

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Arlene Vojtek**

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Interviewer: Chris Godbold

Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

Group: Czech Heritage Society

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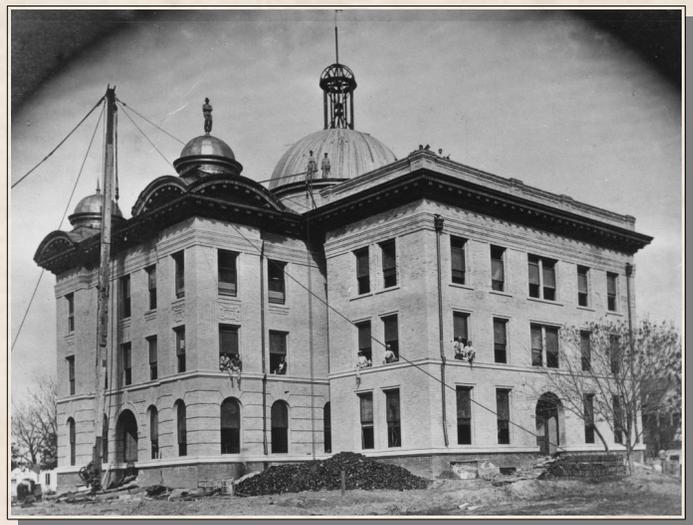
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Transcript

GODBOLD: Let's start with some biographical information. When and where were you born?

VOJTEK: I was born in Needville, Texas, December 7, 1938.

GODBOLD: What were your parents' names?

VOJTEK: Willie and Pauline Uherek. I have one brother left and his name is Gene. I had two sisters, Helen and Dorothy, but both of them have passed away.

GODBOLD: Where is Gene living these days?

VOJTEK: In Pearland.

GODBOLD: When did your family move to Needville?

VOJTEK: It was way before I was born. Both of my sisters are older than I am, and it was a few years before 1938. My parents lived in Needville. I really don't know where my mom was born. I don't know if she was born in Moulton, Texas. I think my dad was born in Needville, but I am not for sure.

GODBOLD: What type of work did your parents do?

VOJTEK: My dad was a foreman on a ranch, and I think way before that, he worked somewhere around Rosenberg. I think he said he helped build some of the sidewalks here in Rosenberg many years ago when he was young. My mom was a housewife, and he even farmed some corn and stuff like that. At that time, he went to the Fat Stock Show in Houston and trained the Brahma bulls. He would rub them and make them kneel down with their front legs. His boss just couldn't get over how he had trained these big Brahma bulls.

GODBOLD: Did he win any awards at the stock show?

VOJTEK: His boss did.

GODBOLD: What was the name of his boss?

VOJTEK: Louis Pierce. He owned the Oak Tree Ranch in Rosharon which is where I was really raised. He had humongous oak trees there, and my sisters and brother used to climb the oak trees. They were huge, with big limbs you could walk around on.

GODBOLD: Was your family house a big house or a small house?

VOJTEK: It was a small one, just a two bedroom, but we managed. We were never hungry. There was always food, and his boss was very good. He would always give us calves when we needed them, or the hogs for the pork, and we had chickens and eggs. My mom had beautiful gardens and she canned everything. We were never hungry. We had a very good life.

GODBOLD: What kind of chores did you do?

VOJTEK: We cleaned the house when we were older, and I liked cooking. I did the housework, and my mom loved her canning. So, she would be snapping beans or doing something. Us kids would help her by doing housework and yard work.

GODBOLD: Did you brother ever help with the cattle?

VOJTEK: He was the baby of the family. After high school he worked a little while on the ranch, and then he went into the Army and served his country. He was stationed in Korea. Then he came home and worked for the Pierce's driving a bulldozer. They were building a big man-made lake on their ranch. Even before he went into the service, when he was just a youngster, he was driving that bulldozer. He caught on so easy on how to do stuff like that.

GODBOLD: What school did you go to?

VOJTEK: All of us, all the kids went to Angleton. When we were young, we had a school in Rosharon, an elementary school. We all went to Rosharon, and I think the school closed down, and we were all transferred to Angleton.

GODBOLD: After school, what kind of work did you do?

