

Interviewee: Gwen Emmet

Interview Date: February 13, 2010

University of Houston
Oral History of Houston Project
Houston History

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Place: At their home in Houston, Texas
Interviewer: Ernesto Valdés
Transcriber: Michelle Kokes

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Abstract:

Gwen Emmett recounts Westbury Square in its infancy during the 1960s. Westbury Square provided a recreational destination for teenaged youths, and Gwen compares the close-knit, formal social lives of young adults in the sixties to the more independent and accessible ones of millennials. Gwen remembers how the concept of a specialty store seemed foreign to her and how she transitioned from home-sewn clothing to store-bought clothing in her college years. Gwen revisits then-popular Houston shops and business like Sakowitz, Foley's, and Compton's as well as discusses newer sites such as Home Depot and the surrounding community's reaction to replacements. Gwen supports the preservation of Westbury Square and discusses with Ernesto plans to regain interest in the area through attractions such as art galleries and stresses the importance of maintaining authenticity in tourist attractions. In addition to Westbury Square, Gwen provides her thoughts on multilingualism, the "American melting pot" metaphor, and the attitudes towards different cultures in the United States.

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EV: This is Ernesto Valdés, I'm interviewing Gwen Emmett at her residence and it is February 13, 2010 and it is 2:00 in the afternoon. Will you please give me your full name?

GE: Yes, I'm Gwen O'Brien Emmett. I moved to Houston when I was eight years old in 1958 and at the time we lived on Birch Street in Bellaire which is one of the streets that fed right into what is now the 610 Loop, there was no loop at the time. Post Oak Road was a two-lane asphalt road and you would go there and turn left and the first shopping center I had ever seen was Meyerland Shopping Center and it was one year old. I have a vivid memory of it having a huge candle on top of it for it celebrating its first birthday.

EV: Oh, really?

GE: The grocery store was Henke and Pillot which was a local grocery store chain out of the Pilot building now is one of the restored buildings that we want to take care of Downtown. But if you kept going on Post Oak Road you wandered down and after about a mile it was a field, there was nothing back there. In a few years, 1960 I guess, '61, my sister started at Johnston Junior High which was the first year it was opened. You had to go out and go down West Bellfort and there were, it was platted, Meyerland was out there but

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there were no houses around it, at all. There was just the city and that's where, of course, the way you got to Westbury Square which opened a few years later. That was all just much different in terms of commercial things that were available, there was nothing. But my first memories of Westbury Square really come with the years that I began dating. I don't really remember going there until I was going out there my... maybe my sophomore or junior year in high school. That would have been '64 to '66, is that right? I seem to remember that where you parked that there was just kind of a ninety degree angle of stores first and it was later that all the parts in the back were added. I'm not sure, but of course everybody's memory is the candle shop, ice cream parlor. Then I do remember a store that, I don't know if it was, maybe it was called Cargo Houston or Pier One or that type store.

EV: Cargo Houston?

GE: Yes I was going to say it might have been, I pulled that out. That was just remarkable to me. I just thought it was so interesting they would have, it was just lots of glasses and they may have really just come off of a ship, that's what it looked like. You know those kind of things just really don't sound that remarkable today because we have so many options for these kind of specialty stores but we didn't have those then. We barely had shopping centers.

EV: I remember I came to Houston about late sixties, the first thing everybody told me was, "You've got to go out to Westbury Square."

GE: It was so unique.

EV: But I came there from San Antonio which..._____.

GE: Right.

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EV: Houston appeared kind of vanilla to me until I looked at Westbury Square and that was just about the only place that you got that real feel of another world or something.

GE: It was very visionary I guess, to think in those terms because you're right we kind of depended on New Orleans who, you know, had the French Quarter. You go to San Antonio for the Hispanic flavor. You go to San Francisco for a certain flavor and Houston was just sort of all new.

EV: Exactly.

GE: And shopping! I mean the village right here near Rice University. I remember driving to the Village with my mother to go shopping. That was going downtown to Foley's, you didn't go to shopping centers even. So this whole new concept of sort of clusters of things that people could walk around and have a little area that felt a little artsy and felt a little old world was just... and for young people that was very...

EV: Very Cosmopolitan?

GE: Yeah and just out for something to do.

EV: Did you go there on a regular basis?

GE: Yeah I think we did, my memory is that we did. Another thing that was different in those days is you formally waited for your latest boyfriend to call you and ask you for a date. Ed and I were talking about... you didn't just go out as a bunch of kids. We didn't have access to our cars every night of the week like the kids today who are just out all the time. You very formally had a date on Friday night and a date on Saturday night, if you were lucky. You didn't go much of anywhere if you didn't. Probably during football season we were at the football games but the rest of the time, you didn't travel far from your

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neighborhood. We didn't get on whatever freeways were there. We didn't run to Downtown or whatever. This was our part of the world. We had a Shakey's Pizza Parlor, we had a movies but we went to Westbury Square walked around. Or maybe we would go to an event and then go out to Westbury Square to the ice cream shop and then...

