

Notes from Recorded Interview with Ronnie Parker
and his mother, Bettye Pruitt Parker, on September 2, 2011
Interview by and notes prepared by Wheelice Wilson, Jr.,
September 4, 2011

Details of the Interview:

This interview was recorded on September 2, 2011, at Wildcat Creek Quail Hunting Lodge, 691 County Road 1242, Detroit, TX 75436, owned by Ron Parker. On the following day, he was hosting a reunion for Coppell High School, classes of 1956 through 1975. In the background of the recording can be heard diners in the lodge.

Present at the interview were Ronnie, his mother, Bettye Pruitt Parker, and his uncle, David "Junior" Pruitt.

Family Background:

Ronnie is the oldest of two sons born to Herbert and Bettye Parker. He was born in Farmers Branch, TX, on November 8, 1952. His family moved back to Coppell when he was five years old, and he lived in Coppell until about 1968 when his family moved to Lake Lewisville. But he commuted to Coppell High School with his brother Randy until Ronnie graduated in 1971. (Randy finished high school in Lewisville.)*

Ronnie's mother is Bettye Pruitt Parker. Her parents were Ruby Thweatt and Dave Parker. She was born June 30, 1931. She married Herbert Parker on August 2, 1952. Herbert was the son of Clyde and Goldie Parker. Bettye and Herbert had two sons: Ronnie and Randy Clyde.*

Bettye's grandmother Mollie was related to the Kirklands and Stringfellows, including Ben Stringfellow, who was a barber in Carrollton.*

Bettye had two sisters. One was Lucille Pruitt who married Pete Salmon. For many years they lived in Coppell about four houses from the Church of Christ. (Wilson's note: This was probably when the Church of Christ building was located on S. S. Coppell Road, and she probably means that they lived south of the church.) They had one son, Eugen, who passed away on the operating table at the age of 53. Their daughter, Darline, married Bob Foshee, and they moved to Austin.*

Bettye's other sister was Thelma Bernice Pruitt, and she married Cliff Whitman. They lived in the north Dallas area.

Bettye's brother, Ronnie's uncle, David "Junior" Pruitt was born in Collin County on March 31,* 1928, on a "cotton sack." He currently lives with Bettye in Winnsboro.*

Family Association with Coppell:

Bettye Pruitt Parker's grandparents on her father's side were Henry Calvin and Molly Bennett Pruitt, and their house was on State Road, about half way between present Wagon Wheel Ranch and present Sandy Lake Road (then Thweatt Road), on the west side of State Road.

Their son was Dave Pruitt, who married Ruby Thweatt. They lived at the northwest corner of Denton Tap and Bethel School Roads.

Bettye's mother's parents were Walter and Pliney Belle Thweatt.*

Bettye's mother attended Bethel School and then went to Grapevine for high school.* Her husband Herbert and his sister Benita attended high school in Carrollton.* When Bettye moved back to Coppell, she finished high school in Carrollton, also.*

Bettye Pruitt had moved away from Coppell but her family moved back in 1947, and she graduated from Carrollton High School in 1948. She left Coppell when she and Herbert married in 1951. They returned in 1957. When Ronnie was a sophomore, they moved to Highland Village to live on Grapevine Lake.

Billy James Harwell set up a blind date, and that's how Bettye met Herbert Parker, even though Herbert was in the same class as Bettye's sister and lived next door to her sister Lucille.*

When Ronnie's family moved back:

Ronnie's parents, Herbert and Bettye Parker, started building a new home on the south side of Oak Grove Road in Coppell in 1957. For three months, until the new house was finished, they rented an old house on the south side of Bethel Road, two houses away from the creek, just west of Denton Tap Road. The house was so old, the wind would blow in, and the family nailed up every extra quilt they had to keep the wind from blowing in. The wind was so bad, it blew in from the north and blew out a window on the south side of the house. Ronnie's bedroom was the "breeze-way," and he would get so cold at night, he would go to sleep with his parents.

