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CITY OF SUGAR LAND AND
FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
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Interviewee: **Terry Puhl**

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Jackie and Terry Puhl

Transcript

GOODSILL: Could we start with your date of birth?

PUHL: July 8, 1956. I was born and lived in the city of Melville, Saskatchewan. It was a city of 5,000 and is a railway and farming community. The Canadian National Railway runs right through it so that was the main employer and still is. I knew everybody and everybody knew me.

My dad, Frank Puhl, was a farmer and then he became the owner of the Massey Ferguson dealership and continued to farm. My dad was born in Melville in 1915 after his parents came over from Hungary.

My mom's maiden name was Margaret Gulash, a true Hungarian name. She was from Manitoba, the province just east of Saskatchewan, in the Swan River area. The two families, being Hungarian, knew each other. My mom is still alive. She's 94. My dad passed away when he was almost 94, about 10 years ago.

GOODSILL: Tell me why they would leave Hungary?

PUHL: I have no idea why my Puhl grandparents left when they did. Probably for the opportunity to get land. My grandparents had a considerable amount of farmland out in that area. I always tell people they lived quite comfortably during the 1930s because they grew poppies and shipped the poppy seeds down to eastern Canada, which was a very profitable business. They did not experience the Dirty Thirties like others did.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Few countries were affected as severely as Canada during what became known as the "Dirty Thirties," due to Canada's heavy dependence on raw material and farm exports, combined with a crippling Prairies drought known as the Dust Bowl. -- *Wikipedia*

GOODSILL: Do you have brothers and sisters?

PUHL: I have three sisters and one brother and they all live in Canada. I'm the second youngest. First was Delores, then Gerald, Valerie, me (my given name is Terrance), and then Catherine.

GOODSILL: Tell me what your life was like growing up.

PUHL: My dad was quite active with all the baseball teams that I played on. We were very close to our relatives. All Hungarian on both sides so we spent a lot of our weekends with our relatives. My dad was a very hard worker and my mom raised the family. My dad was tough. When he said to do something, you did it. Growing up in Melville you had the flexibility to go anywhere you wanted. It was a safe environment with no issues at all. I grew up in the Catholic Church so I went to Catholic school all the way until high school. When I was in high school, they created a comprehensive school comprised of both the public and Catholic schools. It was grades 10 through 12 and my class was the first class to go through all three years. There was a very healthy competition between the public and the Catholic schools. I knew a lot of the kids because I had played baseball with them.

GOODSILL: Did everybody in your family play sports?

PUHL: They played some sports but not at the levels that I did. In high school I played basketball, volleyball, football. I was the quarterback on the football team and I thought that was what I was going to do, going to college at the University of Saskatchewan. But when I was 15 I went to a baseball try-out camp in a visiting city and the Cincinnati Reds said they would like to sign me. But at that time, in Canada, you were ineligible to sign at the age of 15. That kind of lit a fire under me. WOW! – baseball could be a potential career.

However, when I was 17 and could sign with parental signature, the Reds didn't want to sign me. (laughs) But the Houston Astros did. I still remember the signing. We were playing in a national tournament in Barrhead, Alberta, and I was named the Most Valuable Player in the tournament and the Most Valuable Pitcher. The scout, Wayne Morgan, asked if I was interested in a professional career. I said, "Absolutely!" He said, "Well, I'll come to your house in two weeks." I was starting my senior year. Two weeks to the day, I came back from school and he was sitting in our kitchen with my mom and dad talking. He wanted to go out to the local baseball field so he could see if I were throwing properly, how I ran, and how I hit. He said, "I know a lot about you but I want to make sure your arm is okay because you pitched a lot in that tournament." I ran through my paces and when I came back from that little try-out he sat me down in the kitchen and said, "I'd like to offer you a contract."

It required my signature and both my parents' signatures. My mom would not sign. She said later that she knew that if she signed, I would never come back, I would be gone. She had really good insight because I never really did go back after I left. My dad signed and she walked out of the kitchen, and I signed her name. (laughs) So that's how we moved on.