EV: Were they open at night, were there restaurants over there?

GE: Yeah, well restaurants, I don't remember the restaurant part of it. The pizza parlor that was back in the back. That I went to later when I was here in Houston teaching school as a young twenty-something. That... but you know we didn't go to restaurants much, except for maybe a piece of pizza or a hamburger. I remember more just walking around. I don't think we spent very much money and we probably just wandered. My senior year when I was getting ready to go away to college I remember there was a dress shop there and my mother had made most of my clothes growing up. I didn't shop a lot for clothes but I very clearly remember getting to go to that store and buy dresses that were very dressy to take to college. I guess now days all we do is buy jeans.

EV: Jeans and tank tops.

GE: Yeah but it was just, I remember thinking that was... I wish that dress shop was still there. That was a real strong memory in my mind being able to buy clothes there.

EV: Well back then, you were getting to where the Galleria is... you had Sakowitz there right, was that there then?

GE: Yes, Sak... yes. Sakowitz got built...well the loop, the 610 loop was not finished on the west side very far. They built the access roads in the Bellaire area but then, because we played football games up at Delmar and it would take sometimes an hour, an hour and a

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half to get to Delmar Stadium because we would be on a two lane muddy road. So that wasn't all finished in there. Sakowitz sat out there by itself in the mud for a lot of years but that's pretty high level shopping for fifteen year olds.

EV: Right. Foleys was also there wasn't it?

GE: No.

EV: That wasn't there yet?

GE: No, Foley's was downtown. Then it was in Sharpstown. That opened about the same time that Westbury Square opened, '61 somewhere in there. I remember that more when I came back to live in Houston. We shopped at Foleys and even Battlestein's was a freestanding up on Alabama. It's not there anymore. Sakowitz was... I don't know exactly when Sakowitz opened but I'm guessing sometime in the late sixties.

EV: Was it out there sitting by itself?

GE: Oh yeah.

EV: Really?

GE: It was a mud hole. Where the Galleria is, was a little entertainment thing. They had pony rides and you could come have birthday parties. My little brother had a birthday party there it was called Wee Wild West. Right about where Nordstrom's is right now. I mean that was... that was, the Galleria, nothing was there until I came back from college in '71 and it was like, "Wow! Where did this come from?"

EV: When I first came to Houston way on the end of Westheimer, the Sunny Looks was there. Very rich people would eat there.

GE: Oh, absolutely.

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EV: Then we went out to on the corner of Voss and Westheimer I think it where we had, there were working ranches across.

GE: Absolutely. I don't know about other restaurants because like I said that wasn't in the daily book of sixteen year olds to be doing restaurants too much.

EV: Where did you go to college?

GE: My freshman year, me and three other girls went over to LSU because our parents had gone there. In those days, I guess there were girls at A&M but not many so really most of our friends were going to Texas Tech or UT. We decided to be different and go to LSU. Well that summer my dad left the big oil company and went to a smaller, and more independent in West Texas and suddenly that commute became a very unpleasant thirteen hour puddle jump and so I transferred back to the University of Texas. So...

EV: Anytime you go out there, you gotta go through Odessa.

GE: It's a little faster now, though.

EV: You get in and out a lot quicker.

GE: Yeah absolutely. It was just way far away all of the sudden so I didn't stay at LSU. I was not in Houston very much because my parents weren't here.

EV: What did you major in?

GE: History and English and teaching! Teaching certification.

EV: Is that what you taught?

GE: I taught Texas History.

EV: Did you really?

GE: Yeah, seventh grade.

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EV: Wow I start teaching tomorrow night, Texas history. I just teach at HCC because I like to teach. It certainly doesn't pay.

GE: Yeah that's too bad.

EV: It doesn't pay what a high school teacher would make but I just enjoy the teaching. So when you all, I know that it was a big magnet for everybody, even for people who didn't live there.

GE: Apparently.

EV: Was there, I suspect the any... let me back up. Were there any kind of special events that happened there like any kind of a celebration, annual celebration? Somebody mentioned something about a sale, an annual big sale?

GE: I don't know, I don't remember that. I saw it more as a place for me to go in the evenings for, you know teenagers. You know everything was safe and you never worried about, you know, nowadays you wonder how that would play but it just seemed like it was all in fun and nice and being amazed and all the... and a candle shop, that was just remarkable. Now they are everywhere.

