

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Joyce Earline Molly Bezecny Lolley**

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Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

Group: Czech Heritage Society

13 Pages



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Transcript

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

LOLLEY: I was born in Rosenberg, Texas, on November 7, 1935, on the farm on Power Line Road. There was a house there. They tore it down and made a chicken coop out of it, so you can say I might be born in the chicken coop [both laughing]. My full name is Joyce Earline Molly Bezecny Lolley.

GODBOLD: What were your parents' names?

LOLLEY: My dad was Willie Joe "Bill" Bezecny and my mother was Edith Kalmus. My stepmother's name was Mary Bezency. I have a brother, Melvin Bezecny, who was born in 1929.

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

LOLLEY: My grandparents lived in Schulenburg first. They bought five farms in Rosenberg when they came, and they lived on them. Back in those days, they did not have social security, so when they ran out of money they sold a farm. They also had property downtown on Avenue I and Ward Street. They had about half of that city block. They had a house on the corner and two more houses, one was my aunt's, a garden and the back was another aunt's house. Back in those days, it was in the country, and grandma said she saw a cougar outside one time.

GODBOLD: Where were your grandparents before they were in Schulenburg?

LOLLEY: They came from Czechoslovakia, probably the Moravia area.

GODBOLD: What type of work did you do?

LOLLEY: I worked at Woolworth's when they opened the store in Rosenberg. Then I stayed home with the children, and then I worked at the post office. In October, I will have retired 25 years, and that is how long I worked there. I have been retired now as long as I worked there.

GODBOLD: You said your parents were farmers?

LOLLEY: Daddy farmed some, but we lived on the farm. I was born on the farm in 1935, and we moved to town around 1940. I was not even five yet, so it would not quite be 1940. We lived on Fifth Street, and I went to school at First Holy Rosary Catholic School. It was just two blocks from where we lived. I was one of the first students, and I started at five years old. I belonged to the church and I was one of the first baptisms for Father Jerome Tyldka, who was later a monsignor. That was the old church. The church building is not there any longer, but the school building is still there.

GODBOLD: When you moved into town, what did your father do?

LOLLEY: He had a Café, beer joint, family place downtown. I think it was pretty cool because it was an orange cinder block building. They had a bar, two domino tables and a kitchen. They served chili, stew, and hamburgers. It is torn down now. It belonged to Uncle Tom first, and daddy bought it. That is what they made their living at until they moved to Fairchilds. He worked that little place and cooked meals for the ginners. Mom cooked meals for the ginners when they ginned cotton out at Fairchilds, and I made pies and cakes for her to give to them for dessert.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Ginning is the process of removing the seeds and debris from cotton. The term comes from the cotton gin, invented by Eli Whitney in 1794. "Ginners" were workers who operated the cotton gins. www.heddels.com/dictionary/ginning/

GODBOLD: Was there a favorite cake or pie that you made?

LOLLEY: Everybody likes my coconut cream pie, and so do I.

GODBOLD: Did your father get a lot of business from the railroad?

LOLLEY: Yes. It was not a fancy restaurant, and the railroad men down the line would always say, "Stop there," because my step-mom made the best chili, stew and hamburgers. The hamburger I eat now, that tastes pretty close to my mom's, is at Schultz Family Restaurant, that half pounder.

GODBOLD: Did you marry?

LOLLEY: I did. Edward Vernon Lolley on November 14, 1951. We were married in Oklahoma, and our first two children were born there. In 1955, we moved to Fifth Street just a half block from where I lived as a child. We lived there for seven years, and in 1962, we bought daddy's house. In 1942 Daddy bought a two-story house in Rosenberg which had been built in 1941. I bought it from him in 1962, and I am still there. We've added on.

GODBOLD: I know you had children, describe them?

LOLLEY: Vernon Eugene Lolley was born October 17, 1952, in Oklahoma. He was a preemie, 3 pounds and 5 ounces, but he is a big man now. Susan Yvonne Lolley was born on July 13, 1954, and was a few months old when we moved back to Rosenberg. Darlene Kay Lolley was born on July 26, 1961, and was born over here at Polly Ryon which is now Oak Bend.

GODBOLD: Do they still live around here, or have they gone far away?

