some community facilities were also provided, including schools for the native white children and the off-spring of the many Mexican workers who had come to the construction site. Free transportation was provided to Goose Creek for those wanting to go shopping or to seek whatever entertainment the town had to offer.

About the time my father went to work in the refinery's pipe department in 1923, plans were made for a permanent community to be known as East Baytown. The company by then had a large permanent work force. At East Baytown, Humble adopted the policy of assisting its employees in acquiring homes instead of building the houses for them. The company agreed to lay out a tract, build streets, sidewalks, and alleys, provide utilities, and finance a home-building program. Within ten months of the first contract, 380 lots had been sold and 145 buildings completed. Following the custom of our region, East Baytown was restricted to white workers, who also got to enjoy the fine Spanish-

style Community House with its company-sponsored movies and other activities. More adequate housing arrangements for the few hundred Mexican and Negro employees than their small rental houses were not provided. These people stayed in their segregated ghettos and barrios and outside the main stream of the area's society until integration came in the late '50s and early '60s.

The red-tiled Community House acted as the center of recreation and entertainment for the Tri-Cities for almost 40 years. It contained a large auditorium and stage, library, game room, club meeting room, and conference room. Behind the building were handball and tennis courts, barbecue facilities, and picnic grounds large enough to handle the crowds on Humble Day, Baytown's annual celebration to commemorate the opening of the refinery on May 11, 1920. To us kids, the Community House meant many things—ping pong tournaments, chess games, birthday parties, school dances, piano recitals, magic shows (here, Beverly Bergeron, TV's Rebo the Clown and now star entertainer at Disneyworld in Florida, began his career), reading, watching TV when there were few sets and fewer stations, or just sitting, talking and drinking nickel cokes. These and a myriad of other activities, all free, kept the heavy front doors of that building open night and day. In the early 1960s, Humble began getting out of the housing and social activities, moved all the stucco houses out of the company addition and dismantled the Community House.

Humble even provided a sports team that came as close to professional status as Baytown has seen to date. A small sandlot baseball team organized in 1920 grew into the Baytown Oilers, a semi-professional team popular in our area for three decades. During its hey-day, 2,500 to 3,000 people would attend the games. Humble not only paid the men to play, but wasn't above transferring a good ball player into Baytown to improve the team. When I was a boy, my buddies and I would climb into the trees that lined the street by the park to watch the games, or shag foul balls so that we would be admitted free into the stands. In 1954 the team was disbanded and the park levelled.

For those inclined for activities higher on the social scale, Humble provided space for a golf course and country club next to the docks. After I had moved to Maryland Street, my friend Charles Elliott and I would go to the golf course on weekends to be hired as caddies. Being small, we never were, but we did make a little money retrieving lost balls from a waste area, half tar, half quicksand, that lay out in the rough. To preclude breaking through the thin crust that covered most of that pit, we made crude walkways out of scrap lumber, and in the very soft areas would inch out on planks to find the balls stuck in the black, gooey mess. Every once in a while, we would slip off and sink

into the mess and have to clean the oily mud from our shoes and clothes. Years later, a new country club and golf course were built north of the refinery and the old facilities became an open field again.

The business section of Baytown began with a few stores, places of amusement, barber shops and the like on the fringes of the refinery grounds. As permanent, all-weather roads were built into the community, brick and concrete block buildings replaced the crude wooden and canvas structures, a post office was secured, and the business district I knew as a boy emerged. It was concentrated in the triangle formed by the 90 degree turn Market Street made as it came through town and Minnesota Street at the base. On the outskirts of the community, on Market towards Goose Creek, and on the Baytown-Pelly Road (later West Main) were other businesses. Main Street jugged northward off Market for three sleazy blocks, a "sin-strip" holdover from the rowdy days of the '20s and '30s with its vice, gambling, and drinking establishments. These places operated as a "relief-valve" for the foreign seamen who came from the ships at the Humble docks until the 1950s when they were finally closed by the county district attorney. To cleanse itself of the bad image, the city council renamed the street Harbour. Today, the bars are still there, but it is a run-down area that is closely watched by the Baytown police.

When I was a teenager, Baytown had about 6,000 people compressed into the area between the refinery and the creek, and the Southern Pacific railroad tracks and Black Duck Bay. The main street was Market, which started in Goose Creek and ran some 30 miles into Houston. In the early days of the community, and up until the late '40s when Decker Drive was constructed, Market Street was "the way" in and out of the Tri-Cities to the west. From downtown Baytown, it circled the refinery property by going along the bayfront to Wooster, then swung north and west to intersect with the Crosby-Lynchburg Road at Four Corners.

