



ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

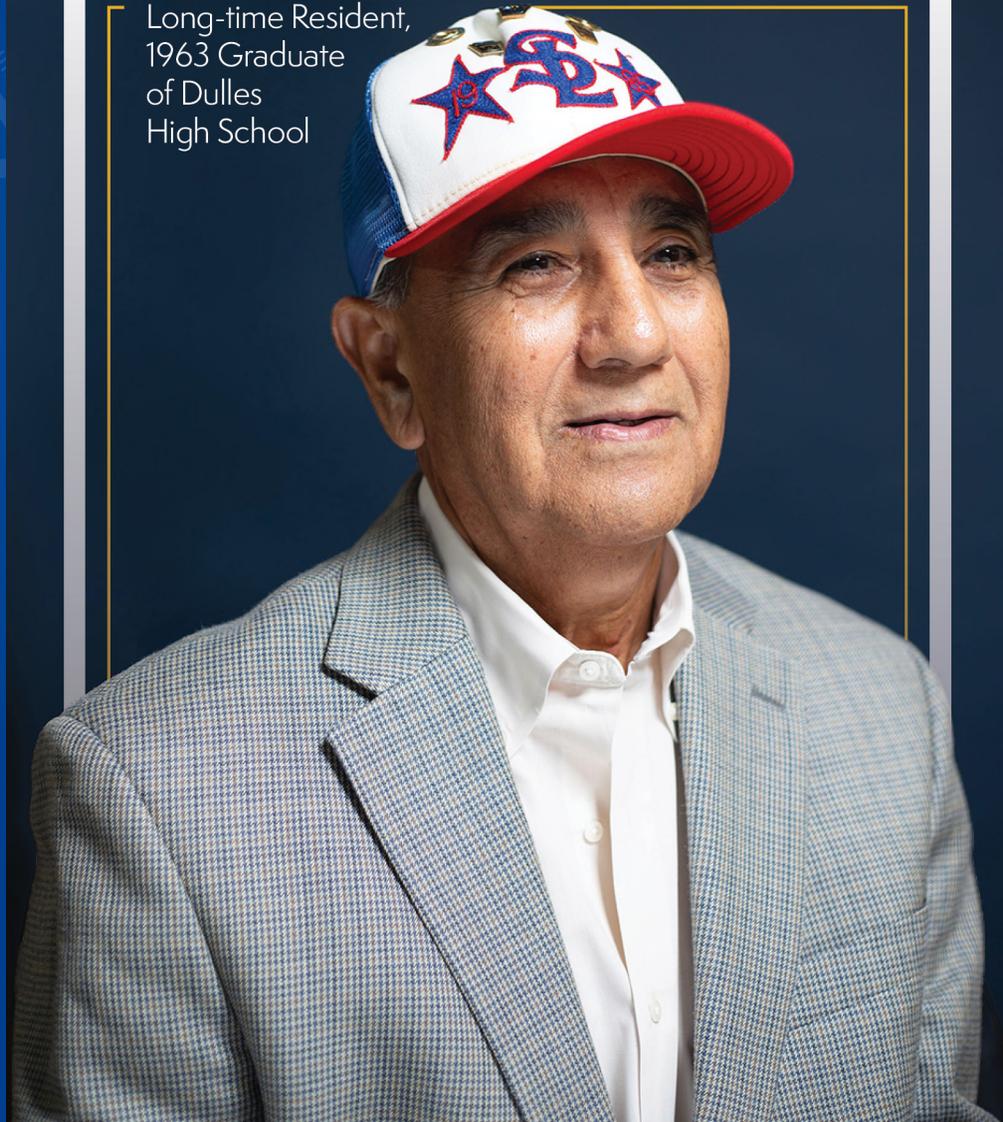
in Celebration of the
City of Sugar Land
60th Anniversary



CITY OF SUGAR LAND

George Morales, Jr.

Long-time Resident,
1963 Graduate
of Dulles
High School



WIDMEYER: When did the Morales clan first come to Sugar Land?

MORALES: My father's parents came from Mexico—I'm not sure exactly what year. My dad and brothers and sisters were born here.

WIDMEYER: And your grandparents were probably quite young when they were married.