EV: The other thing I really like was they had a men's store, the Compton's.

GE: Yes I remember that.

EV: I mean that was a fabulous spot.

GE: Yeah it was great.

EV: Vintage.

GE: Somebody must have done a really good job of... they got good tenants and it was really sad because we lived north, out in Kingwood for years and then we moved, we were

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in Washington D.C. for thirteen years and so, even while we were out northeast I didn't come down that much in that part of the world but our youngest daughter and son in law now have bought a house out on Chimney Rock just not far from West Belford. Of we were going out there with them looking at houses, I was just amazed, I thought, "Oh my gosh, that's where Westbury Square was."

EV: Yeah I got the same article you all got in the little newspaper. I must have gotten ten emails from folks, who want to contribute. But one of them said that they don't shop at that Home Depot because...

GE: Because they took down...

EV: Because they took half of Westbury Square.

GE: I like that.

EV: They kind of put them on their black list.

GE: That's funny.

EV: Do you know whether or not there were any weddings conducted there or any kind of social...?

GE: Not that I remember. But the other thing that intrigued me that I thought was so cool was that you could live in those... I remember thinking that it would be so neat to live in those rented apartments above. That is more when we came back, like I say when I came back to teach, it seems like it was much more, that was more, I don't know when it began to slip but in the seventies, the mid-seventies it was still very popular, very vibrant out there.

EV: I had a friend of mine there that had a little silver that made silver jewelry out there.

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GE: Oh really? Of course that is very common on the east coast but you know we don't do that, you don't see that sort of all incorporated community. What is interesting is now we are at the East End Chamber for example. We are listening to speakers come in and talk about the revitalization of the east end and how we want to make it a community that is an integrated community that has walking and you can walk to stores or midtowns the same way you are going to build more cluster living with stores on the bottom, now we are coming to that here. But that was just totally unique in Houston.

EV: You know there is a move to preserve that place? We certainly, we can't do anything much as a university you have to have some non-profit or some citizens kind of do it but there are a lot of people who want to bring that back and a lot of those folks who were raised there, moved back there.

GE: Yeah.

EV: So they have a real desire to build it back up.

GE: It's just really pretty far gone. I mean Home Depot kind of...

EV: Actually they kind of gentrified the place.

GE: Well I know that. They cleaned it up. I know it had really gone to shambles but when you drive back in there you can see, you know where the back of it was. But boy it really...

EV: I had a friend of mine that is kind of quasi-retired from a large corporation. He went out there and he and I were talking about it. He just moved here he wasn't familiar with it. So I started thinking all excited. He went out there and took a lot of slides, pictures. He put

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together a maybe one or two minute slide show with some music but he showed, he got pictures of what was there and he found the fountain that was out in the middle.

GE: Oh really?

EV: Yeah it's back in the corner somewhere.

GE: Huh... the other thing that is kind of confusing to me, I have a strong memory that you drove in to the parking lot and then you walked up steps.

EV: Yeah, exactly.

GE: So what did they do, did they dig it out and then fill it back in or something?

EV: I don't know but it is raised.

GE: It's all smooth.

EV: Well is it smooth now?

GE: Well it's all the same level. You're not, you don't walk up any steps it's all the same grade.

EV: I didn't notice that, I just came in where the big archway is, that's the way I went this last time to go in there. But somebody had, gosh the thought just came in and went out the other side. Anyway, it will pop back into place.

GE: I know how that is.

EV: They had told me that there was some kind of special that they really looked forward to some kind of real special sale when all the places got whatever they had left over, whatever inventory.

GE: Sidewalk sale?

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EV: Exactly. It also had a little terrarium that's the first place I had ever seen a terrarium.

GE: Oh yeah that was very popular.

EV: Yeah that became "the thing" to have in the house.

GE: The thing to do. Yes and all the plants, the seventies plants.

EV: When you were, the judge had mentioned something, did you all... you all were not together then?

GE: No, we only knew each other. We actually didn't really meet until eight years after high school. But we had been in an English class together. Actually I remembered him, he didn't move back down here until the end of our junior year so he was really here for our senior year and Bellaire was a large high school. We had almost a thousand kids in our graduating class. So, you know, it takes a while. But he dated a girl that I had known for years and so when we met at a party eight years later I remembered him mainly because he dated this girl so that's... we had very minimal connection in high school.

EV: Until he got that white horse?

GE: Yeah exactly thirty five years.

EV: How long?

GE: We've been married thirty five years in April.

EV: Oh my goodness, congratulations! Did you... there goes that question again it must have Teflon on it! Oh are you working now?

