

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Aurelia Cerny**

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Interviewer: Diana L. Ware

Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

Comment: Czech Heritage Society meeting at Gus George
Academy, Richmond, Texas

9 Pages



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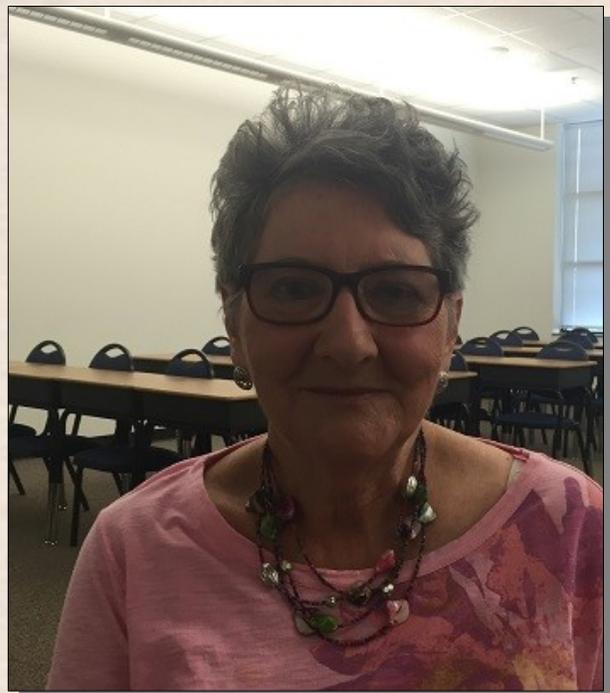
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Transcript

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

CERNY: I was born September 14, 1937 in Lane City, Texas, which is in Wharton County.

WARE: What brought you to Fort Bend County?

CERNY: After I got married in 1955, my husband, Jerome T. Cerny, found work in Fort Bend County, and we moved in 1956.

WARE: Do you have any children?

CERNY: We have five.

WARE: Do any of them live in Fort Bend County?

CERNY: Yes. Three live in Fort Bend County. Two lived in Fort Bend County all their lives, but one has moved to Austin County.

WARE: What are the names of your two children that have lived in Fort Bend County?

CERNY: Tim Cerny and Rene Palmer.

WARE: Where is your family from originally?

CERNY: My father was born and raised in East Bernard in Wharton County, and my mother was born and raised in Hallettsville in Lavaca County. When they married, they lived in Wharton County and raised all four us children in Wharton County. But as we married, we wandered off to Fort Bend County. My father worked for Wharton County Precinct II. My mother worked in cafeterias and had her own little restaurant, Janik's Café, for probably ten years in East Bernard.

WARE: Do any of your brothers or sisters live in Fort Bend County?

CERNY: My brother, who is deceased, lived in Needville and married my sister-in-law, Aileen Shefcik. They lived on the farm until his passing, I guess he passed away about 22 years ago, but she still lives in Needville on the Shefcik farm.

WARE: What type of work did you do?

CERNY: I was a stay at home mom because we had five children a couple of years apart. Eventually, I went to work for Texas Instruments when my youngest child was three. The travel to Texas Instruments had too much traffic because we had to go through Richmond and Rosenberg to get to Texas Instruments because the freeway was not there. That was one of the reasons we moved to Sugar Land. We did have a house in Rosenberg on Magnolia Street for 12 years before I went to work for Texas Instruments.

WARE: What did you do at Texas Instruments?

CERNY: I started out as a line operator, and I stayed there for 23 years. By the time I stopped working there, I was an engineering technician. So, step by step, I went from a line person, to quality control, to an engineering tech. The type of work I did there was building semi-conductors. I guess I was one of the first to build that chip to run the little calculators. We started out with the little calculators, and back then the first calculators were about four hundred bucks. Now you can't give them away [both laughing]. I can't tell you what would have happened if I would have continued there because I would have to learn all the technology that builds a computer. Before I left there, we had to be computer fluent, but it was basic back then compared to what it is now. Don't even tell me what to do with a computer now because I have lost it. When I left Texas Instruments, I did not keep up with the new technology in computers.