The nice thing about Canada and the U. S. is there are so many similarities. It was a cultural shock for me to come down to the U. S. because whatever there is in Canada, there is ten times more of it down here. It doesn't matter what it is. Opportunities are ten times greater. It was a tough first year because it was the first time I'd ever been away from home. I didn't see anyone in my family for six months! I spent that time in Florida and in Virginia.

GOODSILL: What is the day-to-day life of a young ballplayer like? Where did you live? What did you eat?

PUHL: I ended up renting a house with three other players. We cooked our own meals, washed our own clothes, and rode the bus. There were a LOT of bus rides.

GOODSILL: Did you have a signing bonus?

PUHL: Yes. I did get a signing bonus. I got \$1,000 to sign, a pair of spikes and a new glove. (chuckles)

GOODSILL: Did you feel rich?

PUHL: I did! But it was an opportunity that I knew I probably would not get again. I had to move on it.

With the \$500 they paid us a month I actually saved some money. (laughing) We lived pretty sparingly in the minor leagues. But it was okay. I just had to take care of myself. It's not like I had any other distractions. It was baseball, eight hours a day.

GOODSILL: A lot of athletes today do weight training and all that. Was that a part of it back then?

PUHL: It was a little bit different back then. Nowadays if you are a high draft pick, you are getting paid a lot of money upfront in a signing bonus. You have the flexibility to do a lot of things. I didn't. We did everything on our own when it came to conditioning. We didn't have a trainer other than the one on the team who took care of injuries.

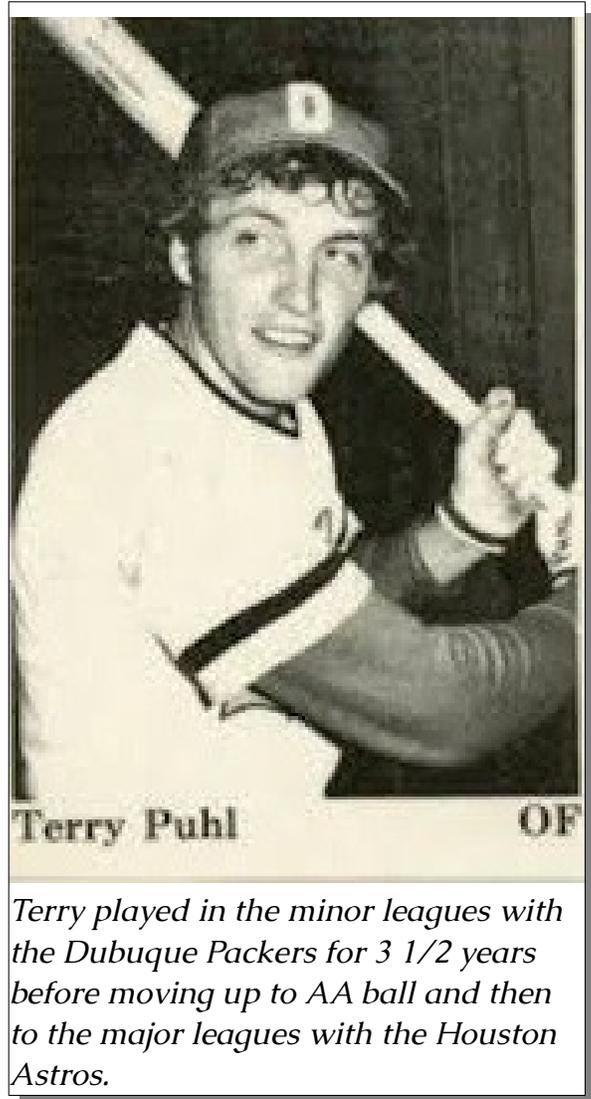
It was a different era of baseball. It was old school. No nonsense. If you caused trouble you got your pink slip unless you were just such a great player. You had to do things the way they wanted you to do it. And that was okay. It wasn't like they were asking you do to anything drastic. But I was focused. I took care of myself.

GOODSILL: How did you take care of yourself?

PUHL: I made sure I got my rest and I ate okay and I didn't horse around. One thing about professional athletes, at least in baseball, if you try to burn the candle at both ends you can get away with it once in a while. But if you are doing it on a regular basis, you can't survive. It is just SO competitive. There are so many people who ARE taking care of themselves. So that was my life for the 3-1/2 years I spent in the minor leagues.