GE: You know I have not, nobody pays me a salary unfortunately. Basically I tell him all I do is Ed Emmitt, I'll turn that off so it won't do that. I am very involved in his campaign, so I

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pretty much run the business side of the campaign. We have consultants and we have all these people with the fundraisers but I kind of run the management of the campaign. We have a business office up here in the village and we have a few concerns still from his consulting practice, transportation and things that he was in before he became judge. I kind of keep a handle on all of that. Our daughter actually is our business manager. We rent part of an old house up here in the village and what takes most of my time is I have gotten, I sit on several boards for him because there are so many things the county oversees that he is considered a member of. He can't get to all of it and a lot of the children's issues and mental health issues and health issues I sit on some of those boards. Well the more exposure I get in that world, I get myself busier and busier because I meet people and they say, "Oh we'd like for you to come see what we're doing" with this group or with that group or whatever. I kind of have a lot of county work, not that's it very official. It certainly helps him get a better perspective of what's going on in the county because there are so many complex issues that we are trying to make changes in and do better in terms of serving our people.

EV: I would love to really delve more behind the scenes of this type of thing of the type of growth... I'm not sure growth is the right word, but the growth of Houston and Harris County. Maybe the variables that are coming into the new society that are, as I say when I moved here Timmy Chan was the only Asian that I knew with the Chinese restaurant down there on Fannin or wherever it was.

GE: You know we were just out at this huge event out at the Chinese community center.

We have two or three events over the next week or so with the Chinese New Year. That's

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the Chinese community. We will go from Hispanic events to Chinese events to Pakistani events to Indian events. Houston is one of the most varied and inclusive cities. I mean a lot of these other cities talk about it but they tend to kind of marginalize and their groups live within their little worlds. Houston is just Houston, you know. They do have their areas and different groups have different but I think there's a lot of celebration of diversity in Houston.

EV: I think so too and it's done on a very, it's done on a very high level because number one it helps when the schools are situated the way they are. It helps, politically you have people on the governing boards like the city council and that's who begin to diffuse themselves into the society and that kind of brings out, I think, brings out the celebration that you're talking about. It adds to a much more relaxed environment for the other folks. I mean even back home there's, El Paso's been a city for hundreds of years but there's still... you still hear the little ethnic problems or something pop up and they are right on the border for God's sake.

GE: _____

EV: Houston, well it was pretty bad when I got here.

GE: Yeah.

EV: Very bad when I got here as a matter of fact but now it's eased up a lot. My roommate in college was Jim Lykes, from the Lyke's Steamship.

GE: Yeah.

EV: Do you know any of those folks? Anyway he was my roommate in college and he was okay but his family was weird. I was kind of taken back by how much it really... you

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know I kind of went into a spin in law school trying to get to all of that. Then I came out and all of the sudden things changed four or five years.

GE: And I don't know exactly why but Houston, I think Houston, there are factions of all kinds of course. The extremists on any level are hardest to work with as far as I'm concerned.

EV: Exactly.

GE: Generally I think what we pick up is a huge effort to be inclusive and to encourage people to be a part of the system appropriately. One of... Steve Kleinberg who is at Rice, Ed is a Rice graduate and we've know the Kleinberg's since... forever. Thirty five years. But he does this study every year I'm sure you've seen them. And he and Ed, ask Ed about this, but he talks about in a certain number of years a something percentage it is going to be Hispanic, Hispanic and Ed always says to him, "The problem you've got is a Hispanic community, the black community... we can't define them the way we always have. Politically you define people by neighborhoods." He said, "These precincts" and you go work these and you don't work these depending on which issue you, the event you are. The problem is we are doing what we should be doing which is we are blending. Our traditionally black precincts are becoming high rise apartments over on the east side and bless their hearts these people are living in, blacks are moving over here and saying, "We want to live in this school district over here" and it's just hard to identify. With Hispanics and I'm kind of laughing at that. What is a Hispanic? The little, this darling little couple that owned this fitness center right here in West U, their last name is Gallagher and her maiden name is Contello

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EV: Really?

GE: Yeah and so unless you know her maiden name and she has blonde hair because I think she bleaches it, but she is cute as she can be and you wouldn't have any, there is nothing that would indicate to you. But you know... so who's Hispanic? Then we have plenty of people who have Hispanic surnames who have blonde hair and blue eyes because they are married to some man whose last name happens to be Vasquez, I don't know.

EV: It's a... the only problem I see with that is you now begin to, you acculturate so much that you begin to lose any contact with your culture. Which some people think "Hey, that's the way it's supposed to be." I kind of tend to believe it's kind of nice for us to remember a little bit of this.