WARE: What year did you retire from Texas Instruments?

CERNY: I think it was 1993.

WARE: Let's go back a little bit; you said that you were a stay at home mom. Tell me a little bit about what that entailed.

CERNY: Well, that was keeping groceries on the table, keeping my children ready for school, taking them to and from the Catholic School in Rosenberg. It was basically having enough food in the house to feed everybody. A normal day, first I had to make breakfast for everybody and not everybody ate at the same time. Then lunchtime came along and everybody ate at the same time. Dinner was a big meal, and daddy would come home, and we would have our meal together.

When I wasn't folding diapers, I was probably cleaning house or trying to get everybody ready for bed. I was young, and five kids were a handful, but I loved every minute of it. I really did. If I had to do it all over again I would probably have more because they were all so great.

WARE: You did a lot of laundry. Did you have a washer and dryer?

CERNY: I had a washer but I didn't have a dryer. I used to hang my clothes on one of those square-looking things, and of course there were a lot of diapers. I washed the diapers first and then the rest of the laundry. It wasn't until we moved to Sugar Land that I was able to get a dryer because the house we bought was equipped with that, and it had a dishwasher, too [both laughing]. That was a plus because the old house didn't. We had a Tilson-built house back then, and we didn't even have central air. We had central heat, but there was no central air. We had an attic fan, and today I don't know how we survived living in a house with an attic fan, but we were not hot. We would open the windows, and the attic fan would take in the cool air, and we were fine. We had a big yard, the kids had a dog and a lot of space to play. It was a half-acre in all. They had neighborhood kids to play with. They still keep up with some of the neighborhood kids.

WARE: Did you have a garden?

CERNY: No. I didn't have a green thumb and my poor husband worked two jobs back then. He farmed and worked for Gulf States Tube. He was gone a lot, and we had no time for a garden.

WARE: Where did he farm?

CERNY: In Wallis, in Austin County.

WARE: He worked and farmed for someone?

CERNY: No, we had our own land. We tried farming, and it was tough. We owned a cotton picker and were able to help him pick the crops. Even if I was pregnant I would get on that old stupid cotton picker and help him pick the crop. My mother-in-law used to yell at me to get off that thing and say, "You are going to lose that baby." I was young, and I could handle all of this. That is probably what helped me get the job at Texas Instruments. When I walked in that day, they asked me what I could do, I said, "I don't know, I don't even know what you do here." I had an interview with Mr. Martinek who was from El Campo. He said, "Well, I see that you help your husband on the farm." What do you do? I said, "I run a cotton picker." He said, "That is what I need to know. You know how to run a piece of machinery, and you are hired."

When I first started working there, they trained me to run a gold evaporation machine, which was pretty simple. You had to melt the gold, and put it on the backs of the chips. It was one of the steps to build the microchips to run the calculator back then. That was my first job there, I think.

WARE: That is an interesting connection. What did you do in your spare time? Were you active in church?

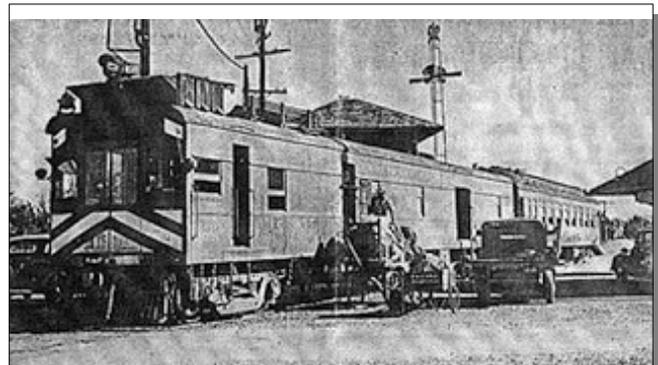
CERNY: Yes. I joined the Catholic Daughters when I lived in Rosenberg at Holy Rosary. When we transferred to Sugar Land to St. Theresa's, I was not able to participate in the Catholic Daughters very much because my husband and I worked different shifts so he could be home to take care of the kids while I was at work. If he worked the midnight shift, I worked the day shift and then we switched over so one or the other was always at home with the kids to make sure they were fed, clean and ready for school and whatever needed to be done. It worked out fine; we did not really have babysitters until later on when we were on the same shift, they were in daycare. We were not really active in church back then. Today, I do belong and am involved with the Catholic Daughters at St. Theresa's.