GOODSILL: At that young age, how did you take care of your arm, your most valuable asset?

PUHL: Even from a young age in the minors, we would 'throw long' to elevate the ball. That strengthens and elongates the muscles of your throwing arm. I used to throw long every second day my whole career. Once you get your arm in shape you can do a lot of things that won't hurt it, if you have reasonable mechanics for throwing. I was blessed with a good body. That's part of the deal. Some guys break down earlier than other guys do. My body is breaking down now, though! (laughs)



My first year, rookie league, was a split season. My second year was A-Ball. I had a great year and it put me on the map with the Astros. I was second in hitting. Pedro Guerrero, who played with the Dodgers for many, many years, ended up winning the league championship in hitting and I was second. I hit .349. I had a fabulous year. I got a big write-up in *The Sporting News* that year. The Astros really liked me.

The following year I went to Double-A in Columbus, Georgia but was there only a month and a half. The manager, Leo Posada, said, "you guys have to work out every morning while we're at home and then play the game that night." So we were doing double duty. There was an injury in Triple-A and he told me I was going to Triple-A. So at 19 years old I was in Triple-A baseball, a phone call away from the big leagues. I started looking around and noticing that the major league players weren't that much better than I was. I started thinking, "I could play at this level!" I played a full year in Triple-A.

My parents had come down to Charleston, West Virginia, home of the Union Carbide. It was my 21st birthday. Jim Beauchamp, was a fabulous manager, one of my favorites of all time. I said, "Jim, my mom and dad are coming down. We're not going to have any issues, right? You aren't going to send me away from Triple-A are you?" He said, "No, the Astros want you to play here. You'll probably play here the full year. You might get called up at the end of the year." I was on the 40-man roster. They had to protect me because otherwise another team could get me. I said, "That's fine."

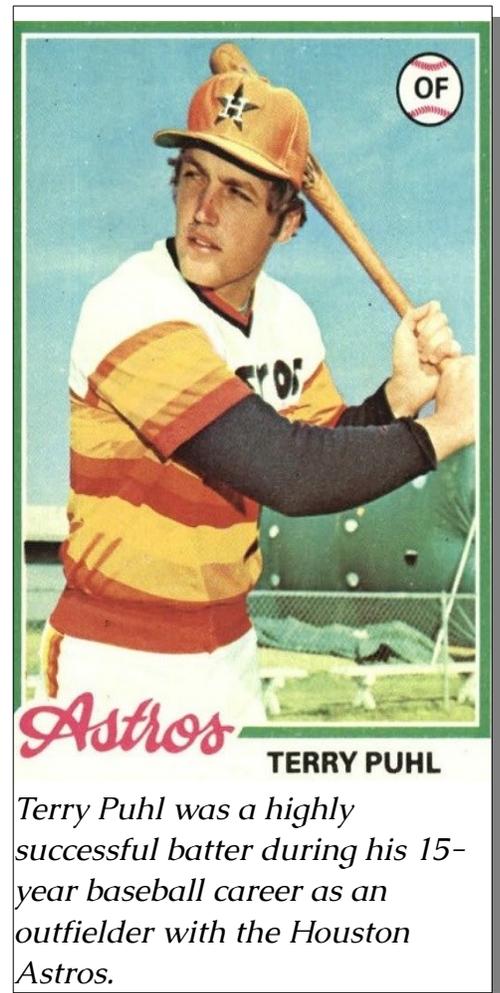
So my parents drove all the way from Saskatchewan to Charleston, West Virginia. I think it was 2,500 miles. They saw that one game, on my birthday, where I hit a home run! My mom loved that.

After the game, Jim Beauchamp called me into his office, which was very unusual. I walked in there and he said, "You're going to Houston." I still remember it. My heart just dropped. You can imagine all the things going through my head. I'm going to the major leagues! I walked out and I'm almost stunned. I tell my mom and dad that I have to leave NOW to go to Houston.

GOODSILL: Your poor mom!

