

Oral History Interview Transcript

Course Title: Energy in World Civilizations

Institution: University of Chicago

Student Name: Leila Pulaski

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Printed below is the transcript of an oral history interview between Richard Pulaski and his granddaughter Leila Pulaski in Houston, Texas on March 4, 2022.

Richard: Are we recording? Oh, that's exciting

Leila: It's very exciting. It's very exciting

Richard: What can I do for you?

Leila: Hello, stranger. Okay. You are my grandfather

Richard: I am

Leila: Kind of exciting stuff. Um, so when Sir, were you born?

Richard: I was born May the third 1940. That's a long time ago

Leila: Yes

Richard: How about we start with going back to the 50s?

Leila: Going back to... go back to whatever you want. So you know that the point of this, of the assignment, is to talk about energy

Richard: Energy

Leila: Generally

Richard: Oh, energy

Leila: And you know, what have you seen change? How have you seen things change, et cetera. And especially because we live in Houston, you've seen a lot of things happen. So, I have other questions I can ask you that are specific. But is there somewhere that would you like to start?

Richard: Are we... we're just talking about energy here?

Leila: We're talking about your experience. It's all about you. It's whatever you've lived through

Richard: Ah. Well it should be! [Mumbles]

Leila: Okay, this other kid in my class was talking about his grandpa he interviewed who lived in, in the Soviet Union. And then he moved somewhere else, and talked about seeing that change. And another student talked about his grandfather... his grandfather is older than you. And he lived in a really small town and he had a coal furnace in his house

Richard: Coal furnace... Well, we had an icebox

Leila: I don't think I know what that is

Richard: It's same as a refrigerator. But we had an icebox in which people would bring ice and put it inside the box. And that's how you kept your stuff cool. That changed uh... well I know that

it changed before I was... probably sometime before I was born. I'm sure other people had real refrigerators. But originally a refrigerator was a refrigerator *maybe* if you had a refrigerator but if you wanted something to stay frozen or cold or whatever it is, you had an ice box. And they had people who delivered ice to your house, and then put it in your refrigerator or your icebox...

[inaudible] so you keep everything cool

Leila: Do you remember having one?

Richard: I can't say that I do even though I think my grandmother did have an icebox in her garage. Yes, in the garage that was behind her house. But I think she might have had an actual refrigerator to go with it. But we had... there was no air conditioning. There might have been air conditioning somewhere but we had a fan and an attic fan

Leila: Just a bunch of electric fans?

Richard: A big electric fan above the top of where you... if you slept in a room or you were in any room. They had, like, air conditioning ducts, but they weren't *like* air conditioning ducts. They were ducts because the fan would blow the air and you would get the air blown on you and that's what they used to have. An attic fan. It was in your attic. You know what an attic is?

Leila: I know what an attic is

Richard: Okay, it was an attic fan. So that's how we started off with an attic fan.

Leila: When did y'all get air conditioning? When you were living with your parents or was that once you already were on your own?

Richard: We still had an attic fan. We moved when I was about seven. So in about 1947 we bought a house. Big two story house and it had air conditioning. It was... that was something! We had a lot of friends after that! [Laughs] Come by to visit

Leila: Good for y'all. Very cool

Richard: But my grandfather [Harry Pulaski] was born in Chicago

Leila: Yes. Wait, that one's... is that Joseph [Pulaski]?

Richard: Harry is my grandfather. But his father [Joseph] might have been born in Chicago. I was once told just recently, actually. I thought Joseph was born in Poland. But they tell me he was born in Chicago and then he had a child which would be my grandfather. And he was born

in Chicago. And my grandfather [Harry Pulaski]¹ was born in Chicago. But he left Chicago with his little brother, The General, Louis Pulaski². And they moved to Fort Worth.

Leila: Why did they move to Fort Worth?

Richard: Because my grandfather [Harry] wanted to get his little brother [Louis] out of town before they threw him in prison!

Leila: Is that the real story??

Richard: I'm pretty sure it could have been! We, we like to kind of joke about it, but they said the mafia was very big in those days and my grandfather was afraid his brother was getting into trouble so they moved to Fort Worth.

Leila: So the one that moved from Poland was... was Joseph, right?

Richard: Who?

Leila: Who's the one that moved from Poland?

Richard: I thought it was Joseph. But I was told recently that he was born in Chicago, and that his father is the one that came in from, from overseas. Imagining that it was either his father or him-- this is the old Joseph, my great grandfather-- were born in Poland. I think it was.

Everybody seems to think it was Poland, so we're sticking with that. And they moved here. And then they, I mean, they moved to Chicago, then from Chicago to Fort Worth. And the only ones that moved to Fort Worth were my grandfather and his little brother. The two of them. So, they moved to... they moved to Fort Worth. And they got in the junkyard business.

Leila: Shut up! Really??