Baytown had a larger, more up-to-date business district than Pelly, and was only a shade behind Goose Creek in quantity and quality. It had four drugstores, three groceries (these did not count in the many Mom and Pop type stores), one large department store, several shoe stores, men's shops, ladies' boutiques, three or four barber shops and beauty parlors, a couple of radio-TV sales and repair shops, many gas stations, two dry cleaners, a laundry, two furniture stores, two dentist offices, one doctor's office, a lawyer or two, an old-fashioned ice cream parlor with wire tables and chairs, four cafes, a bank, a bowling alley, and two movie theaters. The Arcadia was the older theater and showed re-releases and Grade B movies. The Bay was at that time the newest and largest theater in the Tri-Cities and showed the first-run features.

Sometimes when my buddies and I had nothing better to do, we would go to both theaters in one evening.

Out on Market Street towards Goose Creek, was a lumber yard, two or three car lots, a gravel pit, and Brown's Chicken Shack, our "Happy Days" drive-in. Their specialty was chicken salad sandwiches, the most scrumptious I have ever eaten, anywhere. This was the era of the car hops, and we went to Brown's and other area drive-ins as much to hassle the girls and see and be seen as to eat.

As an added attraction to draw customers, Brown's had a playground and small zoo for the kids. In addition to some birds and small animals such as a raccoon and opossum, they had two spider monkeys. These primates may have been entertaining to the kids, but they were sickening to anyone trying to eat. They would sit scratching and picking off fleas from each other or hang upside down exposing their flaming red rears. I, for one was ecstatic when they suddenly died.

Two business establishments in old Baytown stand out most vividly in my memory. One was a bicycle repair shop on the Baytown-Pelly Road operated by an old German named Klass Hamstra. Klass was a bachelor who lived in the rear of his shop. He made his living by working with his hands, but I soon discovered he was a highly intelligent and well-read person. He loved to talk and could converse on just about any subject. Philosophy was his favorite, and he maintained a billboard at the side of his shop where he handpainted adages from both old and modern writers. One week he would quote Kipling, "And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame, but each for the joy of working." The next week he would have, "Laugh, and the world laughs with you, snore and you sleep alone." People in the area anxiously awaited the weekly changing of the pithy sayings on his homemade billboard.

The other place was just down the street at the intersection with Maryland Street, a "beer joint" called Ma Church's. It sat on the right-hand corner of the intersection and on the left was the Longhorn Tavern. These two bars, along with the body of water known as Black Duck Bay which sat at the bottom of the street, gave credence to Dick's and my claim of living on "the wettest street in town." Ma's place was half-way along my paper route and I stopped there to rest. Ma, a fat, jolly matron, bought a paper from me every day, but got her nickel back plus one more when I bought a Royal Crown Cola and a package of Planter's Peanuts. We kids would take a big swig out of the RC, dump the peanuts into the bottle, then drink and chew simultaneously.

Maybe it's just my imagination, but it was a simpler time back during those years. The pace of living was slower. It was small-town

living in its most favorable aspects. Everyone knew everyone else. I was Alfred Young's boy, and Alfred Young worked at the refinery, just like every other father did. Our company-town atmosphere helped lessen the feelings of class or caste. My playmates and I were all on about the same level since our fathers did the same thing. This feeling of equality gave stability to our relationships and enabled us to grow up without overwhelming feelings of superiority or inferiority.

We walked the streets without fear. We seldom locked our doors. We knew all of our neighbors by name, and if a family had problems, they knew their neighbors would help without being asked. A person's word was his bond, collateral was seldom needed. No one welched on his debts, and if one rarely did, his family made good to protect the family's name.

These, then, are my memories of my hometown. They are of the giant Humble refinery whose shrill whistle blasts told us when it was 7 a.m., noon, and 4 p.m., whose orange jets of burning waste gas illuminated the night sky, and whose dank, oily smells permeated the community. They are also of the physical terrain, of forests of moss-laden oak trees and forests of steel oil derricks, and of waterways that surrounded us and left in the humid air a mixed odor of brackish bayou and salted sea. They are also of one and two story buildings of red brick, cream stucco, unpainted wood, and rusted tin scattered along a single main street. But, mostly they are of a group of special people, most of them now dead, who lived by a set of simple values such as honesty, friendliness, and a profound love of God, home, and community. Perhaps my hometown was not a place of ideal perfection, but if my recollections are only partially accurate, it was as close to utopia as I'll ever get.