PUHL: But what an experience they had! They were there the day I got called up to the big leagues! I still remember driving in to Houston. That was July of 1977.

GOODSILL: Oh, JULY in Houston!



PUHL: Yeah! My car air conditioner HAD to work here! I still remember coming in that night and I stopped on Kirby Drive. They had the Astrodome all lit up. We were playing there the next night against the Dodgers. I remember parking my car out there and looking at the Astrodome thinking, "I'm playing in that building tomorrow night!" The next night, playing against the Dodgers, there were 44,000 people in the stands. I hadn't played in front of 4,400 before. It was quite a transition for me. I played left field at the time. I got a hit my 5th time up in the game. I lined out my 1st time for an out. I was shaking at home plate. We went into extra innings, and in the 10th inning I got a hit to lead off. I stole 2nd base. Bob Watson came up and drove me in for the winning run. That was my first game!

I had a good first year. I stayed from July, August, and September and hit a little over .300 that year. And started the process.

GOODSILL: I came in August of 1981 from Honolulu and it was HOT! What a culture shock. One of the things that made it bearable was that I worked for an oil service company and we had Astros season tickets on the 3rd base line and I got to go and watch YOU play. Do you remember what your pay was when you started?

PUHL: Minimum salary at that time was \$19,000 per year.



Former Houston Astros and longtime University of Houston-Victoria baseball coach Terry Puhl had a street named after him in his hometown of Melville, Saskatchewan, in July 2018. The Terry Puhl batting cages (sign at upper left) were built in 1992 and have been used ever since.

GOODSILL: Did you feel rich?

PUHL: (laughing) It was amazing. I could pay my rent with just my meal money! I stayed at some apartments off Stella Link, not too far from the field. It was a good life. Baseball is a platform. Anybody will talk with you, for five minutes anyway! (laughs) But if you respect the game, and I still have a great deal of respect for the game, I think the game will treat you wonderfully. I did get to the highest level in the game. Those who put in a lot of years and don't get to the highest level sacrifice a lot. All ball players sacrifice a lot.

I never had the same family life that a normal person did. With all that traveling you've got to have a strong wife, which I do. Jackie and I have been married 40 years this October.

GOODSILL: Tell us how you met.

PUHL: I'd finished my first year in Houston and was told that I was going to be going to Venezuela to play winter ball starting at the end of October, which would mean November, December, and January. I said, "You want me to go play baseball in Venezuela over Christmas?" They said, "Yes."

So I go back to Saskatchewan right after the season for three weeks. The first day I got home I went with a buddy of mine to the local bar, *The King George*. I walked in, and of course, everybody knows me and I know everybody.

GOODSILL: Not because you are famous but because you grew up there! (laughs)

PUHL: I look around and think, "I don't know HER." Before the night was over, we were sitting at that table so I got an introduction. She was there with her boyfriend. (laughs) But that got taken care of. So that's how we initially met but for those 2-3 weeks, I didn't do anything else with Jackie.

I'm 21 years old and I'm working down there (in Venezuela) over Christmas and New Years. It's the end of January and we finished up in Venezuela. I'd written Jackie a letter while I was there. I fly back to Melville and we end up having a big party at our house. We had run out of Coke so I jump into the car with my brother-in-law and we race down to the local store. We've had a few drinks and we're happy. I get these Cokes and am coming around the corner and all of a sudden I run into Jackie who is pushing her cart. I give my brother-in-law the Cokes and say, "I'll meet you at the house."

So I ended up talking to Jackie and setting up a date. I was home for three weeks, before spring training and we dated every day for three weeks. Then I went down to spring training and we had a long distance relationship, which was not easy.

My second year I'm having another fabulous year and I end up making the National League All-Star team. That's a once in a lifetime honor. What major league baseball does is fly you first class to the game. It was in San Diego that year. You are there for 3-4 days and they pay ALL the bills. And they also pay for ONE guest. So I invited Jackie to that. That's kind of what cemented things with my parents. My dad thought maybe he might go. (laughter) Then Jackie came down to Houston once in 1978 and we ended up getting engaged over that winter. We got married after the 1979 season on October 27, 1979.