GE: I think careful attention is always nice. You know my maiden name is O'Brien and my cousins in Louisiana all still get all excited about the Irish and we kind of dumb down Saint Patrick's Day to "How much green beer can you drink?" Which kind of offends me frankly but you know I think there's cultural pride. Everybody is interested in their roots and I think that shared understanding makes a difference. I think that is why I would like to see, I think the conversation should not be, "Should we make English the, whatever it is, the 'official' language?" I think the question ought to be, "Why isn't every child learning Spanish?"

EV: Exactly.

GE: I mean that, to me is not going to threaten me to learn Spanish it only helps me. I'm not going to not speak English. To me that's the more important inclusive approach to that.

EV: Did you happen to watch the opening of the Olympics?

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GE: You know we were at... where were we last night? I can't remember now.

We were out, we are out every night, we had an event.

EV: They opened up in English and French.

GE: Well that is so Canada!

EV: I know but I mean they can do it, why is there so much resistance here?

GE: It's just ridiculous!

EV: I, one time help right the initial bilingual bill that the senator from Corpus Christi got to introduce. Truan. There's a lot of representatives from the legislature who were asking me questions. What I did was the senator from Pasadena back, then what's his name?

GE: Ed Velasquez?

EV: No.

GE: That's way back I don't know. We may have been gone.

EV: Anyway he asked me to put together, this was in '70 or '71 or something to put together a bilingual bill. I went and copied Massachusetts, they have a bilingual program for five languages. I just kind of scrapped that together and then they asked me to go out there and _____ but a lot of people, questions I got from some of the senators and whoever the people were was, "Why don't we just speak German?" "Go for it!" I think it's fantastic!

GE: It's not quite as pertinent.

EV: Yeah but if you want to speak that, I think that's, speaking in another language I think is great.

GE: If you do any international traveling you begin to feel a little bit dumb after a while.

Even though the rest... again look what's happening anyway. You know we have a son that

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spends quite a bit of time in India and Ed's been over there quite a bit. India, you can speak English to anybody. That doesn't keep them from having lots of different dialects and whatever they have and you just... anywhere in Europe, I think the French on purpose don't talk to us in English I think they all speak it better than they act like they do. But I just think we come off kind of egocentric.

EV: Very much so, yeah.

GE: It certainly, my grandchildren are, their father is Cuban and their mother is Scottish. I mean the mother is Cuban and the father is Scottish. Their daddy grew up, he says he doesn't speak Spanish but he understands everything they say. Well they are a fourth Cuban and I would love for them to be bilingual. My daughter is close to bilingual because she spent, she says she's not anymore because she spent quite a bit of time in Mexico and Spain during college.

EV: Really?

GE: Yeah, she did the semester abroad and but it just makes you... in an educative way it made us not quite the Texas nature. It's too bad!

EV: My great grandmother's name is Cindy.

GE: That's a good Irish name!

EV: And her mother's name was McLoud.

GE: That's a good Scott.

EV: They...it's funny I keep doing, every time I do my tree, we can't get out of the Americas.

GE: It's so deep.

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EV: My family, I mean and some in New England.

GE: It gets so broad.

EV: The 1700s is as far back as we've gone over there and in Mexico it's about the same.

As a matter of fact I found one that's 1690 something. We can't get back to the old country.

I have no idea either in Spain or... I think my sister got the McLouds back to the Isle of Sky.

She went over there, she was over there, she's a Presbyterian minister so she went over there and studied.

GE: I was going to say you sounded a little Presbyterian when you were talking about the Trinity.

EV: Yeah. Well I can sometimes I sound more Presbyterian than that! But what church do you all go to?

GE: First.

EV: Do you? First? That was... as a matter of fact she is about to retire from the ministry she's been at it for a long time.

GE: Where is she serving?

EV: El Paso. She was in Louisville for a while. She did, the church has this where they loan money for small projects in international countries around the world. Some country in Africa would want money for a clinic...

GE: So she worked for the denomination in those?

EV: Yeah. She got a lot of traveling but she's tired now. She's tired of being a shepherd.

GE: I bet she is. My funniest story about blended nationalities, we were at a... actually a

Republican Chinese Texas, well they were mostly Chinese sometimes you don't know but

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there were a lot of Asian groups and this one was particularly Chinese. A few Indians were there but it was called Texas Asian Republican something group club, caucus, something. Ed was swearing in their officers the other night and I'm sitting at the table with all these Asian men and I'm talking to different ones. A man right next to me had just been sitting there kind of quietly and the one beside him had told me that he had come over here fifteen years ago and went straight to A&M straight from Taiwan and I said, "Oh my," you know I said, "even people from Texas think College Station is a little weird. That must have seemed very strange to you fifty years ago?" And he kind of laughed at me. The man next to me and I started making a conversation and I said, "Who do you work for here?" He said, "Oh I'm with...." He named an insurance company and I caught his accent in one sentence. I thought, "That sounds British it wasn't the usual kind of..." I said, "So where did you learn English and how long have you been here?" He said, "Eight years." I said, "So where did you learn English?" He goes, "Oh I'm Scottish!" Really he's from Glasgow. When he started talking to me I could hear his... "Of course you are." He didn't have a name tag and his name was like Andrew Straken and he looked very Asian. He didn't look blended, he didn't look, "Gee I wonder what his background was?" and we just had the biggest laugh. His dad is Scott and his mom is full blood Chinese.