Richard: Yeah! They became junkyard dealers, they, they got a wheelbarrow. But a big giant one. A big one that two people could... could handle. Okay, and they would go down the street. And anytime they found anything that was metal or tires, old tires, cars, they'd pick them up, and they put them in this cart that they had... put it in their cart. And then they would take the cart, once it was full up, and they would go to a junkyard, and they would sell it to the junkyard and get a few dollars. And then they would go up and then they eventually got a bigger cart. And

¹ Richard Pulaski's father is Eddie Pulaski. Richard's grandfather is Harry Pulaski, his great uncle (Harry's brother) is Louis Pulaski, and his great-grandfather is Joseph Pulaski.

² Any mention of "The General" or "General" in this transcript refers to Louis Pulaski, Richard's great uncle. Louis was never a General in any army or military unit. He was often referred to as "The General" or "General" despite his lack of official title, though he is rumored to have often worn fake military garb and medals. The origin of the nickname is assumed to be from General Casimir Pulaski, the American Revolutionary War general. Louis Pulaski is of no relation to Casimir Pulaski.

then for some reason they moved to Houston. And that's where my father [Eddie] was born, was in Houston. And where my Aunt Reba was born

Leila: And did they keep doing this in Houston?

Richard: Well, it got to be a pretty big junkyard with them. They, they started off doing pretty well. In Houston, there was a lot of trash, a lot of junk. So they took a lot of junk. And so I ran into a banker, about 40 or 50 years ago. And he stopped to tell me about my grandfather. And he said that my grandfather and The General, came to his office. He was in the biggest building in downtown, it was two stories high. And he was the fella in the bank that would give you a loan. And they had made enough money that they had also bought a horse. And the horse would now pull the cart. So they didn't have to pull the cart anymore. And they would just fill it up with junk. So when they got to the bank, my grandfather said "We'd like to borrow some money." And then [the banker] said, he said, "Well, how much money would you like to borrow?" They say they want to borrow \$500. And he said, "Well, you know, to borrow money, you need to put up collateral. Do you have any collateral?" And they said, "Yes, we do." And he said, "What is it?" and they said, "We have a horse and a cart." So the banker said, "Really? Could I see them?" So they said, "Yes, they're downstairs." They were on the second floor and the horse was tied up downstairs. And you could see it out of this fella's window. So he said he looked out the window, and he said he saw a horse that was so swayback that he thought his stomach was hitting the ground-- you know what swayback is?

Leila: Yeah where they go like that [Makes a parabolic sweeping motion to illustrate the sagging spine of a swayback horse]

Richard: And he said he looked at my grandfather and he said, "If you've got the guts to ask me to loan you \$500 on *that* horse and *that* cart, I'll give it to you." And he gave him his first loan ever. And he gave him \$500

Leila: So when was... you met this guy 50 years ago, but when did he give him a loan?

Richard: When did he give him a loan? Oh, uh, before I was born! Maybe the 1940s? Maybe the 30s. I was born in 40. So it would be before I was born. I was born in 40

Leila: Well 1940 is some time ago, but it's really not that long ago. Were there that many people walking around downtown Houston with horses?

Richard: Oh, there were a lot of people probably in downtown Houston with horses. And cars weren't a big... I mean... they were there, but a lot of people had horses. And you know, this is Texas girl!

Leila: Did people have horses walking around when you were a child?

Richard: I wasn't there at 1940, I can't remember. [Laughs] No, but 1950s probably everybody did have like a Model T. I don't remember seeing people, too many people, in the street with anything with a horse in it. Yeah, by then things had gotten pretty good. But uh, [Harry and Louis] didn't have a car then. So they drove their horse. They might have even owned a car, I don't know. But they brought the horse with them downtown for the wagon

Leila: And then what becomes of the company post-loan?

Richard: Post-loan? Well, it did pretty well... it... it became the largest junkyard southwest of the Mississippi

Leila: That's pretty impressive

Richard: Which means they were selling a *lot* of junk! By then, they had big trucks. And they had a lot of good friends that they dealt with. And a couple of 'em were the Mitchell boys that'd be George Mitchell and his brother Johnny³. And they decided to get out of the junkyard business. And they decided to get into the oil business.

Leila: So this is Mitchell boys or the Mitchell boys and your grandfather?