GOODSILL: So Jackie's from your hometown?

PUHL: No. She was from Vancouver. She was working in my hometown. Then she moved to Calgary and was working for a CPA firm there. We ended up getting married in Calgary.

GOODSILL: Then your career continues. Is she traveling with you?

PUHL: She traveled maybe twice.

GOODSILL: Are you living in Houston?

PUHL: Yes. I bought a home in Quail Valley, Missouri City, Texas in 1979, at the start of the season. I had been down here for many years but it was a tough adjustment for her. It was really hard for her when we went on the road. But she's a tough gal. We ended up having our first child in 1982, Naomi. We're still in Quail Valley. Stephen came in 1984. Curtis came in 1988.

In 1988 we made plans to sell our home. We met some people who lived on Alkire Lake. We just loved the area so we started poking our noses around. A home was up for sale. We ended up buying the lot, knocking down the house. I still remember my dad when he came down. I took him out there to show him the lot and the house. He said, "Well, what's wrong with this house?" I said, "Dad, this is not going to work." He couldn't believe I was going to 'knock down a perfectly good house'. (Goodsill and Puhl say simultaneously.)

GOODSILL: (Laughing) What's wrong with you? You're getting a little bit above your station there!

PUHL: That's right! We ended up knocking the house down. It took about a year to build our house. The kids had a great place to grow up over there. Eventually we moved to Venetian Estates and have been there for about 10 years.

GOODSILL: How long did you continue playing?

PUHL: My final year with the Houston Astros was 1990. I played with the Kansas City Royals in 1991.

GOODSILL: What was that like?

PUHL: My body was breaking down. I had a problem with my throwing arm, my rotator cuff. I had surgery in 1990 and it just couldn't survive the rigors. Having surgery nowadays is so much different than having it back then. After I had my surgery, I went to spring training with the Mets. My arm was starting to cause me trouble at spring training because you have to crank it up 3-4 times a day. It was okay the first week and then the second week it declined, by the third week I was into the Advil and just couldn't throw.

GOODSILL: It must be awful when you realize you are in the downward slide of your career.

PUHL: Yes. I couldn't run like I used to run. That was age. I had injuries to hamstrings over the years and that took its toll. But I did get to spend a few months with the Kansas City Royals. I got to play with George Brett, Kirk Gibson, Bret Saberhagen and got to see some of the American League. That was cool to spend some time with them. But it felt like I was on the road all the time. I was in Kansas City. Jackie was in Houston with the kids because they are going to school. That was a hard time. I wasn't playing and I wasn't feeling well. Time had come to retire from baseball.

GOODSILL: Then you had to make the decision that every athlete has to face. What am I going to do now?

PUHL: That's true. But I had made some plans. I took some classes and got licensed in the financial world. I got a few college hours at Wharton. I'm a 4.0 student at Wharton! I don't have many hours but those I do have are at a 4.0 average! (laughing) I got my Series 7 licensing. I also have my advisor's license. I'm a registered investment advisor.

My roommate for ten years in the big leagues was Craig Reynolds. We got licensed at the same time and we said, "Well, let's be partners." We were both licensed in 1982 but we didn't get active until 1987.

GOODSILL: You WERE preparing ahead, weren't you! And finance is a natural fit for you?

PUHL: Yes. I had a little bit of experience and I had some good people to study under. Craig was a good partner. We were starting to get pretty active in 1987. We were working during the off-season but during the season it's a little hard. He retired in 1988 so he took over the office full-time. I finished in 1991 and finally joined him. Then he calls me in and says, "Terry, I'm thinking about going full-time on the staff of Second Baptist Church." He was asked to do that by Dr. Young. He said, "What do you think?" I said, "Who am I to say?"

GOODSILL: You can't really refuse that! You've kind of been "called". (laughs)

PUHL: Yes! So Craig left and I took over the office. I was with PaineWebber for 10 years then I moved to Sanders Morris Harris and spent 13 years there. Now I'm with Corda Investment Management, where I've been a little over 7 years.

GOODSILL: What aspect of this job do you like the most?