EV: Yeah I mean it's just...

GE: This brogue comes out of his mouth.

EV: Well I don't know the last night on the Olympics, Mexico has one guy in the winter Olympics and he's all German. His real name is [Hubertus von Hohenlohe] but he's

Mexico's only candidate in winter sports but I found that Yo-Yo Ma they had this, in France

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I think, he was amazing. I just find that migration of people from really, areas we think in terms of the Americas being a "melting pot" for the northern Europeans but you never think about the Asian.

GE: It's very funny because Ed and I, I was telling him today Andrea White, Mayor Bill White's wife, and I got to know each other pretty well. She wrote a little book about being the wife of an elected official and she would say, these little vignettes, "You know you're the wife of a politician when..." and one of them was when you own a sari or whatever the term is a Chinese jacket and you wear them. I am beginning to develop because my son brings things. We go to so many Indian events because we are very close to that community and they.... the dress is always ethnic or business attire. Well I began to think I look doughty because these woman, the clothes are just stunning. I had Joe... Joe's brought me back two or three beautiful outfits and they love it when I wear them. But we were at this Chinese event today and I told Ed, I said, "I need to get one of those jackets." They are really pretty and they're beautiful silks and they're great colors. I said, "You know the good news is that all of the ethnic groups that we go to, I have the right hair color." Because I said, "None of our ethnic groups are blonde!" He said, "Yeah, we don't have many Norwegian..." But it's true. The world is really a dark-headed world. But we think of, America is, like you said kind of the... what do you call, the northern European kind of stuff but it's very funny. I blend in pretty well.

EV: I can't wait to see you in a flamenco dress or something!

GE: I need that one. Now that would be quite lovely.

EV: You know as a side, that my wife she was born right down here in Lafayette.

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GE: Is that right?

EV: But she came down from Chicago.

GE: She's a foreigner, too!

EV: Yeah she came here when she was nine years old or something I said, "That's not enough!"

GE: Yeah, well you can lose some of that Yankee stuff.

EV: She still has that flat long A. Sometimes... "You want a hamburger?"

GE: I know, our sweet little daughter, our third child went to Rice and married a lovely young lady from Rice but she was from up around the Chicago area and she pronounces my name like it actually has a short "e." You know everybody else. I have one Yankee friend who spells my name with an "I" on purpose because she said, "You don't... your name is not GWEN you pronounce it GWIN." I'm like, "Gweehn..." they say that "eh."

EV: That's _____ isn't it?

GE: Yes, it is Gwendoline.

EV: My grandfather, he went down, his brother preceded him down to Mexico and they put up an English speaking newspaper in Torreón because that's a... a lot of mining was going on. They were kind of mining, they were prospectors and miners and all that kind of stuff in the southwest. Anyway they went down there and so after my grandfather stayed with his parents until they passed away. He went and joined his brother. By that time my uncle had this young lady working for him as a typesetter and then the revolution broke out and they brought her with them up to El Paso and then my brother, my uncle told my grandfather, "You better marry this girl because we can't let her out of the family." He was

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like forty-something at the time. They had different ways, reasons for getting married back then. "Okay I need a woman, come on let's go."

GE: Well you know like Randy Couture and Suresh they were an arranged marriage.

EV: Oh really?

GE: They are just wonderful. I don't know if you have had a chance to be around her very much but boy, she is smart.

EV: Yeah. So Westbury Square?

GE: Yeah, I thought we were done with that.

EV: Do you know anything about the guy that owns that land?

GE: I have no idea.

EV: He is a pretty shady character. So that's... that's why I think some of these groups are having trouble because he spent several months in the joint for fraud. The guy owns the stuff so we are trying to figure it out.

GE: He sold off the front to Home Depot and then just left there?

EV: I don't know whether he sold off that part or somebody else did but he owns what is left.

GE: He owns what is left. How is the community around it; are there community associations around it that have any?

EV: My feeling is that they want to preserve it.

GE: I would think or at least clean it up.

EV: Yeah. But this, I don't know what this guy is after. I have a feeling that he probably has some liens against the property and probably can't sell it.