Richard: My grandfather and his brother got into the oil business because they were friends with the Mitchells and the Mitchells were always talking to them and trying to get them to invest with them. And they were all good friends. So they got into the oil business. Seemed like it was a way to make a lot of money. So they sold the junkyard business to my father. And he became the junkie, I mean, the junkyard guy. And then [Eddie] decided one day that, that, you know, that oil business sounds good to me too! So he called my grandfather and told him he was going to sell the company and he was going to get in the oil business. My grandfather said something like, "No, you're not!" I don't know exactly what he said. But, but they did sell Pulaski Iron and Metal Company. Because somebody bought it, they wanted the name, because they were also in the

³ George and Johnny Mitchell were two brothers that dominated much of the Texas oil and gas industry in the 20th century. George Mitchell is widely credited as the father of natural gas shale fracking, as he was the first person to utilize hydraulic fracking at one of his fields in Texas. The Economist asserts that "few businesspeople have done as much to change the world as George Mitchell." See: "The father of fracking." *The Economist*, August 3, 2013, <https://www.economist.com/business/2013/08/03/the-father-of-fracking>.

junkyard business. But we were the biggest so they wanted to take the name from Pulaski Iron and Metal.

Leila: So Pulaski Iron and Metal wasn't making iron and metal, Pulaski Iron and Metal was the junkyard?

Richard: That's a junkyard, that's what it is. It picks up iron and metal. And in a lot of cases they do other things than just do that. [Mumbles] But really the junkyard business was just get all the junk you can. People got stuff, they just want to get rid of it. They bring it to you, you pay em so much a ton, a pound, or whatever it is. They have little scales there, you drive your car onto the scale, you weigh it. You get out of the car, you weigh it again, then you take that weight, you figure out how much it is per ton, or pound or whatever it is. And that's how you got paid. From companies that want to get rid of it. People that wanted to get rid of it. Anybody that wanted to get rid of it.

Leila: What kind of companies?

Richard: I...I don't know. No. I worked there when I was young, but I mean I did... all I did was take nails out of old pieces of wood. And we'd use the... melt the nails down because that gave us more metal. Yeah. Okay, so that's, that's the oil and gas business. I mean, that business.

Leila: When did you work there?

Richard: When I was about 10. I don't even know if it was... I don't even know if I was 10 then... I can't remember how old I was. Well not so shortly thereafter, my father just takes it over, then he makes really good money out of it. And then he sells it to friends of ours that were in the business that wanted the name so they sell him that and then, and then he got in the oil business. And my grandfather wasn't real happy with it. I remember listening in on a phone call once. [Laughs] But my dad did things a little different than they were normally doing. Oil business works like this: You call all your friends that have money and you ask them if they want to invest in your oil business.⁴ You tell them you're gonna go out, you're gonna drill a well and you're gonna make a lot of money with oil. And in those days, it didn't take a lot of money to drill an oil well, but it was still a lot of money for those days. You know it coulda cost \$50,000 to \$100,000 to drill one well. Didn't mean there was going to be oil when you got down through

⁴ George and Johnny Mitchell regularly invested with Harry and Louis Pulaski's oil ventures, and the two sets of brothers were good friends and colleagues who often exchanged money. George Mitchell actually bought into his first oil company with a 9,000 dollar loan that Louis Pulaski and another friend, Morris Rauch, endorsed for him at Houston's Commerce Bank. See: Kutchin, Joseph W. 2001. *How Mitchell Energy & Development Corp. Got Its Start and How It Grew: An Oral History and Narrative Overview*. Irvine, California: Universal Publishers. 377-378.

there. So it was hard for a person to do it, so you would get all your friends to do it. And we invested with the Mitchells, they invested with us, we invested with a lot of other people here in Houston-- the Sakowitz people and the Battlesteins people and, and a whole bunch of different people invested with us⁵. And I'm talking about my father now, because my father handled his business a little different than everybody else's, which really was a wonderful thing. But it wasn't so good for the other people. In the old oil business, you'd raise all the money. You would keep part of the profits. Yeah. And you would get whatever your percentage was that you all agree with, that you would take and they took the other, and you drill the wells...you do everything else. And then if the well was good, everybody would split. It would split, everybody would split it according to the amount of money they put in, depending upon it.

Leila: So that's what your grandpa was doing?

Richard: Yeah, everybody, everybody was doing that. We did that too. But my father did it a little bit different. This is why my grandpa got mad at him. He bought in with our company, the company, the MPS Production Company bought their share. Nobody else ever bought their share, it was given to em for free.

Leila: What do you mean he bought his share?

Richard: Whatever it cost, MPS kept a certain percentage of whatever it was. And when he kept that percentage they would pay as the other individuals paid to get in. I don't know if they paid as much or whatever they did. But they became like an investor, in with the investment. And if the investment lost money, they lost money. Why did he do that? I don't know. He thought it was the right thing to do, I guess. I don't know why he did it

Leila: So what is MPS? That was the oil company?

