

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Bernice A. Freudensprung**

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Interviewer: Chris Godbold

Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

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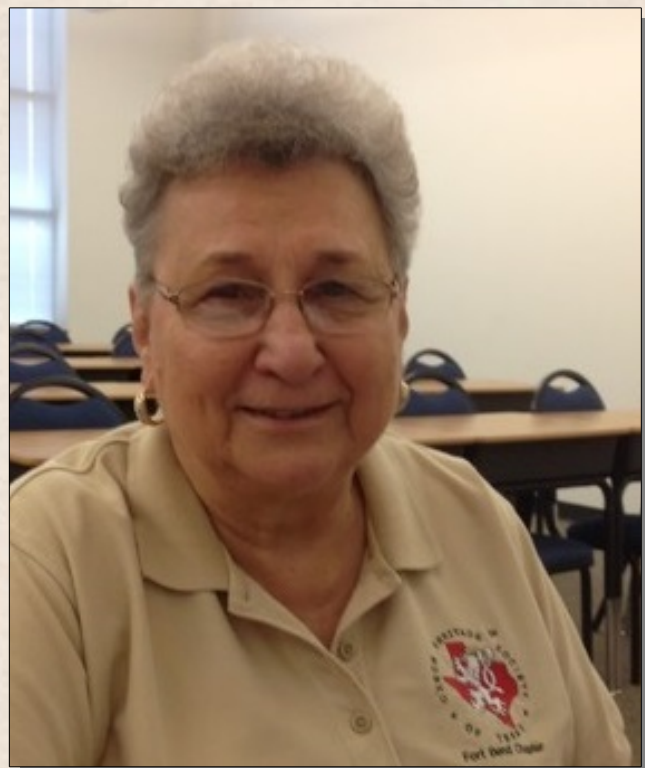
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Transcript

GODBOLD: Mrs. Freudensprung, when and where were you born?

FREUDENSPRUNG: I was born in what they call Frenstat, Texas. It was in the country, at home.

GODBOLD: When was that?

FREUDENSPRUNG: January 25, 1936.

GODBOLD: What were the names of your parents?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Alfred and Louise Ubernosky. My mother's maiden name was Matus.

GODBOLD: Do you have any siblings?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes, I have six. There were seven of us.

GODBOLD: When did your family move to Fort Bend County?

FREUDENSPRUNG: I was the one that came. I had an aunt and uncle living here and they didn't have any children so I came and stayed with them and worked at a summer job and they wanted me to stay and go to school. So I finished two years of school here. It was probably in 1950, maybe 1951.

GODBOLD: What was your summer job?

FREUDENSPRUNG: I worked at Rice Confectionery, actually it was a Walgreens. It was in downtown Rosenberg. They served hamburgers and we made drinks.

GODBOLD: Where was your family from originally?

FREUDENSPRUNG: My parents were from Caldwell, but my grandparents came from Europe. Both sets, my momma's side and my daddy's side came from Austria and Hungary in the 1800s.

GODBOLD: Was it hard for them when they came over here.

FREUDENSPRUNG: I am sure it was, because it was even hard for us when I was little. So I am sure it was hard for them.

GODBOLD: What type of work did your parents do?

FREUDENSPRUNG: My parents farmed, we lived on a farm.

GODBOLD: What type?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Cotton and corn.

GODBOLD: Did you have chickens and pigs?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Oh yes, chickens, pigs and a few cattle.

GODBOLD: What kind of chores did you do around the farm?

FREUDENSPRUNG: My chores were to gather the eggs, and pick up cobs because when I was little, we had just a wood stove and wood heater. I picked up cobs to make a fire in the stove. I picked cotton and cut corn stalks.

GODBOLD: Do any of your brothers and sisters live here in Fort Bend County?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes. My oldest brother lives here and I have a younger brother that lives here. I had two other brothers that lived here, but they went back to Caldwell.

GODBOLD: I imagine that you were able to go to school?

FREUDENSPRUNG: I graduated from Lamar.

GODBOLD: What kind of work did you do after you graduated?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Clerical, secretary and then years later after my children were born, I went back to work for the school district.

GODBOLD: What did you do for them?

FREUDENSPRUNG: I worked in the cafeteria for two years and then I worked in the food service office. I was head of the free lunch program.