WARE: There were trains in your area. Did you ever use the train?

CERNY: No, but my aunt rode the Dinky from Wallis, and she would go to Lavaca County to visit family. We did not ever ride one, but we had to cross the railroad tracks before we got to our home where we lived in East Bernard. A lot of times we saw accidents and train wrecks, that happened right there at that crossing.

WARE: You were talking about the Catholic Daughters. What kind of things have you done with the Catholic Daughters?

CERNY: We meet every month, and we say the rosary for all the deceased members. We have functions to raise money for giving things because every time we have a meeting, we have a lot of requests for help. The biggest thing I help with is the annual garage sale.



Shown is a train similar to the Dinky Train that ran between Houston and Victoria. The Dinky was a local freight train that ran on the S&P track along Highway 90A and included one or two passenger cars. -- photo courtesy of the <http://wateringholdclubhouse.blogspot.com>

That garage sale is filled from top to bottom with wonderful things and makes at least six or eight thousand dollars. That is the biggest thing I help out with there. But any other functions that come up, I always volunteer by bringing food and whatever is needed to get the function going.

WARE: What do you do with the garage sale money?

CERNY: We do scholarships and help the Women's Center here in Fort Bend County. They have a budget and every bit of that money goes to somebody that is asking for help. We have a certain amount in the budget to be able to help everybody that requests things.

WARE: What do you remember about racial segregation?

CERNY: When my parents had this little Janik's Café we did not have a place for black people to eat, but they were allowed to come to the back of the café and sit in my mother's kitchen. There was a little spot there and she fed the colored, mostly men workers there. They were just as nice as could be. It still kind of bothers me as to why they couldn't sit where everybody sat, but back then, they had to eat in my mother's kitchen. This was cruel.

WARE: Did anybody give your mother problems for letting them eat in there?

CERNY: No. They were the nicest people, they were very nice. They were always glad they had a place to have their meal.

WARE: Did any white people complain about it?

CERNY: I don't think they knew about it. I don't know, I don't think they did back then. I was only 12 to 15 years old. All this was going on, and I don't think they knew they were back there. If they did, maybe there would have been some problems. But she fed them back there, and so did the other people that owned the café before her. She continued doing what everybody else was doing before her.

WARE: How easy was it to access medical care?

CERNY: Back then, if you were ill and if you had money, the doctor would help you out. But if you did not have any money, I don't think the doctor could help you. We did not have health care and I remember having some issues with my tonsils when I was growing up. We never did any surgery on me back then because my parents did not have the money.

The minute we got married and moved to the Freeport area where my husband worked at Dow Chemical for a while we had insurance. The minute I had insurance, the tonsils came out. Up until I was 17 years old, I had to deal with my tonsils every day and it was not a fun thing because sometimes my fever would get up so high, my parents thought I was going to be a loser. They would take me to the doctor, but I don't think the doctor did too much for me, other than give me an aspirin to get the fever down.

WARE: All your married life, have you had insurance?

CERNY: I did. We had real good insurance with all the companies that my husband worked for. All of our pregnancies were covered completely. Once I got to be 65, we had Medicare, and today I still have free insurance from Texas Instruments. They gave us a package. I pay a little difference when I go to the doctor but nothing like I hear other people talk about. I am still very fortunate I worked for Texas Instruments.