Richard: Meyers Pulaski and Sud. That's my cousins, the Meyers'. My father was the Pulaski and a fellow by the name of Bob Sud, who married my cousin became the other one. They were,

⁵ The Sakowitz and Battlestein families are Houston locals who owned department stores in and around the Houston area. They are two of the many Jewish families, including the Pulaskis, that were heavily involved in the financing of the Texas oil and gas industry in the mid 20th century. Though this legacy is virtually unknown, they contributed massively to the success of many of Texas' largest wildcatters, namely the Mitchells. Johnny Mitchell, George Mitchell's business partner and brother, was able to finance the Mitchell oil projects in large part because of the so-called "Big Nine" which he gathered in the early 1950s. The "Big Nine" were a group of Jewish businessmen from Houston and Galveston-- namely "Abe and Bernard Weingarten, who owned supermarkets; Abe Lack, who was in the auto parts business; Jake Oshman of the sporting goods retailers; Irving Alexander, who had interests in real estate and supermarkets; Will Zinne, a Galveston-based lawyer." Eddie Pulaski eventually married into the Lack family, and members of each of these families that Leila and Richard know refer to each other as cousins, though they are not believed to be blood-related. See: Kutchin, *Mitchell Energy & Development Corp*, 15-16.

one of them was an accountant and the other one was selling clothes. My father said, "Look, we can make a lot of money at this. Come on in with me. And I'll take care of em. We'll get it all done." And they did. And I think they owned it equally. And they went in there and they did it. And then my father would buy into the well, yeah, so he would usually have a little more. And it worked out pretty well. We hired a guy that was really fantastic. He was a... when you go to drill these wells. It used to be-- just go drill! "I think it's over there." And it was! It was everywhere! I mean, you could go stick your finger in the ground here in Houston at one time and oil would come up

Leila: Were y'all drilling in Houston or West Texas or?

Richard: Everywhere. Everywhere. Any place that was hot. You had people that'd call up and say "there's oil down there." Okay! They didn't care if it was down there or not, they went down there and did it. No, we did some in Houston. We did some in Beaumont. I think we did some maybe down in the valley. Yeah, we did do some in the valley. So they were wherever, wherever oil looked like it was plentiful. And eventually, now, the oil people got together and they came up with maps, oil maps. And they tested all the ground all over Texas to find out where was the possibility of oil. And you belong to this organization and you pay em money and you could get the maps, you can get the oil maps. We had a fella who was our head engineer for us. And he was fantastic. The average that would be for anybody to hit a well... a well that was full of oil? That made money? Hitting a well that has oil in it can also be a disaster. Because it costs like... to drill a well, maybe 30 to 50 thousand. Okay. It took to *complete* that well, another 50 to 100,000 or maybe 150,000, because that's when you have to start putting pipe down and you have to be... pulling, getting the oil out and all that so it's not... It's bad that you lose money when you drill a well but it's better than hitting a well that works for like two months and then goes out... it goes dry. Because at that time you spent a lot of money. So they went out and they had this, this guy... he... he was just amazing. The normal for a person to strike oil by drilling an oil well was one out of 16. That's what it used to be when they were first getting in the oil business. We hit one out of two

Leila: Seriously! Wow!

Richard: So we became pretty well known. A lot of people invested with us, with MPS. Yeah, with MPS Production. Yeah

Leila: So this is... this is during the 60s?

Richard: This was um... yeah, the late 50s. 50s and 60s.

Leila: Did you go work for your dad there too?

Richard: Actually I worked there, but not for him because he died before that. But they, they invited me up there to come work for there. And I worked for my Uncle Louis, The General. The General took over MPS, the company that he didn't care for! They took over MPS, that he didn't like, because, well, to be in the oil business in those days you had to be able to raise money, get money. Yeah. And it wasn't just raising money. You had to have money so you could do other things, too. So... and my father was pretty wealthy at that time. He wasn't, we weren't really gigantically wealthy rich, but he had a really good group at the bank that he dealt with that would give him just about anything he wanted. My uncle was... was... by then my uncle and my grandfather were... they were rich. They were really rich. And, but when my father died, then MPS had no one to rely on to go to the bank to get the money. Yeah. So The General came in and took it over. Okay. So he took it over, my grandfather had died by them, too. So Uncle Louis came in. And he ran MPS for a while. And then, and then they brought in my cousin. And he became the head guy at MPS. And then eventually they sold MPS Production Company.

Leila: And how long were you working there?

Richard: How long was I working there? Oh, it was... it was in summer. I was going to school.⁶ I'd go there and work there in the summer. I worked for about a month or so. And I was either in high school or in college. Yeah. I could have been in college, but I would think it was in... when I was in high school.