GODBOLD: Were a lot of students on that program?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes, probably not as much as it is now, but it was quite a few. I can't tell you the number.

GODBOLD: Did anything unusual happen when you were working in the cafeteria?

FREUDENSPRUNG: No, well when I went to work I had a handicapped child at home that I had to get on the bus and off the bus so I really couldn't have a regular job. When I went to apply they said, "You have to have a certain time." So I said, "I will see you later on." Then there was a manager at George School, George was a new school at that time, and she said, "I will work you any kind of time, just come on." So I went to work for George Junior High and the first day she put me on the cash register in the snack bar and I said, "Oh God, I can't do this [both laughing]. I am not going to make it." But I did. During lunch it was really rushed but we made it.

GODBOLD: What is your husband's name?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Wilbur. We had three children. I have a daughter and a son that are living. He works for the light company, Center Point and Denise actually works for the State. She works in Child Protective Services.

GODBOLD: What did you do in your spare time, hobbies and stuff like that?

FREUDENSPRUNG: I used to do plastic canvas, which is a craft. I liked to go dancing, but I don't do that anymore [both laughing]. I do embroidery some now. All the adults are into coloring pencils and coloring pictures that are supposed to be good for your mind [both laughing]. I like to work Sudoku and I could sit there and work that all day long. It gets addictive.

GODBOLD: Me too. So what is important to you to about being part of the Czech Society?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Well, I would like to know where my roots were and it is a fun group. They go on some tours and I go on that and it is just a good little group. I would like to learn Czech better. I used to speak it fluently because my grandmother couldn't speak English so she only spoke Czech and we always had to speak Czech at home. But now I have gotten so far away from it since my mother died. I don't have anybody to talk to and I lost that and I hate that. I can see it in my mind but it will not come out [both laughing]. The words won't come out of my mouth.

GODBOLD: Did your grandmother make any special Czech dishes?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes, she did and after she was gone a long time, I asked my mom but we never could get back to it. I don't know what it was called but it was really good. When we were in the field she always had that made and it was some kind of pastry. I have never see it since then. But it was real good.

GODBOLD: She was one of those ladies that had the recipe in her head?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes. My momma always made kolaches and noodles every weekend.

GODBOLD: Was your family active in the church?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes.

GODBOLD: Which faith was that?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Catholic.

GODBOLD: Was that the Catholic Church in Rosenberg?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes, even in Frenstat we always attended. I belong to Holy Rosary.

GODBOLD: On the farm did you have hired help or was it mostly the family?

FREUDENSPRUNG: It was mainly family but when there was a lot of cotton to pick we had cotton pickers.

GODBOLD: Did you ever go on the train?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes, I used to ride the train from Caldwell to Rosenberg before I moved here. I would come to visit my aunt and uncle and my dad would put me on the train. Back then the train stopped everywhere. We didn't go to town. I think we caught the train on 36 when it came by. The best I can remember, I would get off in Rosenberg and my uncle would pick me up and after a week or so I would go back. They would put me on the train and then when it got to where I was supposed to stop you pulled this chain and the train stopped. I got off and my dad picked me up.

GODBOLD: Was it kind of exciting when you were on the train?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes, it was. I wished my children could have experienced that. It was good.

GODBOLD: Do you have a favorite memory growing up on the farm?

FREUDENSPRUNG: I was 12 years old when my sister was born. I had five brothers and she is the baby. When she came I was glad [both laughing]. Every Sunday afternoon we usually went to visit the neighbors or they came to visit us and we played with the kids.

We always played games mostly end over the house with a ball, where you throw it. You threw that over and hide-and-peek. We always played something outside. When we were in the field, momma and daddy always took a nap after dinner, after we ate. But us kids didn't. We'd go down to the creek and we got clay from the dirt there and we would come back and we would build stuff out of it, like log cabins and stuff like that.

GODBOLD: Where there a lot of neighbor kids where you lived?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes, pretty much.

GODBOLD: Do you have a favorite memory from when you were in school?

FREUDENSPRUNG: We always played ball at recess in the country school. Of course, I went to a country school and I had to walk. I always told my children that they would get hung up on the first fence that we had to go through because we go from our house and pick up kids that lived along the way. We went through the pasture and we had fences that we had to crawl through and cows and bulls were there. I don't think my daughter could make it [both laughing].