VOJTEK: I never worked out. I always just helped at home, and then I got married and never really had to work. I babysat for 28 years, plus I have a handicapped son, which kept me from going out working in case he got sick or something, and I would have missed a lot of work. I started babysitting in my house to help ends meet.

GODBOLD: What was your husband's name?

VOJTEK: It was Frank. He passed away January 14, 2008.

GODBOLD: What kind of work did he do?

VOJTEK: He worked for about thirty years in the beer business. He was a driver/salesman, and when he got a little bit older, he was going to all these different places and checking their signs. If they weren't working, he would fix the signs and replace them. Then he went to work for Lamar School District driving a school bus. He did that for a couple of years until the paperwork got so bad. Then he became an aid on a handicap bus.

GODBOLD: You described that you have a disabled son. Was he the only child or do you have other children?

VOJTEK: I have a daughter and she is 55. She lives here. My son is 43. He has cerebral palsy and mental retardation, but he is a sweet person.

GODBOLD: They both still live around here?

VOJTEK: My daughter and her family live with me and kind of help me out with my son. I have twin grandsons there who are twenty and my granddaughter is 19 and they help out.

He needs assistance always; dressing, feeding, and I need help. I would not have it any other way because he is so precious.

GODBOLD: Describe some obstacles you faced in caring for your son.

VOJTEK: Heartaches is one; just knowing that he was never going to be normal. He is happy, that is the main thing. I tried to make sure he is happy and he loves polka music and any kind of music. In fact, there is a dance tonight, polka music. I take him with me; I never have put him on the back burner. He has always been with me.

GODBOLD: It probably doesn't leave you with much spare time, but if you did have any spare time to yourself are there any hobbies that you may have had?

VOJTEK: I used to go fishing, and I loved yard work and garden work. I used to go on a lot of cruises. We are going on one in April. Gary, my son, loves going on cruises.

VOJTEK: So you said your parents were from Needville. Do you remember what Needville was like back in the days?

VOJTEK: Well, it never was a big town, and it still is not. There are quite a few houses there, and people are moving out toward Needville. As far as businesses, there are not that many.

GODBOLD: You don't think it has changed a whole lot?

VOJTEK: Well, it is hard to say. I think they have that one grocery store and Dollar General. We moved away from there, and we have been in Rosenberg about 53 years.

GODBOLD: What was Rosenberg like when you first moved there?

VOJTEK: A lot smaller than it is now. It was mostly farmlands on Highway 36, and 59 was kind of like all farm land. Then when you would come up to Texas Instruments, that would be a big deal back then. Highway 6 was open land and fields, only one lane each.

My daughter was about five, and we were coming home from somewhere. We were in Missouri City on a curve, and I don't even know if that curve is there anymore. But, a Highway Patrol was chasing a pickup and the pickup side swiped us. The truck that hit us flew into a field way over the railroad tracks. I just knew it was a big curve. People are crazy. We used to enjoy going to the drive-in movie theater. We used to have one of those here in Rosenberg.

GODBOLD: Do you remember where that was located?

VOJTEK: Somewhere in town, I couldn't even find the place now because they have built up the place. We enjoyed the concession stand so much.

As for Lamar School, we just had one junior high school and a high school when we moved here. Now we have about 35 or 37 schools.

We had a lot of mom-and-pop grocery stores, like Luksa's, Mencik's, Hajik's, and White House. In those days, you could even charge your groceries and pay weekly or monthly. Nowadays I don't think you can charge.

GODBOLD: I think they would look at you funny if you ask.

VOJTEK: We had full service gas stations.

GODBOLD: I can barely remember those.

VOJTEK: Then in 1963, the gas was thirty cents a gallon. That is hard to believe. We saw that big railroad bridge over in Rosenberg being built. It is not that old, but we did see that progress. We used to have a swimming pool at Travis Park for the public to go swimming. They have covered that up now. You wouldn't even know that used to be a pool. There is no pool or anything for the kids nowadays.

The census population in 1960, when we moved to Rosenberg, was 9,700, and the census from 2010 was 30,600; a difference of 20,900. We have a lot of new businesses in and around Fort Bend County now, malls and everything.