Leila: And they eventually sold it

Richard: My cousin sold, he sold MPS Production Company. Yeah, yeah. That was years after that. Let's see. When did he sell that? It would be probably before the 90s... it might have been in the 90s... it might have been in 1990. That company existed for a long time. But remember it started off, it wasn't very big. And that was, it took 10 years before it became really something and then another 10 or 20 years after that so now you're in 70s 80s 90s. So somewhere around there

Leila: That's, that's really cool

Richard: Yeah. Good for everybody. Everybody seemed to like it. Yeah. Well, I had a guy once come into our office while I was there. And we didn't have anybody up front for some reason

⁶ Richard attended the University of Houston.

that day, and I heard him come in. So I walked up to the front door and he was there and I thought he was a sailor. He was in the sailors outfit, you know, like, like he was a, you know, sailor! I thought maybe he was working for the government or something. I don't know what he was. Anyway, he said he came to see General Louis Pulaski and I said, "Okay, just a minute." And I went into the back and I told my uncle Louis there's a, there's a sailor outside that said he... somebody told him to come see you. So he said, "Send him back." So I sent him back and I went back to work. Then about five or 10 minutes later, The General came into the room I was in and he said, "I want you to meet somebody. Come on back here." So I came back with him. He said, "I want you...I want you to meet this man. His name is John Connally. And Lyndon Johnson sent him over here for me to talk to him. And he wants to run for governor of the state of Texas. And he said that he was told, Connally said that he was told that if Louis Pulaski will support him, he'll be the next Governor of the state of Texas." So he said, "I'm supporting him. So I guess he's the next Governor of Texas."

Leila: Was he?

Richard: Yes, he was. Yeah.⁷ Yeah. And he had a great memory because I didn't see him after that for at least, I don't know how many years, 10 years? I don't know. I was eating downtown. And I went downtown to a bank building. They had a cafeteria down there, and I went there. And he was there with about three or four other people. And I walked in and I saw him and I walked in to go over and get something to eat and, and he got up and he walked over to me, he said, "Richard!" And I said, "Yes." He said, "I'm John Connally." I said, "I know who you are. I don't know how you know who I am." But I'd only seen him that one time. He knew who I was. And he asked me to stop and have lunch with him. Yeah, he was really nice. He was a really nice guy. I said, "I can't right now cuz I gotta leave in a minute. I just came to get somethin' quick, but I thank you for the offer." He was a nice guy, it was fun

Leila: God, he must have met a million people. That's very impressive

⁷ John Connally served as the 38th governor of Texas. After starting his political career in the late 1930s as Lyndon B. Johnson's legislative assistant, he served in the United States Naval Reserve during the second World War. The outfit Richard describes is presumably a naval uniform, worn in this case to demonstrate his respect toward Louis Pulaski, a man who made people call him The General even though he held no title whatsoever. During the 1950s and 1960s Connally managed five of LBJ's campaigns before being elected governor of Texas in 1962. He occupied the role until 1969 and later became Nixon's Secretary of the Treasury. See: The Texas Politics Project. 2003. "John Connally." Accessed March 16, 2022. <https://texaspolitics.utexas.edu/archive/html/exec/governors/25.html>.

Richard: I was impressed. *I'm* not impressive, but I was impressed by the fact that he would remember who I was. Yeah, cause you know, he's got to meet a lot of people. And I met him only that one time. Anyway, that's how we got oil and gas business

Leila: That's how you got oil and gas business

Richard: And the oil and gas business was great. And right now it looks like it's gonna be great again, yeah, if they will just... I mean, they don't have to leave it forever, but they need to get back to drilling. They need to get back to some of these pipelines that they've taken out and put them back in

Leila: What do you mean?

Richard: Well, right now with the problem they're having with Russia. We need more pipelines to... when you drill oil, the oil comes out, and it goes into a pipeline and the pipeline directs it to somebody who's going to be able to refine it. So they have these huge pipelines that go from Houston to Canada, you know, and they go from Houston to New York and Houston to wherever they're going to go. And they need to get those pipelines back open, they shut a lot of them down. They stopped working on some that were supposed to be big pipelines they should have finished. I realized there is a climate problem and something needs to be done. But in the short term, they should do something about this. It wasn't too many years ago that they were talking about the one in Canada that they were going to put through and they didn't. And a few other ones. So there's... I don't know. I don't know. I didn't I didn't really keep up with it

Leila: Do you remember them building the pipelines? The ones that were finished?

Richard: Oh, yeah. Well, a lot of our friends are in the pipeline business. So yeah. So they, you know, they, they supply the pipe for the people that build the pipelines. That's Uncle Bo⁸

Leila: No, it's not

Richard: Yeah

Leila: Bo Rubenstein??

Richard: Yeah

⁸ Uncle Bo, otherwise known as Bo Rubenstein, is one of Leila's uncles. She is unsure if they are related by blood, marriage, or simply by friendly ties. Up until hearing this, Leila believed that Bo ran an exotic ranch called FreBo for a living. The ranch, which is located along the central highway between Houston and Austin, houses zebras, giraffes, and other uncommon ranch residents and is apparently a passion project. For this passion project, Bo commissioned and installed an 8 foot tall bronze statue of himself with his dog in 2012. See: Tom White Studios, Inc. n.d. "Monumental 8-ft. "Bo's Ranch" placed off Texas Hwy. 71." Accessed March 16, 2022.