Herbert on the School Board:

On the Sunday after the Parkers had moved into the rental house, Salty Parrish came to Herbert and told him that Herbert had been elected to the Coppell School Board. Herbert said that he had not run. Salty said, "Well, you didn't run fast enough because you got elected." (Wilson's note: He was a write-in candidate.)

Selling the new house on Oak Grove Road:

The story is true about how the Parkers unexpectedly sold their house on Oak Grove Road in Coppell. One day, Mr. Arthur (Wilson's note: This was the grandfather of my brother-in-law, Mike Arthur, with whom Mike and his brother Yancey lived.) knocked on the Parker door and asked Bettye how much they wanted for the house. The Parkers did not intend to sell, so she tried to quote a price that was very high. She had no idea what the house was worth, but she remembered that they had taken out a \$10,000 note to build the house. So she said they would take \$18,000 for it. Mr. Arthur, said, "Who should I make the check to?" So they sold the house and the Parkers moved to Highland Village, on the lake.

The brick house and frame house at the corner of Denton Tap Road and Bethel School Road:

Ruby Thweatt lived in the original brick house showing in an antique photo owned by the Coppell Historical Society, with a girl wearing a bow in her hair standing in front. (This girl was Ruby Thweatt Pruitt.) Rumor has it that this was the first brick house in Dallas County and that the bricks were made from mud taken from the creek behind the house. Bettye says she always thought the brick house was built by Walter Thweatt.* The house was torn down when Ruby was about 16 years old.*

Walter Thweatt, Bettye's grandfather, tore down this brick house in 1912 and, in its place, built a white frame house that was supposed to be two stories. He admired the two-story house one mile west of downtown Coppell (later owned by C.L. Plumlee, Jr., and moved to downtown when it burned in route) and that's why he wanted to build a new two-story house. Walter was a tall man and he instructed the builder to make the first floor ceiling higher. But this resulted in the top floor being less than full size, so the house was actually one and a half stories tall. When the brick house was torn down, until the new house was completed, they lived in a small "milk house" behind. Walter was color-blind, and he had the entire interior of the house painted black.

(Wilson's note: This house had deteriorated badly by about the early 1960s, and it was occupied by a large, poor family named Underwood. One night, a ferocious fire destroyed the house.)

Ruby Road:

Ruby Road was named for Ruby Belle Thweatt Pruitt. She was 15 years old when the old photo of her with a bow in her hair in front of the brick house was made. She was born in 1896.

The land along Denton Tap Road:

Bettye's mother, when she died, left land to her four children along Denton Tap Road. Starting at the creek (Cottonwood Creek) on the east side of the road, going north, the first plot of land belonged to Dave Pruitt. The next plot north belonged to Bettye and Herbert Parker. The next plot belonged to Lucille and Pete Salmon. The final plot belonged to Bernice and Cliff Whitman.*

J. C. Thweatt got the property from the corner of present Denton Tap Road and Bethel School Road (where the white frame house and original brick house had stood), all the way to Dodson's place. (Wilson's note: Joe Dodson owned a junk yard on the west side of Denton Tap Road, between Bethel School Road and Sandy Lake Road.)*

Ruby Thweatt Pruitt kept the land from Bethel Road, south to the creek.*

Herbert Parker's youth in Grapevine Springs:

Ronnie's father Herbert Parker and Herbert's friends such as George Corbin once put together an old Model T pickup and put boards on the back so groups of kids could be driven around Grapevine Springs Park. They hooked up an old electric magneto and when underclassmen were riding in the back, Herbert and his buddies would turn on the electricity and shock the riders.

Sometimes youth groups from other communities such as Lewisville would have picnics in Grapevine Springs Park. Herbert and his buddies would sometimes "crash" a party and start eating the food. When they were discovered and chased, they knew where there were openings in the barbed wire fences, and they could escape with the food.

According to Ronnie and his mother, Jeff Thweatt was the land owner who donated the land for Grapevine Springs Park, under the condition that it be used as a park. It was later sold to Webb Roberts.*

Ronnie's youth in Coppell:

Ronnie started first grade at Coppell School in 1958, and he graduated from Coppell High School in 1971. On the first day of school, a classmate, Lloyd "Cotton" Moore, didn't want to stay, so he climbed out of the window of Mrs. Shockey's class and ran home through the corn field across the street.