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GE: Can't sell it?

EV: Then he won't... I don't know I haven't talked to some of the people involved so I really don't know but I'm hoping that they can somehow launch a way to save that. The idea was that they wanted to make some studio apartments for artists and then have the apartments upstairs for the artists to live in.

GE: Sure.

EV: Better yet maybe have a gallery there for some of these artists to show their stuff. I have a problem thinking that is someone going to go way out there to see an art gallery?

GE: Yeah it's not in the...

EV: Without any other drawing card...

GE: No it's not in the midst of any of these other neighborhoods that are, the ones that are more that would do that now. In this economy that kind of thing might not be the best launch right now anyway.

EV: Yeah I think they will probably have to have something else out there or move there. Maybe into Diverse Works or something but I just don't think they can do it there. They probably won't have any trouble selling or renting out artist studios.

GE: Right.

EV: But I think beyond that.

GE: But anything too commercial would be too hard.

EV: That's up to some real estate guy to figure that out. Do you have any... have I asked you anything, have we not discussed something you'd like to say?

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GE: I don't think so I think my memories are just, you have to put me in the role of about a fifteen year old and how I would relate to it which is...

EV: I don't know if I can do that.

GE: No? But I don't know if I have any, know much... I mean it was there and we enjoyed it and I didn't know anything about who put it there and why they did it, it never occurred to me that there was anybody, that anybody thought it through in terms of a business venture but we just... it is just one of those things that we would never forget, it was so unique to our community. It's just hard that's the main thing, it is so hard in these days when any city you go to or any airport you go to practically, you see the same stores and the same... you know there's not much new under the sun. In those days it was! It was very, very different. We didn't have access to every little, media so you know what every little village in Europe or... it was just a much closer world so it was a great addition. It is a shame it fell apart.

EV: I think I went to Cozumel, no Cancun. They have that, you know they built that artificial island off of the tail end of it. Then it has all the American stores, it's like being in the Galleria.

GE: I know!

EV: Why go?

GE: Right? Well I know that's been... they did that since we've been out there. But I remember thinking even then at the spot where the hotels were, you could have been anywhere in the world. Then you walk down this little gravelly road and caught this creaky

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bus that rumbled up and went in and it was like you were in Mexico. It was just like two different... They just, in an effort to I guess, sanitize it they... I don't know what they do.

EV: Well they have that, gosh, that jazz place. They had a hotel in Vegas they used to have one off of North Shepherd. Something Hard...

GE: Hard Rock...

EV: Hard Rock Café. They had a Hard Rock Café, they had all the stores we had in the Galleria. I thought...

GE: Why leave town?

EV: This is not my cup of tea. Well as I say there are some efforts to kind of preserve that place.

GE: Well I'll keep an eye out.

EV: I hope they can probably get it done. The other... you mentioned you were touching on ... oh you'll be from New York because the next issue is going to be Houston's Katrina rescue so to speak. So...

GE: We were here. Of course Robert Eckels was the judge. Of course, the lasting effects of that is what Ed's have to deal with and deal with hurricane Ike. He's the Head of Office for Emergency Management and a lot of things that were affected in Ike were because of what we learned from the experience we had with Katrina here. In New Orleans my daughter and son in law at the time, she's remarried – she actually divorced him. They were in New Orleans up until about a year... let's see what year was it?

EV: Five years ago.

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GE: Yeah. They were there until '03 and then going to Tulane. He was in medical school so they had quite a few friends that ended up here. A lot of them have moved back, they live in the old garden district. A lot of their parents haven't, a lot of the parents apparently had houses up in the mountains of North Carolina and you know they owned those big old homes. New Orleans is just really taking it on the chin, not unlike what is happening in Galveston. I mean a very small percent. I mean Galveston is not as devastated... well they might say they are but in terms of population. You know... every time. I was asking Ed, I said...I was here in Carla in 1960 and I said, "You know Galveston got wiped out then is it that different?" He kept saying that the population is 50% of what it was. Well he said actually with every hit it is taking away from the population and therefore the economy and everything else. The city of Galveston has to start looking at things like putting Level 1 trauma center at UTMB, and should you be doing that? Should you take it down there on an island, even though people got used to it being there for a very small population? So all of those communities have to, their whole infrastructure changes when half the population is...

EV: I never thought about that for the UTMB but I kind of suspected it for the other things. In essence what they are saying is that every time you get hit it knocks it down a little bit further.

GE: Yeah that is what he is saying. Yeah. And you know the chances of it... and it might regenerate and it might look like a different group of people. It may be that it comes back with different population I don't know; because you are talking about what, twenty, twenty five years between... well since Carla... I don't know what happened to Galveston during

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Alicia because I had three pine trees on my roof up in Kingwood so I was a lot more worried about that. But you know those hit every twenty years or so. It reshapes the community.