<https://tomwhitestudio.com/Bo-Rubenstein-of-Texas-Pipe-monumental-figurative-portrait-bronze-by-Tom-White-sculptor.html>.

Leila: Is in the pipeline business??

Richard: Well he was. I think he's retired. Wait, no. He's still in the business. Yeah. He owned a company called Texas Pipe and Supply. [Inaudible] I don't know. And they still, they still sell a lot of pipe. I don't know to whom. I guess, I guess you have to keep up with it. You know, it could corrode. Yeah. And then Mansell, your friend, Uncle Mansell,⁹ he cement lines it. He owns a company called Cement Lining Company. And what they do is they cement line pipe, so that it won't corrode so quick

Leila: So you just all are in the same business?

Richard: Well, we were all friends. We all were in like, the same business. And we were all friends. And it was... it was fun!

Leila: So Louis is in charge during the late 50s and 60s. What happens in like, 70s with the oil shocks and worries around oil?

Richard: Well Louis died and my grandfather died. And really, and then Bob Sud took over. Yeah. And, and he ran it. And then his son took over. And he ran it... And [hesitates] I, I can't remember when they sold it...

Leila: I don't mean necessarily with the company. But in the 60s, oil business is all good and fun

Richard: Yeah, it was great

Leila: The family is doing well. And then I'm asking less about the company, but just for you. By early, mid 70s, you're married and you have kids. So as a... as a grown person that was driving around in a car and living in Texas, in the middle of like, all the weird oil stuff happening in the 70s, what was that like?

Richard: Well it was... [mumbles]

Leila: Did you notice anything different?

Richard: No! Well why would you notice? Well, you might drive in, you know, you can get in a road in Texas, and go straight for like 100 miles, you know, and so it's not that you noticed it, but you could... there were a lot of... you would have seen the pumbers that would pump... you know the... I don't know if you've seen em in the street before on property, and they still have them around somewhere. But you know, when they got through, when you finish the well, then you need something to pump the oil out of the well down there into that. So those things you would notice once in a while. There would be some around there. But ah no, I don't think people

⁹ "Uncle Mansel" is Mansel Rubenstein, the owner of Cement Lining Company Incorporated.

noticed it much. Not until you get to like West Texas, where that's all there was sticking up out of the ground. And when you get the gas out of oil out of the ground, those tanks that they put it in... those barrels that they put it in, they're now 100 and something dollars a barrel. They used to be \$3 a barrel. So you can see the gas was a lot cheaper then. So it used to be that gas was like, when we were selling it, \$3 to three and a quarter a barrel. That's all we got. Yeah. And that was good. And that, and that made you a fortune! So of course, things are a little more expensive with everything today. And it, I don't know... whatever you... I'm just trying to think of... what it could have... the difference that it made to us wasn't too much difference for anybody else.

Because gas was so cheap in those days, everything else was cheap in those days! You can't just say, "Well, it was the oil business." It was... everything was cheap. In those days. My grandfather bought a brand new Cadillac every year for, I think it was 500 hundred dollars. Every year he would take his car, trade it in, and give them \$500. He had a deal with em. Every year, whatever it was, took his Cadillac in, got a brand new Cadillac, gave em \$500. And he was off again. And every year he'd bring it back and do it again. So there's not too many Cadillacs for sale for \$500 a year anymore. No

Leila: Not really. Well, I'm just curious about gas prices, because I know in my class we've talked about some big historical things that have happened that have affected energy policy or price. Like when there was the whole Israel war in the Middle East in the 70s. And the idea we talked about was, oh, gas got dramatically more expensive. And lots of people in the... in America were freaking out about, oh, my God, are we gonna run out of oil? But you seem to have not... That maybe wasn't the case here...

Richard: They definitely didn't run out of oil! [Sighs] Fracking, fracking, which they do, probably is not really a great idea. But it sure will get you a lot of oil, I guess. Because it's... I think it's a lot less expensive to do. But when you get through, what you're left with is usually a problem. But you got to find something to do... That's, that's the problem with all sorts of things. When you start drilling in the earth, and you leave holes when you leave, in fracking, you know, they have... if you walk on the, walk on the property after somebody was fracking, you're liable to fall through the ground and go who knows where! And they started that recently, I say recently, but remember, I'm 81. Yeah

Leila: Yeah

Richard: I don't know. I don't know when they stopped because I... we got out of the oil business. And I didn't have much to do with it. I didn't have much to do with it when we were in it. [Mumbles] And that's how... I invented... the...

Leila: [Laughs] What did you invent?

Richard: I invented nothing [Laughs]

Leila: [Speaking as Richard] I started the practice of fracking. It was all me!

Richard: Yeah... I don't want to be the one to say that actually [Laughs]¹⁰

Leila: Yeah. That's not that's not an invention you want to your name

Richard: Well you know, the energy, the gas business, oil and gas, has been great for Houston. Yeah, great for Texas. Great for everybody. Great for the world. But we recognize it because we were in it. So while you're in it, you can... you realize how fantastic it is. Yeah. And everything is fine. Until you run out of it. Yeah. And then it's not good for *anybody*.