MORALES: I would say yes. Back then they got married young, like sixteen—seventeen or maybe even fifteen years old.

WIDMEYER: They came here for work, do you think?

MORALES: I think that they probably did. Back then this was farmland. My dad had over sixty-some years working at Imperial Sugar.

WIDMEYER: Tell me about his job. What he did for the refinery.

MORALES: I remember going to visit dad at Imperial Sugar. I was really AFRAID to visit him. He would take me to the plant just to see where he worked.

He was what they called a 'pan helper'. He was the guy that cooked the sugar. They had different shifts, one at 8 o'clock in the morning, one at midnight, and four in the afternoon. My dad worked all the different shifts.

But this was not Dad's only job. Dad was the type that wanted to provide for his family. So when I was about twelve years old, we moved to Stafford. He had a café, and then later on, opened a dance hall in Stafford Oak. Dad worked both jobs. He was a go-getter.

WIDMEYER: And how many children were there?

MORALES: There were a total of six, four boys and two girls. I'm the oldest. We lived in the Mayfield Park area where we rented a house. My grandmother and my uncles lived there. It was a community town where

everybody worked for Imperial Sugar. I've seen the town grow from hardly anything to what it is today.

WIDMEYER: What are some favorite memories from your boyhood?

MORALES: I remember riding on the streets on my bicycle in Mayfield Park. I enjoyed that. There were a lot of people visiting and talking. I went to school in Mayfield Park through the third grade, then went to Sugar Land School. [now called Lakeview Elementary] I remember the school, the auditorium and the circle drive. I didn't go to high school there. I graduated from Dulles High School when they consolidated. The Sugar Land High school mascot was the Sugar Land Gators. In Missouri City they were the Missouri City Mustangs. But my uncles and my aunts were going to school in Sugar Land, and I went to school at Dulles.

WIDMEYER: It was a long walk to Sugar Land Elementary from Mayfield Park.

MORALES: It was! But it wasn't so long. There wasn't an entrance on Burney Road. We had to walk all the way around the refinery to get to the school. There used to be a feed mill store there. We used to walk through there in the afternoons, going back home. And I remember the restaurants that were there. It WAS a long walk. But we used to walk it with no problems.

WIDMEYER: Was there no cut-through?

MORALES: No. There were just streets that were coming through the feed mill where the furniture store was. And that led to the front of Imperial Sugar.

WIDMEYER: I'm guessing you graduated from high school about '63. Not too long after the town was incorporated.

MORALES: That is correct. The town was growing.

WIDMEYER: I'm especially curious about Mayfield Park and the races who lived there.

MORALES: We had the Mexican people, and we had the colored people that lived there. It was its own little community there, if you want to call it. I DO remember there used to be a pool hall where they used to play pool, cards and different games. The pool hall used to be on Live Oak Street. That's where we lived on Live Oak Street. There were some cafes or beer joints, that were there, pretty close to Imperial. People would go in there to get something to eat or drink.

There used to be a store right across the street from the small school. I used to buy cookies there. The school was a two-story building. Back then in case there was a fire, it used to have a slide from the second floor all the way to the first floor. And I DO remember that.

WIDMEYER: Is that because you slid down it one time?

MORALES: NO (laughter). I think I was afraid probably to get on it. But, no, they DID have a big slide.

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It was a community town where everybody worked for Imperial Sugar.

George Morales, Jr.

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WIDMEYER: Tell us about the dance hall.

MORALES: Back then they used to have dances for the Mexican people. There used to be in the back part before Mayfield Park started developing. They used to have celebrations and fifteen-year parties. On the 15th of September, we used to celebrate the independence of Mexico from France.

I DO remember a teacher named Mrs. Hightower, and I remember Coach Hightower. He used to be the football coach and the track coach. I remember Ken Hall, the football player who set all kinds of different records for the school.

WIDMEYER: Now, Coach Hightower coached what sports?

MORALES: Coach Hightower was the main football coach. Chuzzy Jenkins was the track coach

The elementary sat on one part of the campus, right by the bridge. The high school sat behind the elementary on Lakeview Drive.

WIDMEYER: I want to go back to Mrs. Hightower, the teacher. She told someone that when you all came to school, you were probably the best-turned-out kids in the school.