EV: Yeah.

GE: One way or the other. New Orleans is still not, it was already in a little bit of trouble economically. You didn't have the oil businesses there that you had once.

EV: I've kind of... correct me if I'm wrong but I have a real problem in a lot of aspect with New Orleans and I'm only gauging that by what the people faced when they got here. I mean if their kids came in with the most part they had to be put in lower grades then they were because they couldn't read and write. A lot of doctors that I talked to said that they come and said, "You know I've never seen a doctor." So the whole social structure of New Orleans was pretty warped.

GE: That's right and the people that, New Orleans, the actual city of New Orleans is small. You have some areas that are very rich. You know the whole garden district and all that area, they all know up and down Saint Charles. But that is a small group. Like I said, those people can go and live in their houses in their... it's kind of more like a third world where you have a real... then the medium kind of people live out and that's not what really... because New Orleans really didn't get damaged from a hurricane they got damaged from the levy breaking. It was the down, the main part of the city. I think you are right. I think everybody who knows anything about New Orleans knows that New Orleans was a large ghetto. A lot of fun place to be and a lot of good tours, the main industry being the whole convention-tourist kind of world but the population, when you have that large

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population that is kind of helpless then it creates the kind of problems that you... because you know the hurricane that hit went over into Mississippi and wiped out cities and they don't seem to be the same level of this devastation still that you are looking at from the hurricane. Then you've got physically but geographically New Orleans is a bowl. The question really is: should it even, should it be, should we be pouring a lot of resources into a place like that in case it ever does get hit? It sits in a funny place on the Gulf. You know over my whole lifetime, sixty years my mother who is in her eighties will say this. She says, "You know hurricanes don't hit New Orleans head on. They either go kind of here to the left or they kind of go this way. They side swipe it a lot. But if a hurricane ever goes up the river, it's going to be under twenty feet of water. There's not going to be a question of whether this worked or that worked. It's going to be Atlantis, I mean you know?"

EV: Yeah.

GE: It's an interesting conversation.

EV: I think there's a lot of... a guess a lot of the city and county governments like you saying deciding, "Should we rebuild?" The problem is if you don't rebuild it then of course you are looking at racism and you don't because it's all black and you can't explain... I don't think there is a way that you can explain yourself away from that. To say, "No we're not going to do that." The only alternative that I saw that we have is to build it up like Galveston.

GE: Hello Ranga!

EV: My name is Ernesto Valdés how are you?

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GE: This is a professor from U of H, University of Houston. He does work, History of Public Works in Harris County. Ranga is from India.

EV: Are you really?

GE: And is here with my son. He is... he and my son both study at an _____ outside of Bombay and they study a discipline called _____.

EV: Hey, how are you doing?

GE: This is Joseph.

EV: Ernesto Valdés, how are you?

GE: Joseph, Mr. Valdés is from the University of Houston. I was explaining in my simple way that Ranga is actually here to begin formalizing classes and studies here. Joe goes back to work in India but Ranga is going to be here for however long he can manage.

EV: I have a friend of mine who is a novelist, a writer, he is writing in Ireland but he has a program that he goes to in India.

GE: That's kind of what...

EV: I don't know, I forget what he calls it.

GE: I guess different nationalities study different disciplines is that the case?

[Ranga]: Yes. Same roots but different.

GE: Different people.

[Ranga]: Like different denominations.

EV: Yeah. He had a... they had some, I don't know what he did. He goes down there I think he is kind of a literary Mother Theresa. He goes down there and helps these people, a lot of the folks in the community out there, how to... he instructs them on writing novels

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and poetry, he is just a teacher. He has a seminar and he comes back to Ireland and does his stuff. But he's got, he wrote, I researched a book on some stuff on The Battalion of Saint Patrick's. Have you all ever heard of that?

GE: No.

EV: When the Irish first came over here, I mean immigrants from everywhere first came over here back in the 1600s or something, they were... the only way they could get money or get any kind of money to keep going was to join the military. You know they would get some money and save up and all that. Then when they got out, did their three or four years of brutal military stuff back then they'd have some kind of money sitting back. I did this research paper on it and he somehow found out about it and we started talking and he made it into a play. Of the guy that actually did this. He got pretty good reviews in Dublin.

GE: That's funny.

EV: I'm waiting for the Pulitzer Prize money on that.

GE: Of course!

EV: He's a very interesting man, very interesting man. And he loves country and western music.

GE: He's multifaceted.

EV: I'll take it from there.

GE: Did you find everything you needed?

End of Interview.