

Young and Black in Sugar Land

When Mrs. Aline McLemore purchased the first FHA (Federal Housing Administration) Urban Renewal house in 1961, she couldn't have known that her stepson Clarence would recount growing up in the Mayfield neighborhood some 48 years later. Clarence McLemore agreed to be interviewed by City of Sugar Land staff who are documenting the early days of the City after its incorporation.

Clarence offers an interesting perspective on growing up in Sugar Land—he was a black child, although the terms “negro” or “colored” were used then.

“Yes, we were a segregated town back then, after the war and the 50s and 60s,” Clarence says. “I never thought much about it. That’s just the way it was—everywhere in the South. And we never saw the hostility you heard about in other Southern towns and cities.”

Clarence’s parents worked for the Imperial Sugar Company. “The company sold everything—clothes, groceries, even cars. My dad had a convertible. Took the payments out of your check. It was OK like that—no one went hungry.”

Listening to Clarence, you can't help but hear fondness in his recollections.

“We were ‘youngins,’ so we played, I mean we all played together though we didn't stray from our neighborhoods much,” he recounts. “I went to the M.R. Wood School—it had all grades and was just for the black kids. The Sugar Land Elementary School was sort of close, but that was the white school, and the Mexicans and Hispanics went there, too. Even though it

was close as the crow flies, walking there I'd have to have taken a big detour as there was no bridge over the creek. So it was just as well I went to M.R. Wood." In Mayfield when he was a boy, all the residents looked out for each other's children. And if you misbehaved at school, word got back home quickly: "You got a whipping at school and another soon as you got home," remembers Clarence, with a slight grimace at the memory.

There was never any racial turmoil. "We were sad when Martin was shot and killed, and really very sad when Bobby was killed," has says speaking of Rev. King and Robert Kennedy.

Clarence went to work at a relatively young age. Really, there was no option after a black boy finished his schooling, and a job at Visco (now Nalco) was a pretty good deal. "There were three types of employees," he recounts. "Laborers, and we were the blacks and Hispanics. There were the blue collars, but they were the white men and they did most of the supervising. And there were the white collars, but you never saw much of them."