My husband was hired after I informed him he needed to come over there and forget all that farming. They were opening a shipping department and that is where he stayed until we both retired. That was the best thing we ever did because we would not have been able to travel to Europe, Hawaii, or wherever. Texas Instruments was good for both of us.

WARE: You have seen some major changes in your lifetime, insurance is one them. What are some of the other major changes you have seen?

CERNY: The freeways. It comes to a point where I think where am I and where am I going? This doesn't look the same, and if you don't have GPS, you are not getting there. So that is the major change I guess. Other than that, I guess the price of things. Everything is pretty expensive. Both husband and wife have to have jobs to be able to live comfortably.

WARE: When we were talking about medical care, I am backing up a little bit; when your kids got sick where did you take them to get treated?

CERNY: Back then we still had connections with our doctors in Wharton because that is where I started out having my babies. I had a pediatrician there and I would drive to Wharton from Rosenberg for their medical checkups. My pediatrician always said, "I will see you when they have a fever for two or three days, but don't come running over here because we can talk on the phone, and I can tell you what to do." We had a good pediatrician in Wharton and he took care of everything.

WARE: Since you were living in Rosenberg and Sugar Land, I guess shopping wasn't much of an issue. Where did you shop?

CERNY: We had a store in Rosenberg called Mensik's, and they were able to let us charge our groceries. So, when the pay check came in, we were able to pay the grocery bill, and that was convenient. That was like using a credit card.

WARE: So you ran a tab?

CERNY: Yes, in Sugar Land, when we first moved there, we had a grocery store in that shopping center right across from the sugar refinery, and we shopped there. We shopped at that little grocery store until it closed. They built a Walmart so we shop there.

WARE: The story of the American life, they built a Walmart.

CERNY: I wish they would put that little grocery store right back where it was.

WARE: Traffic has changed a little bit in Sugar Land, has it not?

CERNY: Yes, it has. Highway 90 is always busy, and 59, I won't even go on it right now because of all that construction.

WARE: What did I not ask you about that you want to talk about?

CERNY: I just know that once we retired, we were able to pay off our house and enjoy some years of travel because my husband loved to travel. We were able to visit almost every state in the United States.



Ray Michan, Gloria Michan, Joyce Lolley, Shirley Myers, Aurelia Cerny and Ted Kaspar, members of the Czech Heritage Society of Fort Bend County, are decked out in cultural clothing in Decker Park --photo FBC Museum Association

We took two or three weeks to do road trips, and the last trip we did was to Wisconsin. Our son was getting married, and the wedding was in Wisconsin. So, we took off two weeks early and toured the Corn Belt and found the little area where his grandparents settled when they came in from Europe.

They were able to move to a place in Nebraska, and I think it was called the North Belt. He always wanted to see where that piece of land was, where his grandparents settled when they first came from Europe. That made him so happy. After that, we were able to go to the wedding, cross over Lake Michigan and go into Niagara Falls.

When we came home from that trip he said, "I need to go to the doctor because I am having pain. I don't know if it is my heart or what." That is when they diagnosed him with lung cancer. After that, it was two years of chemo. I was just happy he was able to see where his grandparents came from. Before that, we were able to take a couple of trips to Europe, shortly after we retired and before the wedding.

We traveled with the Klecka's, and they were able to take us to the place in Dolni Cermna, where his mother's side of the family came from. We were able to find the house his mother's family grew up in. He was able to pick up some soil where his grandparents came from. To this day, I still see this beautiful smile on his face that made him feel so good. He was able to find the place where his grandparents came from.



Dolni Cermna, Czech republic, Aurelia's husband's ancestral village.

WARE: What is the name of that town?

CERNY: Dolni Cermna, it is very close to Poland. That made him so happy. I think he was just happy he was able to touch the gate and feel the soil. It was very beautiful.

WARE: Thank you very much for talking to me today.

Interview Ends