When Ronnie was eight years old, he and Mitch Waters were racing and hot-rodding their tractors through downtown Coppell. Ronnie was given a ticket by Constable Albert Hodges.

Ronnie started school in the old part of present Pinkerton Elementary School, and he went to school in that building through the sixth grade. He ate lunches in the old wooden lunchroom. There was no air conditioning in the building until after he finished sixth grade. Ronnie's teachers in the elementary grades were Mrs. Shockey, Mrs. Phillips, Mrs. Handley, Mrs. Phillips (again), Mrs. Ryan, and Mr. Stewart. Mr. Stewart sponsored the boy scouts, and they would often hike to the Carrollton dam and back, stopping at King Tut's Grocery Store on Sandy Lake Road for drinks.

When he entered the seventh grade, he moved into the new brick building to the east that was the junior high school. Ronnie and his friends started the Teen Club, which sponsored dances on Friday nights in the new gym.

When Ronnie became a freshman, he moved to the new high school campus, presently Coppell Middle School West. His graduation ceremony was in the dome auditorium.

Ronnie's favorite teacher in high school was Mrs. Gibson, later named Mrs. Dillehay, the math teacher. She often went fishing with him. She also often berated him for not applying himself more while he was so smart. She gave all students a "think test," a math quiz designed to make students think. Ronnie was the only one to get 100 on the test.

Some of his high school teachers, besides Mrs. Gibson, were Coach Riddels, Coach Thompson, Mrs. Savage, Mrs. Langley, and Mr. Brown.

He had played football since seventh grade, and in high school, he played on the new Lesley Field. He was All-District for three years, named unanimously All-District twice. He had a 28 game tackle average for a year that still stands. He was Captain of the football team, Mr. CHS his senior year, class president his senior year, sophomore class president, Student Council president, and Most Mischievous several times.

He also played basketball and participated in track.

Ronnie remembers that Coppell always had nicer uniforms and equipment than the schools which Coppell played.

Ronnie cut through Grapevine Springs Park everyday to get to elementary school.

Hurt in the Homecoming Parade:

He was riding in the homecoming parade on the front of Linda Pinkerton's 1952 Chevrolet, driven by Larry Millican. In front of them was Troy Ham driving a 1968 Chevrolet Impala. When Troy slammed on his brakes, Ronnie's leg was caught between the two cars. Coppell's policeman, Kelly Story, took Ronnie to Stephen's Memorial Hospital in Dallas to the team doctor, Dr. Holiday. They stopped the homecoming parades for a while after that.

Bonfires for Coppell High School:

Bonfires at homecoming were big deals. Ronnie would get out of class to haul lumber for the bonfire. Southlake Carroll High School students sneaked over and set Coppell's lumber on fire one night (Wilson's note: And the rumor was that Coppell students did the same to Carroll.), and the bonfires ended.

Coppell Junior Rodeo:

Ronnie never liked riding horses, primarily because his uncle David always made him try out horses that he would buy. But Ronnie, at ten years old, rode a bull in the Coppell Junior Rodeo, but it was the only time he rode. He said, "If I had made 2 ½ more jumps, that would have made 3 jumps."* The Coppell Junior Rodeo was started in 1960. Ronnie and Mitch Waters would bring up the stock for the rodeo each week from the pastures west of S. Coppell Road.

Coppell Post Office and the store next to it:

The old general store in downtown Coppell, on the north side of W. Bethel Road, was remodeled by Clyde Parker, probably in the early 1940s. At the time, the post office was inside this store.

(Wilson's note: Apparently, the very first post office was in Harrison's general store of 1877, probably on the very same site as this store remodeled by Clyde Parker. After Harrison's store, the post office was in Minnie McGee's drugstore, and there is some indication that the post office was once in the store on the southwest corner of W. Bethel and S. S. Coppell Roads. So until Clyde Parker took it over, the post office had moved around.)