GODBOLD: Was it a one room school?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes. Actually we started out in a church. It was a church and I don't know why it was abandoned. I was in the first grade and I was going to be in a Christmas play. I know I was going to sing *Away in the Manger*. I remember that so well and the school burned down. So we didn't get to have our Christmas play that year because it must have been right at Christmas. Then they just built a one room school house.

GODBOLD: Do you remember why the school burned?

FREUDENSPRUNG: No, I really don't. I can't tell you that. I just know that it burned down.

GODBOLD: Were you asked to help take care of your little sister?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yea, but I wanted to [both laughing]. I did. It was good to have her.

GODBOLD: What are some of the big major changes you have seen in your life time?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Oh Lord, I don't know; so many of them. When I got married we lived in an apartment and then we built a house out by Sunset Park and we were the second house there. In fact we picked dewberries where Sunset Park is now.

There were no houses and now there is such a change in the traffic, my goodness. Traffic is so terrible now compared to what it was. I guess that would be the biggest thing. Of course, there are all the stores; but the traffic and houses would be the biggest. There are so many houses and so many subdivisions that were not here at the time.

GODBOLD: It is so much larger than it was. Do you remember about racial segregation?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes, I do. You know, like I said from way back when I was little, I hate to say that we were racist; I don't think we were. I guess we were if you think about it but that is how it was. I have black friends now. I worked with them, but it is different now.

GODBOLD: I know on a farm you provide a lot of things for yourself but there are always things you have to go into town to get.

FREUDENSPRUNG: Actually our farm was small. It wasn't a big farm and the land up there is not all that fertile so it would take us all week to pick a bale of cotton. We would take it to town on Saturday and daddy would stay at the gin and gin the bale of cotton and we always got to go to the movie. We would go to the movie and he would come pick us up when it was over with.

GODBOLD: Do you remember any of the movies you saw?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Roy Rogers and Gene Autry and all those good movies they don't have any more [both laughing]. That's mainly what it was and I am sure we probably got in for a quarter. Now it costs an arm and a leg to get into a movie, especially if you are going to buy popcorn or candy.

GODBOLD: Back then I guess the movies still had the news reel and the cartoons?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes, they did.

GODBOLD: How close was the doctor?

FREUDENSPRUNG: It was about 21 miles to Caldwell. I guess that is where he was. I remember when we butchered a hog and that morning I got up with an ear ache. We didn't get to go to the doctor until late at night after they were through butchering the hog. My ear was hurting me so bad. Finally my daddy took me to town. I had a pretty bad ear infection.

GODBOLD: Did your mother have a lot of home remedies?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yeah. Back then you didn't have a hot water bottle so they heated corn meal in a sack and I remember lying on that corn meal bag. It hurt me so bad, I remember that. Whenever he treated it, I don't remember what he treated it with but he had to stuff gauze in there and when they pulled that gauze out it hurt so bad I thought my ear drum was going to come out.

GODBOLD: Do you remember much about World War II? You were probably a little girl then.

FREUDENSPRUNG: I kind of do. My brother was in the Navy in World War II so he was on a ship. I remember when he left and we had some kind of radio that dad listened to the news on. A lot of times when he wrote letters home there were lines cut out because I guess that was secret stuff on where they were going so they cut that out. I remember my momma crying a lot of times and then I remember when he came home.

GODBOLD: Do you remember rationing?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes, I remember that, the shoes, flour, sugar and stamps. I remember all of that.

GODBOLD: You said you came to the Rosenberg area in 1951 and went to school. Can you describe what Rosenberg was like when you came here, when you were going to school and working?

FREUDENSPRUNG: It was not as busy as it is now. You could walk places. I used to walk from Seventh Street where I had my job. I walked back at night; I would not do that now [both laughing]. There was no crime like it is now.

My daughter had a house built in Summers Lake, that used to be a cotton field and now they have a subdivision. Everywhere they have new subdivisions that were cotton fields and they have all these houses sitting on it.

GODBOLD: Did you ever go to the county fair?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes, I went to the county fair all the time. I went when it was in Rosenberg not exactly in town and now they got it at the fairground out on Highway 36. When we first went it was so much more peaceful. There weren't so many big crowds and now I don't go any more. There are just too many people to go to the fair. I don't think at the beginning it was so much with kids, raising the cows and chickens that they do now at the fair.