Leila: With things like um, Enron and the oil spills off of Galveston, I'm just curious about your take on those things. Like the crazy Enron people that were doing whatever they did with money and Deepwater Horizon and all these oil spills-- they are all very physically close to you, but you weren't in the business at the time

Richard: No. But you know, they didn't... they didn't do what they did intentionally. The bad things that are happening like you, how you're talking about Horizon and all that stuff. They

¹⁰ Louis Pulaski (Richard's great uncle) unknowingly led George Mitchell, the inventor of fracking, to his first oil fortune as well as to the field that inspired him to start fracking. Mitchell originally worked as a geology and engineering consultant for Texas independents and had trouble accumulating much money in the position. He had a group of friends that would pay him about \$50 a day, but he wanted to do some speculating of his own. One day in 1952, Louis' bookie (who took his horse racing bets) in Chicago let him know that he had a tip on a field in central Texas. At the time, Louis was managing the Pulaski Iron and Metal junkyard and decided to pass the tip along to his friend, George Mitchell. Mitchell was aware of the field, often called the Wildcatter's Graveyard, and told Pulaski that it wasn't worth looking into. Pulaski was persistent, arguing that he had a good feeling and felt that George ought to see it through. Though he was busy and largely uninterested, George decided to look into the field out of deference and obligation to his long-term friend-- a friend that he allegedly owed quite a bit of money to. Upon exploring the field, Mitchell was impressed. His first well at the field was incredibly successful, as were the next 9 upon the same field. He had discovered a stratigraphic trap, a giant underground reservoir of natural gas. Within 90 days, he bought 300,000 more acres around the area. As recently as 2000, this field near Fort Worth accounted for 50% of Mitchell Energy and Development's gas sales. This was the find that made Mitchell his first fortune, and the Barnett Shale that made up the field is what inspired him to develop hydraulic fracking, a practice which now drives United States' oil and gas production. Richard was unaware of this information when he stated that he wouldn't want the invention of fracking accredited to him. See: Hinton, Diana Davids. 2012. "The Seventeen-Year Overnight Wonder: George Mitchell and Unlocking the Barnett Shale." *Journal of American History*, Volume 99, Issue 1: 229-235, <https://academic.oup.com/jah/article/99/1/229/854861>. Also see: Kutchin, *Mitchell Energy & Development Corp*, 17-20. Also see: Zuckerman, Gregory. 2013. *The Frackers: The Outrageous Inside Story of the New Billionaire Wildcatters*. New York: Penguin Publishing Group. 26-27.

certainly didn't want to blow up the tank, blow up the rig. But it's... was big money. So when you're talking about the kind of money that these people had, you know, they thought they could do anything they wanted to. And they... most of them could. And most, but most of the people were pretty good at it. And we know a lot of people in the oil business. They were really nice. George was great, and Johnny... I mean, George Mitchell, George Mitchell, and Johnny, they were terrific. Johnny. Johnny was younger, and a really good friend of my father. They once... my father once said, "Look, Johnny, I'm getting ready to do this deal. And I want you to come in on it with us." And [Johnny] said, "Uh, really? I don't want to do it right now. I haven't got the money for it right now. But let's do it later, we'll do something". He said "Okay." And then the next week [Eddie] came by [Johnny] and said, "By the way, here's your interest, I bought it for you." So he didn't want him to be out. So he gave it to him for free. And, and these guys were all really good friends. And they all had a lot of money. So we... there were probably a lot of things that were terrible going on, but we didn't quite notice them. Yeah. But they were... it's... well it's a business and these people just... this business just happened to make a lot of money.

Leila: And I know that when... when you, your family, and your family friends were in it, it was a lot of money. And even now it's... I mean, it's like billions and billions of dollars

Richard: Well, then the kind of money you had seemed like billions of dollars, you know, that was... the country was doing well. Everybody else was doing well and they were making money but oil was just... oil was king. I mean, I'm not saying it still isn't. It probably still is. But that was a lot of money

Leila: So why did you want to do real estate and not go into oil?¹¹

Richard: Well, oil business cost a lot of money to get into. Of course, I didn't have to worry about that because I was in it. But my father had died when I was 16. So I didn't have the kind of money to get into the oil business. But I had enough money to get in the real estate business. So I built my first shopping center when I was 19

Leila: Really?

Richard: Yeah. And then I built a couple other ones, and they weren't real big. I mean, these were like a little 711 strip with a Dunkin Donut in it and things like that. And it seemed like an easy thing to do. And I had a few friends that would come in with me and they put up the money

¹¹ At 81 years old, Richard Pulaski still works in commercial real estate and has done so for more than 60 years.

and I put up some of it, but they put up most of it and everything worked great. And then... it too can have its problems. But today, it's doing great. We're still eating. So...