MORALES: (laughter) Well, Dad ran a tight ship. We ran a straight line because if we didn't, we knew where we were going. And of course, Dad and Mom always provided for us. We dressed not maybe in the BEST clothes, but we were proud, all the six kids.

WIDMEYER: Did you leave Sugar Land at some point?

MORALES: We left Sugar Land when I was twelve years old. Dad opened a place of business in Stafford. So we moved from Sugar Land to Stafford. But, we were still coming back to Sugar Land because we were involved with Little League baseball teams. I remember when Baker Field first opened. We had two teams here. One year I played on the Sugar Land Lions, and then the other year I was part of the Saint Theresa's Little League team.

WIDMEYER: Mr. Baker was critical in getting the ball field AND the teams going.

MORALES: Yes, yes he was very involved making sure the kids had some place to play. Before Baker Field, we used to play ball across the street off Highway 90, where the Sugar Land Bank is now.

WIDMEYER: Did your family come back to Sugar Land, or did you come back as an adult?

MORALES: The family moved to Stafford in 1956 and returned in 1973. I went to the service in 1965. The Viet Nam conflict was going on. So I was drafted into the Army. Mary and I had been married in October, and I got a 'Greetings from Uncle Sam! I need for you to come in for a physical'. So I went in for the physical and in November, I left.

WIDMEYER: Where did you ship out to?

MORALES: Leesville, Louisiana. That's where I had my basic training. After I finished basic training I went to Huntsville, Alabama, to learn about being an ammo specialist. But there was a mix-up. I had a relative who was drafted at the same time as I was. He was a Morales, too. Before the service I went to Massey Business School in Houston. I learned how to do accounting there. When I went into basic training, my relative got shipped off to Indianapolis to do payroll. And they shipped me on to Huntsville, to do the ammo. I was the one that had the experience in accounting, but he went to do accounting work. (laughter)

From Huntsville, Alabama I went to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. We were starting a unit to go to Viet Nam. Then I got called in by one of the sergeants. They wanted to find out if I would want to go do an accounting job in Viet Nam. They were going to do on-the-job training for me at Fort Bragg.

I already knew that I was going to Viet Nam, so I said, 'Yeah, I'll go ahead and learn on-the-job training.' So they shipped me out of that unit to another unit. I already KNEW accounting, but this had to do with paying the employees.

I learned how to do the job. They sort of forgot about me. Maybe I fell through the cracks. I finally got tired of waiting so I called my wife and said, 'Do you want to come to Fort Bragg?' And she said, "Yeah, I'll go to Fort Bragg." So she and our daughter, Carol, came to stay with me in an apartment in Springfield, North Carolina.

WIDMEYER: Your hitch was four years?

MORALES: No, my hitch was for two years. But they forgot about me so I stayed, and I stayed. I was trying to move up in rank. I finally called the unit and I said, "Hey, I've been doing payroll. I see all these promotions coming through. You think maybe I can get promoted?" And he says, "Yeah, we'll see what they can do." I was able to become a specialist E-5 where I got a little bit more money. I came out of the service in November 1968.

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One year I played on the Sugar Land Lions, and then the other year I was part of the Saint Theresa's Little League team.

George Morales, Jr.

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I moved back to Stafford because that's where my parents lived. My dad had a small rent house, and he asked if I wanted to move into the rent house. Even before I went to the service, all of our family used to work at the business that Dad had. People from ALL over Fort Bend County used to go to my dad's place. It was one of the ONLY places where friends and family could entertain themselves.

WIDMEYER: Were the clientele mostly Hispanic?

MORALES: Yes they were. People would come weekend after weekend just to have a good time.

WIDMEYER: It must have been exciting.

MORALES: It was. But Dad ran a real tight ship. If you went there you had to behave yourself, because if you didn't behave yourself, you were gone. (laughter) And you couldn't come back. Some people that Dad would turn away would come back and say, "Look, I did bad. I want to come back. Would you let me come back?" And Dad would say,

"Yeah, you can. Just as long as you behave yourself, this is a FAMILY entertainment place. It's not just for the single ones. This is a family entertainment."