LOLLEY: My son, Gene, and daughter, Susan, live about two blocks apart. We go to church every Saturday, then go eat after church and play dominoes after that. My youngest daughter, Darlene, lives in West Columbia, Texas and in Colorado.

GODBOLD: Was dominoes one of the things you did with your free time when you were growing up?

LOLLEY: Grandpa Kalmus taught us dominoes, that was my mother's daddy. The Bezecny all played dominoes.

GODBOLD: What did you do in your spare time when you were not working at the Post Office?

LOLLEY: My husband died on December 21, 2004, the Christmas it snowed. It made it a little bit easier for everybody that we had snow on Christmas Eve, and we were all together. Prior to his death we traveled in our RV for 13 years. After that, I started doing more volunteering.

I've been working with the Fort Bend Museum Docent's since the 1970s. I still belong, and I am still active in it. I am a Fort Bend Historical Commissioner. I belong to Friends of the Library and serve as secretary. I'm a member of the Czech Heritage Society and their secretary. I'm treasurer at (American Association of Retired People (AARP)). I have several 55 Plus clubs that I go to. What else? Oh, the Railroad Museum, of course. I was one of the first members there, and I was part of the book about the Rosenberg History. We went to Rene Butler (of Another Time Soda Fountain) and did that *Historic Downtown Rosenberg*. I got to sign the book. I am an author, sort of.

GODBOLD: What was your specific role in the book?

LOLLEY: Many people would meet every month, bring pictures, get pictures from other

people, and gather historical information. Just before it was published, there were five of us that met; Larry Barcak, Rene Butler, myself, Joyce Lolley, Von-Maszewski, and Frank Gutowsky, he used to work at the theater downtown. We worked probably six months or longer to do that, but it was a really fun thing to do. Some of the proceeds we have gotten from the book were used to buy a bench in downtown Rosenberg.

GODBOLD: Do you have a favorite memory from your time as a docent at the museum?

LOLLEY: Well, actually yes, and it is a good thing. At first, it was just a house, it had the old wallpaper and that happy stuff. Back in that time, people would bring their silver (for everyone to eat off of), and we would have a party in the home. We would serve food and drinks. I remember Dr. Knolle's wife, Jean and I, would make hors d'oeuvre and all this kind of this stuff. I think that was one of the coolest things with the museum – we could go inside and pretend that we were living there before it was a museum.

GODBOLD: So on your family's farm, what kind of crops were they growing?

LOLLEY: Cotton. I never picked any cotton. I wasn't even five when we moved to town, but mother said I was out there under the wagon in the shade while they picked cotton. One of these little cotton-picking boys came and kissed me, and so I got kissed, you got loved out in the field. I think my brother had to pull a sack because he used to talk about that quite often. He is 86 now, and I am taking him to Praha Monday. Praha is just on the other side of Schulenburg. The Catholic Church, one of the painted churches, has a mass and celebration of the founding of it every year. They have this big event, and people come back every year. It gets bigger and bigger. They used to cook this stew in this big kettle, but now you go and they have a meal. The hall is still not air conditioned, and it is going to be in August. But, they have the outside pavilions, kind of like when we have a bazaar here now. Of course, they have the Czech music and the polka music.

Our meeting of the Czech Heritage Society today is to talk about the dance halls of Texas. I am quite excited. My uncle Henry Brosch was with the orchestra, and I used to spend summers with them. There is a book about Jimmy Brosch (see next page). He was a nephew and a band leader, too. I grew up around music.

GODBOLD: That orchestra that you talked about, did it travel to different dance halls.

LOLLEY: They did mostly around there, but actually at that time period, the Czech bands played a lot of weddings. Uncle Henry played events in Schulenburg, Flatonia, or Rosenberg. A lot of people here remember going to his dances. Jimmy was younger.