When my husband and I first married, we rented a duplex in Needville. We paid \$35 a month rent. In 1963, we moved to Rosenberg and rented a real nice two-bedroom home for only \$65 a month. Now you rent a home anywhere from eight, nine or a thousand dollars.

GODBOLD: More than a thousand, yea. Were you active in the church in Rosenberg when you moved here?

VOJTEK: I go to Holy Rosary Catholic Church. I a member of the Altar Society, Young at Heart, and the Czech Heritage.

GODBOLD: What is important to you about your Czech Heritage?

VOJTEK: I would hate to see it die. My daughter and her family come, and we come as a family to preserve the heritage. Before I married, I stayed with my grandparents in Damon and helped them on the farm. I talked Czech because they only talked Czech. But after they passed, I kind of forgot the language. I can still talk, but not real well like I used to. My daughter and her children have picked up a few words here and there, but I would like my grandparents to know that we are still involved with the Czech heritage.

GODBOLD: So what kind of farm was that in Damon? What kind of crops did they grow?

VOJTEK: Cotton and corn; they rented it from one of their son-in-law's, I think. They lived in that house and did the farming.

GODBOLD: What are some of the major changes you have seen in your lifetime?

VOJTEK: Vehicles, and when a person is working, you get paid a lot more than you used to years ago. And all the new buildings; nothing but cement everywhere. It used to be grass and farmland and now everywhere you look there is nothing but cement. We have all of these flooding problems now, and I don't know if that is one of the reasons because it does not have a drain off. Nothing but cement everywhere.

GODBOLD: Did your parents or your grandparents have a favorite Czech dish that you liked?

VOJTEK: My mom was the best in kolaches. She made homemade noodle soup. She was a very good cook and she taught all of us to cook. My brother to this day works in his garden, he cans pickles and he has a green thumb, too.

GODBOLD: So back tracking a little bit to the cowboys your father oversaw, were there any African Americans?

VOJTEK: There was one, and there was another one that mainly helped my dad on anything he could help with. I think my dad was saying, "You remember Nolan Ryan?" I don't remember if he was in high school or out of high school, but he worked at the ranch too, mainly helping my dad.

GODBOLD: What do you remember about any racial segregation or discrimination?

VOJTEK: There was a colored family that lived there, and they were good people. We played with the children, and they were just like us. We never thought of them as being different. We played with them, and I think that the girl's name was Ellowen. They called their mother, mother-dear. Anytime they wanted to ask her something, it was always mother-dear. My dad got along good with them and everybody.

GODBOLD: When you were living out in the country on the ranch, how far away was the nearest doctor?

VOJTEK: That was in Angleton. When I was about three years old, my godparents had come over for dinner and we had fish. I do not know what happened, but my sister ran into where my mom and dad were sitting at the table and said, "Something is wrong with Arlene!" They all ran into the bathroom where I was laying over the bath tub like a rag. They grabbed me up, and my godfather drove me to Angleton which was about fifteen or sixteen miles. I had food poisoning, and when they got me there, the doctor told them that he was going to scratch the bottom of my foot. And if I moved, we've got it made. If I didn't move, there was no hope. He drained my stomach. Evidently, I must have eaten some Vick's, and I guess between the Vick's and the fish, I got food poisoning. I was always thankful to my godfather for driving so fast in those days.

GODBOLD: Do you remember any home remedies that your parents had since the doctor was so far away?

VOJTEK: For a cough, it was a little bit of whiskey, a little bit of honey, and lemon juice, I think. Just put it on a spoon, and it was supposed to help your cough. I guess that helped. If you had a bad cough, they would use a mustard pack. Vick's was rubbed on your chest and back, and your clothes were all yucky. [both laughing]

GODBOLD: You said your brother served in the Army in Korea.

VOJTEK: He was an MP, and he had his own dog, a German shepherd. He adored that dog. He said when they were out at night, he would be laying on the ground and hear these Koreans coming. He would lay down on the ground and the dog was just as quiet. You think a dog would bark, but my brother said he did not. When he got out of the service, he said it was so hard for him to leave his dog. He loves animals and he always has.

GODBOLD: Is there anything important that you feel like we should know that we haven't talked about?

VOJTEK: I can't think of anything else.

GODBOLD: Okay. I appreciate you speaking with me.

Interview Ends