I used to help Dad on weekends. In 1970 my wife and I decided to come back to Sugar Land to see what we could find as far as a place to build. Mr. Neal had some lots for sale. We talked to him to see if we could move into this area. And sure enough, we were able to buy a lot from him and build this house in 1970.

MARY MORALES (wife): We bought it in '68 and built in 1970.

MORALES: After a few years Dad called us and said, "This dance hall needs a lot of work. I'm willing to build a new place if y'all want it." He says, "Does anybody want to take it over?" I was the oldest, he was looking at me, and I told him, "No Dad, I don't want to get into this type of business. I just don't want to." He says, "Well, does anybody else want to do it?" And nobody agreed that they wanted to do it. So Dad sold it and came back to Sugar Land.

WIDMEYER: And where did they live when they came back?

MORALES: They lived in Covington Woods.

WIDMEYER: That was a new subdivision.

MORALES: Yes. It was. He bought him a house there, with FIVE bedrooms; five bedrooms, a playroom, a wet bar, a dining room, a living room. The playroom had a pool table in it.

It was really for EVERYBODY. Some of my brothers and sisters were not married, so of course they lived at the house. Before he closed the business, we used to close up the hall and come to the new house where Mom would make breakfast. We'd play pool, and then we'd go to sleep in the early hours.



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WIDMEYER: At four o'clock in the morning? (laughs)

MORALES: Yeah, four o'clock in the morning.

WIDMEYER: I want to go back to a little bit before you were married. I interviewed an African-American gentleman last week, and I asked him about discrimination. And he said he wasn't really aware of it as a boy. And I was wondering how you felt as an Hispanic.

MORALES: As far as ME, or my family, we didn't have any problem. Maybe it was because everybody knew my father. I remember going into the eating place here in Sugar Land that was run by the African-Americans. We would go and eat there all the time. I remember going over to the drug store in Sugar Land. My dad would take me after school. We'd go and sit at the little diner and we would eat. No problems. Dad would tell stories that yes, there had been some issues, but I can't say that I ran into any problems.

WIDMEYER: Now, your dad worked at Imperial for sixty years?

MORALES: Sixty-one—over sixty-one years. Dad had a lot of years there. Dad knew a lot of people. He was familiar with everybody. He knew everybody in town. Dad goes back when Mr. T.C. Rozelle was still there. He also knew all the Kempners.

Dad was one of the first Hispanics that Imperial Sugar asked if he wanted to do some sales for Imperial Sugar. So Dad, with all the other things he had going, agreed to do some sales. We were still kids but we used to travel to New Mexico, El Paso, McAllen and other areas trying to sell Imperial Sugar products.

WIDMEYER: Well, that was a big compliment.

MORALES: It WAS! I remember going to McAllen. We'd stay maybe a week, two weeks, and he would rent this small cottage where we would stay when he was out doing his sales run,

WIDMEYER: Good way to make a sale, take your children.

MORALES: That's right, to make sales! And he would make sales.

WIDMEYER: Well, he knew the key people at Imperial, then.

MORALES: Yes he did. The only way you could get promotions was the amount of years of employment. Dad built his seniority. When different jobs came up he bid for them and was able to get some of the jobs. One of his last jobs was working the "gate"—the main gate. He would greet people when they were going in, making sure they had the right badge to go in or checking to see who they were visiting. Dad did this before Imperial Sugar closed down.

He left because the company closed. Supposedly, the management had a talk with him, 'George, we're probably closing it down, so that's it'. He worked until it closed. I'm not sure exactly the year—two thousand and something.

WIDMEYER: I think it was June of 2002. And your dad died in November, 2004?

MORALES: Yeah. Right.

WIDMEYER: A year and a half later.

WIDMEYER: I talked to a former mayor not too long ago who said closing that refinery was heartbreaking. Was it?

MORALES: Very. For a lot of people. This is where most of Sugar Land residents worked. I think a lot of people thought they were going to get some type of severance pay for their many years of employment. It never did come about.

People from all over the county used to come to work here. It was hard for these people.

When Dad was still alive he talked me into running for a council seat for the City of Sugar Land. We DID run. He knew a lot of people. We ran a good race. I was trying to be the first Hispanic to serve on that council. We came in close, but it wasn't close enough.

WIDMEYER: Was that an at-large or district?

MORALES: It was an at-large.