GODBOLD: Do you remember when they did horse racing at the fair?

FREUDENSPRUNG: No, I don't. I remember my father-in-law telling me about when they had the German prisoners at the fairgrounds during World War II.

GODBOLD: Did he ever encounter them? Did he work with them?

FREUDENSPRUNG: No, I heard him say this. They kind of had a watch deal. Some people had binoculars and would look into the sky for enemy planes coming over. I didn't know until here lately that the submarines came so close in the Gulf. My friend's brother was killed from a submarine. He was in the Coast Guard and I said, "Where did he get shot". She said "Here in the Gulf is where they shot him." That is where they were patrolling. I didn't know that submarines came that close.

GODBOLD: You said that you lived with your aunt and uncle. What were their names?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Frank and Agnes Noska. They ran a confectionery in downtown Rosenberg. That was neat; you would go and sit down, like a soda fountain, with little chairs. I think people who went to the movies would come there after the movie and get ice cream and stuff. They made hamburgers there and I think she made chicken noodle soup. I think that was the big deal [both laughing].

GODBOLD: Did they get a lot of business from the folks off the train?

FREUDENSPRUNG: I think so. I think they had a good business for a lot of years.

GODBOLD: Can you tell me where you shopped?

FREUDENSPRUNG: The theater was right across the street and eventually it went out of business and they sold it. I think Felchman's Jewelry Store was in that building. They sold out and right now it is like an antique place because that is all that is in downtown Rosenberg now.

When I was in high school, my friend and I caught a bus one evening. You could do that then. We caught a Greyhound bus to the Rice Hotel in downtown Houston. We went to a movie and we ate at the Rice Hotel. I remember for dessert we had cantaloupe with ice cream. Then we caught the bus and came back to Rosenberg. That was a good trip. Lord you could not do that now I don't think.

Who would want to now? You have a car. Another thing that has changed is these phones that every kid has. These phones they look at. Eventually the kids are not going to know how to write and pretty much they are not going to know how to talk. I just see that they constantly have that phone in their hands.

GODBOLD: Did your parents have a phone?

FREUDENSPRUNG: They didn't have a phone when I was growing up. They didn't get a phone until I was about ten years old. Back when I was growing up we didn't have electricity either. I remember when we got electricity. I don't know how old I was but it had to be six or seven because I remember studying by the lamp, doing homework by the lamp.

GODBOLD: Was that first phone a party line?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Yes.

GODBOLD: What was that like?

FREUDENSPRUNG: If you picked it up and someone wanted to listen they would pick theirs up and listen.

GODBOLD: Is there anything else about your experiences in Rosenberg or Houston that you think is important to add?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Bill Mraz was big at that time. I had a cousin that was older than I was and she was working in Houston and living in an apartment. She had a friend that would come from El Campo and pick us up and we would go spend the weekend at their apartment and go to Bill Mraz's dances.

GODBOLD: Where were the dances?

FREUDENSPRUNG: At Bill Mraz in Houston. I want to say on 64th Street, or something like that. It's not there anymore.

GODBOLD: What kind of music was it, swing or big band or jazz?

FREUDENSPRUNG: Western and polkas, I think, mostly western when we were dancing. When I was going with my husband, even after we got married, we went dancing at the Fairchild Hall which is torn down now. The Needville Hall is still there but it is called the K. C. Hall now and East Bernard. We didn't venture far to any of the other halls.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In creating a place where Houston's Czech population could gather and socialize, Bill Mraz and his music brought to the Czech community a place where they could



pass their heritage down from generation to generation. To the citizens of Houston, the Bill Mraz Dance Hall represented a down-home, country place, where "happy hearts", family entertainment and an educational experience could always be found.

The iconic, cultural dance hall located on 34th Street in Houston, Texas, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on March 5, 1998. However, it was delisted on December 22, 2004, after being destroyed by a fire in October 2004.

GODBOLD: Did you go to the one in Guy?

FREUDENSPRUNG: No, we didn't go to Guy. I don't know why we didn't go there.

GODBOLD: I appreciate you stopping by and talking with me today.

Interview ends