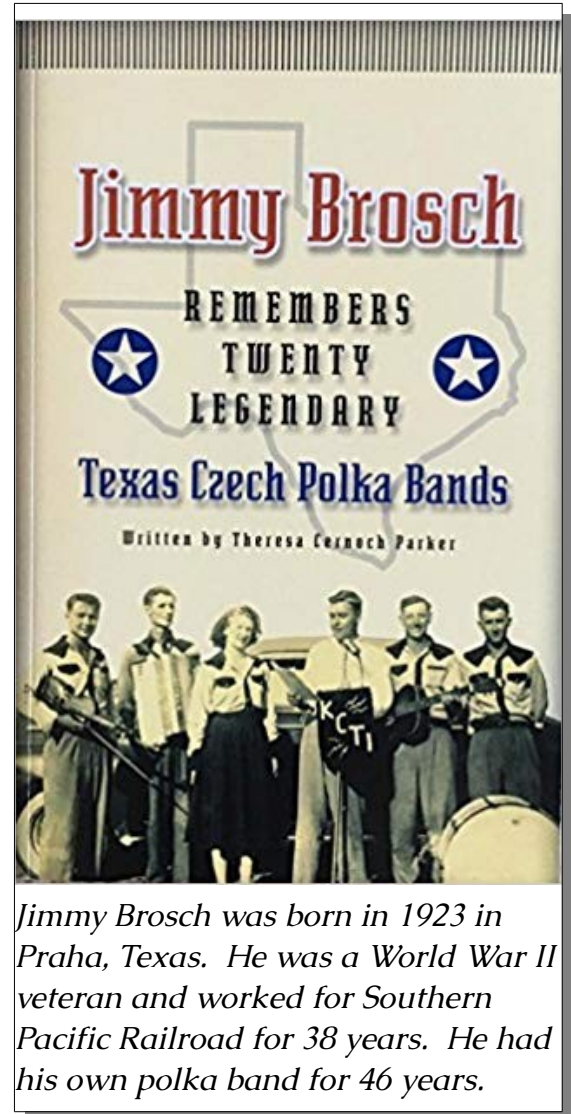
I remember when I spent the summer with my Uncle Henry, and I had to go back home to Houston. Jimmy drove me, but he had played with the band the night before and was tired. He was taking a truck full of eggs to Houston to sell. He would stop every little bit and run around the truck. I think it was to wake him up because he had not had enough sleep. That was kind of interesting.

GODBOLD: Did you play an instrument?

LOLLEY: I never did. Daddy tried to play the accordion a little bit. I loved music and still do to this day. I love music, and I love to dance. As a matter of fact, my grandson got married on the 23rd of July, and I got to dance four times, yea. The old gal hasn't lost it [both laughing].

GODBOLD: When you moved into town in your house, did you have any sort of hired help?

LOLLEY: Daddy had some hired help at the café, and there was an incident that happened in my memory. We had a little storage house behind this white house. It was right next to the city nursery and flower shop. I would go there all the time. We had this room filled with clothes that did not fit in the house. My brother and I were out there playing, and it was cold. We had a gas lantern, and it got knocked over. It started a fire, and we ran out. He hid in the car, and I hid under a cabinet. I heard that my mother was going crazy because she thought we were still in there when the firemen came. Of course, that wasn't very far from the fire station, about six blocks, but she didn't see us, so we were kind of in trouble.



Jimmy Brosch was born in 1923 in Praha, Texas. He was a World War II veteran and worked for Southern Pacific Railroad for 38 years. He had his own polka band for 46 years.

GODBOLD: There was a volunteer fire department back in those days?

LOLLEY: Yes. Back in those days, they would blow the fire whistle on the water tower at noon to say it was noon. When I was young, we still did that.

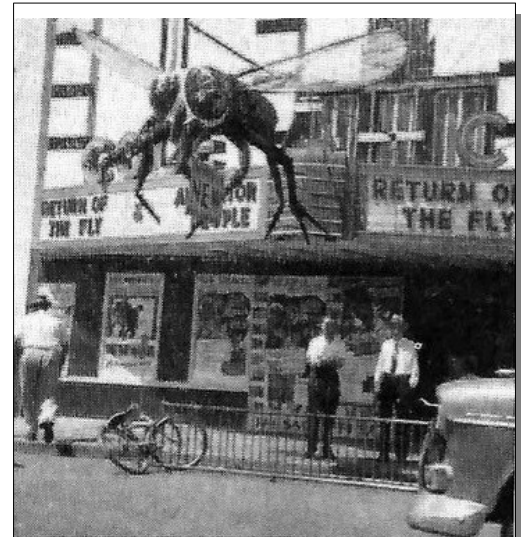
I would come to town with grandma, and we would go to Bergman's Grocery. She would bring eggs to sell, and if I was good, I would get one those cookies in that jar. They had cookies in jars and fruit stands outside. Next to my daddy's café, they had Hocheman's, where he sold sugar cane. We would get a piece of sugar cane and chew on it. Down the street to Noska's Pharmacy, we could get an ice cream. Vanilla ice cream soda is still my favorite.