PUHL: The interaction with the clients and putting their assets into a good strategy that will stand the test of time and market. I've had some clients for over 30 years now. To see where they are now, they are retired and they are in good financial shape is very satisfying.

GOODSILL: You have to keep your clients level regardless of the chaos that is happening in the market or in the world.

PUHL: That's right. If people have a tendency not to overspend and to live a reasonable life, they'll do well with our strategy. We're there to make your money work for you. We're not there to hit home runs.

GOODSILL: When you are a professional athlete, adrenalin is part of the deal; you get fueled by the excitement of the game. Is there any adrenalin in your current job?

PUHL: You'd be surprised. In baseball you try to remove that adrenalin rush. You train yourself so much that it becomes a reflex action. I could tune everything out and focus myself on seeing the ball come out of the pitcher's hand, looking for the rotation of the ball, the location of the ball. I had so trained my eyes that my body took the bat to the ball. I had swung at it so many times.

When you start thinking too much, at least in baseball, you get yourself in trouble. You do all the thinking beforehand. I find those who ride high, up and down, don't have longevity. And the market is like that too.

GOODSILL: That answers my question about adrenalin. Well said!

PUHL: Experiencing huge ups and downs is a hard way to live. I was fortunate. If I got four hits one night, by the time I get home, I felt good about it but the next day I had to produce again. You have to have a thick skin. Baseball is a game of failure really. As a hitter, if I fail 7 out of 10 times, I'm a complete success because I'm a .300 hitter. You can't beat yourself up because the game will eat you up otherwise.

Football is a different sport. It's once a week so all the emphasis is on one game. Baseball is completely different because of the schedule of nearly continuous play. They both happen to be professional sports where you get paid for what you do, but there is no similarity after that.

GOODSILL: Are you interested in watching young athletes playing your sport now?

PUHL: I do. Besides what I do at Corda, I also have another job. I'm the head coach of the University of Houston-Victoria baseball team. This is my twelfth year. I started the program in Victoria so I travel back and forth. I'm down there for the fall season, September, October, November, and the start of December. It's an hour and 20 minutes. I can leave Victoria and tell Jackie when I'll be home and I'll arrive within 2 minutes of the time. (laughing)

GOODSILL: Tell me what you like about doing that?

PUHL: The beauty of teaching younger players. The game has evolved and there is a lot of new stuff. Everybody talks about Launch Angle. That's what we called those people who had an upper cut swing. I've had to do a lot of reading and a lot of watching video on the current players in the major leagues to see exactly how they approach the swing. I'm very much a student of hitting so I can see the difference in Bregman's swing versus the swing of Correa and Altuve. They have three different types of swings.

GOODSILL: Do you pick one and teach your students that or do you go with the student's natural ability?

PUHL: With the advent of the Launching, we're putting the ball up in the air a little bit more and having the rotation of the ball get the distance on it with backspin. In my career I probably had no less than 10 different swings. There are variations. You are always tweaking things. I know how to hit off the back foot or the front side. There are certain players who I work with that I'll say, "Let's try this." And you see what sticks with them.

More and more I'm teaching a little bit more Launch Angle because players are stronger now than they were when I played. You CAN put the ball up in the air. I try to teach the defensive side of the game as well. I was a player who made very few errors. In my whole career I had 19 errors. I've got players on my team who push 19 in a season! I tell them they have to develop skills with their glove hand. You can't make mistakes there.

I was always looked at as a player who was a great defensive player. Offensively, they marked me down as a .280 – .290 hitter. Nowadays, with my players, it's hard to find players with the defensive skills. They don't have them.

GOODSILL: Why is that?

PUHL: Because they don't teach that, they don't emphasize that. Everybody has hitting coaches and they spend all their time doing that. If you look at the major leagues now, the defensive side of the game isn't as polished as the offensive side. Key players such as shortstop, second baseman, catcher, and center fielder are still the same. But the other guys are there because they hit.

I throw batting practice every day. I teach the guys to do the long throw. That's part of keeping your body healthy. The long toss is a little bit different with the pitcher than with a position player. The position player can elevate the ball a little bit more.