WIDMEYER: What year?

MORALES: I can't remember. It had to be after I got back from the service. Late '70s I would say.

WIDMEYER: And who was the victor in that?

MORALES: It was Mr. Rozelle. And who else was running? I can't remember the other ones. But I came in third.

WIDMEYER: Grandparents spent their lives here, your parents basically were raised here, and you, and now your children are living here.

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George Morales, Jr.

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MORALES: Yes.

WIDMEYER: And grandchildren. Five generations. What does that say about this city?

MORALES: It's a good town. We enjoyed it. I remember when I first moved into this house here. Eldridge Road was a TWO lane highway.

And 90-A was four lanes. We used to have ditches out in the front of our yard. And you might be wondering, well, why do I have the circle driveway? Because back then we used to have to back out onto Eldridge and I didn't want to have to back out. One of my uncles came in from California. He used to do cement work. We talked him into doing a circle driveway for me so that way we could pull out head first instead of backing out into Eldridge. The Clyde Hentons used to live right across the street from us.

WIDMEYER: Well, Public Works – you saw a lot of their work, didn't you, as they were putting in the sewage pipes? (smiling at all the road improvements done on Eldridge.)

MORALES: Oh yes, they put in the drainage pipes. Walter McMeans was Mayor then. Of course, he's a judge now. We knew him; we were both involved with the Little League. While the street was being fixed, we had to park our cars on Lakeview for about six months. Oh, that was a hassle. And if it rained, we had to walk in the rain. We were glad when the street was fixed.

WIDMEYER: Walter had a lot to do with the sidewalks over here.

MORALES: Oh, yes, the sidewalks, too. We weren't going to have sidewalks. And he's the one who put in the sidewalks.

WIDMEYER: One thing you forgot to cover was about your dad being in the Sheriff's Department.

MORALES: That's right. Dad worked for the Fort Bend County Sheriff's Department and the Grand Jury every first Monday of the Month.

WIDMEYER: Thirty-five years.

GOODSILL: He worked full-time at Imperial and he had all these other activities? And he took time out to be the room-father for Mrs. Hightower, to help the teachers take the children on the field trips. He was the room father!

MORALES: Yeah. (laughing)

GOODSILL: He would come and drive them. Or he would get somebody from the dance hall to drive, and he would be there all the time to help the kids and make sure they had what they needed for their extracurricular activities. She has VERY high praise for him. She taught your brothers and sisters.

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Dad worked for the Fort Bend County Sheriff's Department and the Grand Jury every first Monday of the Month.

George Morales, Jr.

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MORALES: Right. Right. She taught Connie and the rest of the kids. Connie's the second. Mrs. Hightower is a very wonderful person.

WIDMEYER: Your dad started working for the Sheriff's Department in Richmond?

MORALES: Dad got involved with the Fort Bend County Sheriff's Department after he opened the place of business.

WIDMEYER: That's right. And he did it for thirty-five years.

MORALES: Dad also was part of the reserves—well, really NOT the reserves. He was a deputy with the Fort Bend County.

WIDMEYER: Your father is amazing! All that he did. And he started out as a laborer at fourteen years old.

MORALES: He started early because he lost his dad. His dad drowned in that lake behind Nalco. They found him drowned. They don't know whether someone did it, or he fell in.

Dad started working at a fruit stand here in Sugar Land. Way back then. He used to help with the fruit stand and probably delivering.

[Looking through photographs and talking about them]

WIDMEYER: This is called a Fiestas Patrias?

MARY MORALES: This was when my father-in-law had his dance hall and that's the hall, right there. He was recognized by the Hispanic Forum, here in Fort Bend County. That was after Dad passed away, so they asked for us to come up with photos. That's the hall. And here are all the celebrations they would have there.

Here is a photo of a Mexican singer, Lydia Mendoza. She would come in and entertain the people. That's him, right there, before he retired.

WIDMEYER: Tell us about your career.

MORALES: I was in the accounting department. I worked for Sperry-Sun, but I retired from Halliburton. After thirty-six years.