At some point, Clyde built another small building that stood on posts just east of his grocery store. The post office was moved into this little building, with Clyde as the postmaster. Clyde's wife Goldie Mae Robertson Parker continued to run the grocery store. Old post office lock boxes were moved from the grocery store into the new post office. Ronnie Parker owns a few of the old sorting bins.

In 1954, Les Shafer bought the grocery store from Clyde Parker. Les Shafer, by coincidence, had owned a grocery store in Farmers Branch, only two blocks from where Ronnie Parker lived before his family moved back to Coppell.

Sometime around the early 1950s, the little post office was moved to become a playhouse behind one of the houses owned by the Parkers on S. S. Coppell Road. Ronnie and Carolyn McCain played in the playhouse. It eventually deteriorated and was torn down.

Clyde Parker replaced the little post office with a building almost twice as big, built of cinder blocks. Again, some of the lock boxes were moved to this post office.

Clyde Parker retired in 1962, and Benita Parker McCain became, first, the postal clerk, then the postmistress.

In about 1966, a new brick post office was built on the east side of S. S. Coppell Road, about half way between the railroad and W. Bethel Road. Benita McCain continued as postmistress until

she retired and married Gerald Tillery, who owned a barbershop in Grapevine, on Main Street, beside the movie theater. This post office served Coppell until the present post office on Denton Tap Road was built.

A restaurant in the old post office:

After the new brick post office was built, in 1968 or 69, Bettye Parker took over the former post office and made it into a café, The Hitchin' Post. Judy McGiboney helped her run the café. Only a year or so later, she sold the café to Iola Harris, who named it Dolly's.

The service station in downtown Coppell:

Herbert Parker* and Sam Lesley built a service station in 1963, located just east of the Kirkland House and the First Baptist Church. They owned it for about five years. First it was a Humble Gas Station, then Sinclair, then Gulf, then something else before it closed.

The domino hall:

In 1962, Clyde Parker built a very small house to be a domino hall. It was south of where the service station would be. The old men who played dominos in front of the general store moved to that location.

Other Parkers in Coppell:

Bud Parker was Ronnie's uncle. Bud and his wife Catherine lived in the house next to the Coppell Church of Christ, on S. S. Coppell Road, which was the original site of a cotton gin. Ronnie and Bettye could never remember Bud's occupation. He was always retired.

Bobby Parker is Ronnie's cousin, Bud's adopted son. He and his wife Rita (or Irita) had a sister* also named Rita. Bobby was the first tax assessor-collector for the Coppell School District.

The Thweatts in Coppell:

Walter Thweatt owned the land on the east side of present Denton Tap Road from Sandy Lake Road to Denton Creek and on the west side from Turkey Knob Hill to Denton Creek.

Robert Thweatt owned land in the northwest corner of Coppell, near present Highway 121, on present Sandy Lake Road, then called Thweatt Road.

J. C. Thweatt was the only son of Jewel Parrish Thweatt and Elgie Thweatt, and he owned 160 acres at the corner of Denton Tap and Bethel School Roads.

Five generations of Ronnie's families, on both sides, are buried in the Grapevine Cemetery, extending back to 1849.

Midway and the beer joints:

The building that was called Midway was built by Walter Thweatt, on his land. It was a café and beer joint on the northeast corner of Sandy Lake and Denton Tap Roads. Walter rented it out. He eventually tore down the building because he didn't like the business that went on there. There were beer joints all along Sandy Lake Road.

Sandy Lake Road, in those days, was known as the Oklahoma Highway.*

Denton Tap Road:

Walter Thweatt gave most of the land to the county to construct Denton Tap Road. Before it was constructed, there was just a path going from present Belt Line Road to Denton Creek, toward Lewisville. He gave the land on the condition that the county would provide access for his cattle to cross from one side of Denton Tap to the other. So the county constructed a cross-over in front of the present First Baptist Church. It was a culvert large enough for cattle to cross under the road.

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- These items were added or corrected by Bettye Parker by mail after he interview, in October, 2011.