A pitcher needs to keep things on the line. They can throw for a long distance but they are looking for that burst of energy. As an outfielder I was trying to get my muscles elongated whereas pitchers are looking for bursts. They need 97 (mph).

There is also the issue of dealing with athletes who have to stay eligible academically. Otherwise I lose them. I have no farm system. Before I recruit a player, I have to find out what kind of student they are, and what kind of family life they come from. I find that some of my best players have very active parents. It's amazing. Tried and true rules of the past still work!

GOODSILL: Your dad would be nodding his head! (laughter)

PUHL: I find that the students with parents who are active with the academics of college students are some of my best players.

GOODSILL: Do you get some kids who are very athletically talented but don't have scholastic discipline?

PUHL: Exactly. And they become ineligible. I had many pitchers this past year, four of them, who became ineligible. It really hurt my team because I can't use them for the whole spring. In order to stay eligible you have to carry a 2.0 GPA. It's kind of sad that players can't do that. I think a lot of times they think, "I'm going to be a baseball player."

GOODSILL: They think their sports acumen will get them through. Of course it won't, because some day they'll retire and they'll need to do something!

PUHL: True. They are good players in high school because of the level of competition. But you get into college and the level of competition is pretty good. In high school they are so much better athletically than the others and somehow, they slip through academically to stay eligible. I think things need to be tougher.

I love it when I hear a parent is a teacher. I look at the recruitment forms and see that mom's a teacher and dad's an administrator. I'm not going to have any problems with that one!

GOODSILL: This variety between your work life and your contributing in Victoria sounds like a nice balance for you.

PUHL: Right. When I get tired of one, I can go to the other. I'm never going to "retire". I'm going to work; that's what I'll do. Obviously, the baseball will stop me at some point. I'm probably getting close to that.

GOODSILL: Let's talk a little bit about why Sugar Land.

PUHL: Initially it was because of Alkire Lake. We fell in love with the area. Our kids grew up here. We had good schools. First they went to Advent Episcopal School. Then they moved over to Fort Bend Baptist, which is now Fort Bend Christian. After a few years all our friends were out in Sugar Land. We thought about moving to the north side of Houston but if we did that, it would be like starting a new life. When we sold our home on Alkire, Jackie and I were looking in Houston. But we couldn't reproduce in Houston what we had here for that money. So we came back and Jackie found the home in Venetian (Lakes).

GOODSILL: Are any of your kids athletes?

PUHL: Yes. Our oldest boy, Stephen, was signed by the Mets but got released. Curtis would have been a pretty good athlete but he had some hip issues that required surgery. Naomi is probably the best athlete of them all. Her sport is volleyball. She didn't have the size necessary. She is 5'4" so she couldn't play at a high level. She was fun to watch. I would go to her high school games. Even to this day she has the wildest swing. She had three children, two girls, six and three, and a little boy, Jackson.

I met some notable people because we lived in Fort Bend County. Jodie Stavinoha was one of them. I had a golf tournament back in the 1970s for the Richmond State School. Jodie would help me. "Terry, can you come over to my office? We'll walk up and down in Richmond." We'd go there and people would be writing checks for the tournament. I loved that man. He had a place over in Hillcrest Estates in Richmond. We came real close to buying over there before we built our house. We actually put in a bid on one. I'm glad we ended up on Alkire Lake because Richmond would have been a little too far. Mayor Duggan was a neighbor of ours. You would never know he was the mayor!

GOODSILL: He's unprepossessing. And funny!

PUHL: He's a good man. We became close with a lot of people on Alkire Lake. Rick and Cyril Hosley are very close friends of ours. Joe and Nancy Zimmerman are very close friends of ours.

GOODSILL: There were quite a few athletes who settled on Alkire Lake.

PUHL: Mike Newlin (Houston Rockets player) lived out there and Hakeem Olajuwon (Houston Rockets player). We've had some good people in Sugar Land. Jimmy Thompson for example. We've had good mayors here. There are quality people out here and there is quality of life. I like the pace of Sugar Land; we couldn't replace that for our kids. I'm so happy our kids grew up in Sugar Land. It was a great place for them to grow up safe.

GOODSILL: Thanks for talking to us, Terry!

Interview Ends