I want you to know they offered me a job at Imperial, after I came back from the service. I went to apply at Imperial Sugar and at Sperry-Sun. I got the job at Sperry-Sun, with the understanding that I started work for Sperry-Sun as a shipping and receiving clerk. Fred Kielman knew my father. He said, "I'm going to offer you a job, but the only opening right now is in shipping and receiving. But if there's an opening in accounting, we'll move you." After a few years, he came back and he said, "Look, we've got an opening in accounting. Do you want to go into accounting, or do you want to go into the repair of the equipment?" And I said, "No. I'll go into accounting." But I want you to know, that a few months after I'd starting working at Sperry-Sun, Imperial Sugar called to ask if I wanted a job over there. I said, "No, I'm comfortable here."

WIDMEYER: Where was that Sperry office?

MORALES: The office used to be at Industrial Park in Sugar Land. Other companies bought us, like NL, Dresser, and Baroid. I retired from Halliburton.

My sister Connie worked for Imperial for a long time. Before she retired, she wanted to reach a hundred years total between her and grandpa for the Morales family. It was accomplished.

MARY MORALES: My father-in-law was so good about motivating people. He urged a lot of people who lived here in Sugar Land to get an education. Many did not know how to read and write well. So buying a car was hard, the contracts, etc. He would say, "You want a car? I'll go with you to help get you a loan." He told them, "Look, you lend this man money. He works for Imperial Sugar." He was a big motivator!

MORALES: When I was growing and driving, I was not allowed past the Brazos River. Dad was afraid that something would happen to us. I used to fill out the beer boxes. That was my job. And I used to clean up of the hall.

WIDMEYER: Any time you mix a Saturday night, couples and alcohol, you're going to get some fights. You probably saw some—

MARY MORALES: Oh yes, there were. But he tried to keep them from happening. I asked Grandpa once, 'Grandpa, why the dance hall? Why did you want that?' He said, "For one," he said, "There was no place for Hispanics to go for entertainment." And in Hispanic culture, you partied but you partied as a family. I could not date when I was sixteen-seventeen years old. It was a no-no. When I graduated from high school, then I could. But before high school, no. You didn't go out with a boy. A boy didn't come to your house to pick you up. You went as a family. So this is where I met George. I met him at the dance hall. I probably would have never met him on a date, or at the movies, because we weren't allowed. And so that's what Grandpa was trying to instill. He knew what family culture—Mexican culture—was like. The only way people would go somewhere would be as a family. He tried to make it family-oriented as much as he could. He had the bar and there was a dance floor.

GOODSILL: It must have been fun to have a place to go and dance and be together.

MARY MORALES: Oh yes, dance and socialize. And he made it real reasonable too. I couldn't believe it. He wouldn't even charge them. It was free to get in. He made his money with the beer.

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He knew what family culture—Mexican culture—was like. The only way people would go somewhere would be as a family. He tried to make it family-oriented as much as he could.
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Mary Morales

WIDMEYER: So your dad would do the dance hall on the weekends and then go to work at Imperial during the week.

MORALES: That's right. I forgot to tell you a little bit about the Sheriff's Department. See, Dad had the place of business in Stafford. When Mr. Logene Foster was a highway patrolman he'd go there. And Mr. Curtis Hall used to stop and visit.

WIDMEYER: What was the law enforcement when you were a boy in Sugar Land? I was told that there was one constable.

MORALES: Yes, it was a safe town.

GOODSILL: There was some discrimination in those days. It couldn't have been easy to move up.

MORALES: Dad was very likable. He loved to help people.

WIDMEYER: I want to go back to a story you mentioned about the company store.

MORALES: The Mercantile. They used to sell furniture. In fact, we bought our first furniture there. Of course, we didn't have any credit. Dad went in and talked with them and said, "we are here to buy some furniture." I think we also bought a refrigerator, a couch, a bed and different things. We were able to get credit there, and then pay it back.

WIDMEYER: You also mentioned, I think, a grocery store in Mayfield?

MORALES: There used to be like a little store. They would sell sodas, candy, and all that stuff.

WIDMEYER: Was that Imperial-owned too?

MORALES: No. It was probably one of the neighborhood stores there.

WIDMEYER: Growing up you went to the Mercantile and the drug store?

MORALES: Oh yes. I worked at the grocery store when I was growing up. This was a farming town. When I was working at the store, people would come in from the First Colony farming area, and do their grocery shopping. Imperial used to give them coupons worth money.