Leila: We're still eating [Laughs] This is true

Richard: And I have this nice desk. [Knocks on large circular desk] That's the best thing I got out of the construction business. Was this desk. It is six feet round. From one end to the other. It has four file cabinets in it. One desk drawer. [Counts file cabinets] But this is just to have close to me. So I don't have to get up so much

Leila: I showed, I showed my roommates for next year the photo that we found when we were at your house with you in Memorial Park and they love it. They love it. Like they want to blow it up, frame it, and put it on the wall¹²

Richard: Of course! I mean, look!

Leila: Oh, it's such a good photo. I showed it to my history professor. And I was like, "Look, cowboys!"

Richard: Well, we were cowboys!

Leila: Would you... Do you really think you were cowboys? [Laughs]

Richard: No. [Laughs] I mean, we were. We had a ranch

Leila: What?

Richard: You don't know we used to have a ranch?

Leila: How would I know this? When did you have a ranch?

Richard: It was the um... R&R Ranch. No, this was... this was some ranch. This was the R&R ranch! One of the times we went to drill an oil well, there was a piece of property. It was about 40 acres, bout 45 acres. So my father bought it. And we would... they would want to drill on it. I'm pretty sure it did not hit any oil. But we bought for ourselves personally the front five acres. And that's what we were on. And in the back 40 acres that was for the oil but I don't think anything happened to that. So we built a ranch there... I actually don't think we built it. I think we bought it. I forgot who [inaudible]... might have built it. But we built... we built the barbecue pit there. We built the barbecue pit twice the size of this desk out there. This fella came out, he built it for my father. And my father came out to take a look at it. My father looked at it and he said, "What is this?" [Inaudible] It's a barbecue pit. [Eddie] says "It's not a barbecue pit. I want a

¹² The photo referenced here is an image of Richard wearing cowboy boots and a cowboy hat, taking a nap on a picnic table in Memorial Park, Houston in front of a horse.

barbecue pit!" So the guy's... he just finished. I mean he worked really hard building this thing. So he tore it down. And he built a barbecue pit that was probably 10 feet long and I forgot how wide it was, and that thing would serve... we've had 100 people out there at a time to come out for dinner and lunch and things like that. So

Leila: Where was this?

Richard: In a little place called Clodine, Texas right down the road from here. It's a great place. I've looked for it since then. It's called the R&R Ranch. That's Ruth and Reba¹³. And, and all of my friends... all my rowdy friends used to come out to the ranch. They all had a good time. I had a horse, and his name was Mac. He was 18 hands. I think. Maybe 16- 18 hands. That... that's how you measure the height of a horse. He was big. He was big. Huge, huge

Leila: Mac... was Mac at the ranch?

Richard: Mac was at the ranch. Yeah. We had five horses and I'd ride there all the time. I would get to the ranch and I'd ride around the ranch. You're on five acres

Leila: That's nice

Richard: You'da loved it. I wanna buy it back. But I don't think I could afford to buy it back today. It's gotten everything out there. It's so expensive now

Leila: Yeah. Emma,¹⁴ for her birthday, she and a couple of her friends... we drove down to Round Top¹⁵. And because they have that little hotel there with the pool. It's very cute. Um, we were staying there just for like, a night or something for her birthday. And we were eating dinner. Someone was talking about how the property out there is just crazy. Crazy. So the people that live there hate the people that built this hotel. Among the other people that are building like new, trendy things in Round Top because it was something insane...

Richard: Which hotel did you stay in in Round Top?

Leila: Lulu? The one built by the Armando's people¹⁶

Richard: Uh huh. Yeah, I've been there. It's a nice hotel... if you like to do nothing

Leila: Well, we were only there for a day, so we weren't trying to do much. [Laughs] But it was something crazy. Like the plots of land there are in the millions

Richard: Well. People from Texas seem to like to own a lot of land!

¹³ Ruth Lack (later Ruth Pulaski) was Richard's mother and Eddie's wife. Reba Pulaski was Eddie's sister.

¹⁴ Emma Pulaski is Leila Pulaski's older sister and one of Richard's five grandchildren.

¹⁵ Round Top, Texas is a small town southwest of Houston and approximately halfway between Houston and Austin.

¹⁶ Hotel Lulu is a boutique hotel that opened in Round Top, Texas in 2021. It is managed by the same family that owns an upscale Mexican restaurant in central Houston called Armandos.

Leila: Yes, this is true. And now everyone wants to move to Texas. Because we don't have any state income tax [Sing-songy]

Richard: There are few states that don't. Yeah. What else?

Leila: What else? I don't know-- you've given me so much!

Richard: I'm pretty sure that's it for me?

Leila: Well thank you very much for talking with me, Dickie