WIDMEYER: Imperial scrip, I think I saw.

MORALES: Yeah. And they could go in and they'd buy things, using this paper, this paper money.

GOODSILL: Do you have any of that scrip?

MORALES: No, I don't. But I do remember seeing it. The store was fully equipped. They had lots of food there. They would sell it in quantities—big quantities. The farmers from the First Colony area would come in and do their shopping. I tell you, when they

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This was a farming town. When I was working at the store, people would come in from the First Colony farming area, and do their grocery shopping. Imperial used to give them coupons worth money.

George Morales, Jr. ”

were there, they were there to SHOP. They were buying for maybe a month. I remember using the big paper sacks from Imperial Sugar, just to load all their goods. And then having to take it from the store to their cars. They would buy flour in BIG sacks.

There used to be a clothing store at Imperial Sugar too. It used to have a barbershop and a drug store. All of it was right there in that little strip, and people would come in. Whatever they needed, they could get it there.

WIDMEYER: At fair prices.

MORALES: I think so. They couldn't go into Houston easily because of the roads. Imperial really provided for its people. They had the medical doctors in case anybody got sick. I remember Dr. Slaughter and Dr. Kuykendall. They had the clinic across the street from the depot. There used to be a cotton gin here, in Sugar Land, too.

WIDMEYER: I'm curious about the doctors. Why did you go see a doctor?

MORALES: Well, you would get sick, or your tonsils were hurting, or you had the flu or ear aches.

WIDMEYER: If tonsils had to come out, you didn't go to Houston?

MORALES: No, no. You would go here.

WIDMEYER: Were there jokes about Dr. Slaughter and Dr. Deatherage?

(laughter)

MORALES: Yeah. But, both of them were real good doctors. Just because we were Hispanic, didn't mean that these doctors weren't going to take care of you. I remember they brought Dad in once when something happened because of the business. I think that he had an injury or wound from trying to arrest somebody. They brought Dad over here to the hospital. They also brought the other gentleman to the hospital. I want you to know that Dr. Slaughter said, "I'm not worried about him. I'm going to take care of George first."

WIDMEYER: Your children were born here.

MORALES: Yes, they were. My daughter, Carol, was born in Houston, and my son, Marty, was born in Bellaire. But all of my family was born here. I was born at the hospital right here on Lakeview. Before they built the hospital on Eldridge. I think it was Dr. Kuykendall who brought me into the world.

WIDMEYER: What big changes have you seen over time?

MORALES: Changes are good. They keep us from going into Houston for everything that we need. Everything is here for us now. There is no reason for us to go all the way to Houston.

I used to work in Sugar Land, but Sugar Land didn't have all these eating-places that we have now. So for lunch hour we used to go into Houston to eat. Changes are good. All these hospitals now. The roads are good. It's just been nice.

WIDMEYER: There's been a huge change in the ethnic make-up of the city, too. What would your grandfather have said to see the 30% Asian population that it is here today? Would he recognize Sugar Land today at all, or ever have imagined it to be like this?

MORALES: I don't think so. He would be amazed by all the ethnic groups.

WIDMEYER: For the past decade, this was the fastest growing city in the state, among the fastest growing in the country.

WIDMEYER: I've been in Sugar Land for a number of years. There is a fierce loyalty from all the generations who've stayed here and love this town. Why do people feel so strongly about this community?

MORALES: Maybe we feel that we belong here because we've been treated well. Our kids have their own houses. My brothers, my sisters, and others are here. This is our place. We've seen it grow. We like it. Our ancestors saw the growth and we have seen the growth and the many changes for all groups of people.

WIDMEYER: We're about to kick off a Fifty Best Campaign, asking residents to tell us the fifty best things about Sugar Land. Can you give me your top five best things?

MORALES: The five best things. Well, I'm probably going to say, the eating places, the freeways getting into the Houston area, the stores that are available, the hospitals that are available and the police department.

WIDMEYER: It's just so rare to see this many generations stay in one community. I'm not sure I know of anyone in my life that has done that. It's just very, very rare these days.

Well, thanks so much for your time.

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Sugar Land 
HERITAGE
FOUNDATION

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