We would go to the movies, the Cole Theater had musicals. My brother and I would spend Saturdays at the movies, and then we would go to the Texas Theater and see westerns. Across the street was a little house with a fence around it, and two sisters lived there. I would go over there all the time, and they would give me cookies and treats. I remember a lot about downtown because I was there all the time.

I remember when they had a "Gone with the Wind" opening. I remember when they had movie stars coming and selling saving bonds during the war. When they announced Pearl Harbor, I remember rationing and food stamps. Everything was used to support the troops there. I remember going to the railroad station and telling the guys good-bye and all the tears. I was pretty small but I do remember that a lot.

Between Rosenberg and Richmond, there were three miles that were all huisache (tree shrub). When I got to Richmond under the underpass, it was three miles to our home. I lived close to the railroad to the main Grand Central Station in Houston for a while. It was just easier to ride the train than the bus.

GODBOLD: So you rode the train a lot?



Cole's Theater in downtown Rosenberg with a traffic-stopping display for their current feature, "Return of the Fly", ca. 1959.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Huisache, pronounced "wee-satch" or sometimes "we-sach", is a shrub-to-small tree in the Legume family is a native, warm-season perennial that is commonly named "sweet acacia." The stems of the Huisache tree, which can reach 15 feet tall, have many spines that are paired, straight, pale and pin-like.

--*Courtesy of the AgriLife Extension Texas A&M System*

LOLLEY: I did. My parents divorced when I was seven, eight or nine, somewhere in there, and I lived in Houston with my mother. My brother lived in Rosenberg. So one weekend, I came here, and one weekend he came there. We went back and forth all the time, and so that is why I was riding the train back and forth.

GODBOLD: You said Mrs. Sitta owned the flower shop?

LOLLEY: She owned the Rosenberg nursery called The Flower Shop. Down on Sixth Street, was Kocurek's Flower Shop where Mary Jane, who is currently one of our museum docents, had their family flower shop.

I remember when they had that disaster in Texas City, and everybody was going there to help them. I remember when the war was over, and I remember when they said that Kennedy got shot.

EDITOR'S NOTE: **April 16, 1947 – Fertilizer explosion kills 581 in Texas**

A giant explosion occurred during the loading of fertilizer (ammonium nitrate) onto the freighter *SS Grandcamp* at a pier in Texas City, Texas. Nearly 600 people lost their lives and thousands were injured when the ship was literally blown to bits.

(<http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/fertilizer-explosion-kills-581-in-texas>)

I remember going to the farm at grandmas. She lived in that little white house, and it is still there on 2218 just down from that Handy Stop. There is a brick house next to it. We would climb the mulberry trees and put swings out when we spent the night with grandma. This is after we moved to town.

Grandpa had me fill out paperwork for him once, but I was a young mother with two kids, and I didn't think much about it. I think it had something to do with social security. I don't think he ever got social security because he never paid in.

GODBOLD: Was it hard for your family?

LOLLEY: Not really because we lived on the farm. We had our own vegetables, fruits and stuff. But I do remember that ladies could not get their nylon stockings, so they would paint their legs and draw a line up the back of their legs to show the seam to pretend that they had nylons on. They would have sugar rationing, and I don't remember all the things that we didn't have. You could not get gasoline; you could not get tires, only a certain amount. With grandma living on the farm during the war, I never thought of myself as poor. Now we don't sacrifice as much for our troops as we did back then. Maybe that is what made them the greatest generation.

I went to school at Lamar Consolidated for one year when they opened the school. I was one of the first to go to the school. Mostly I went to school in Houston.

GODBOLD: Did you have a favorite subject or favorite teacher?

LOLLEY: I liked my English teacher, and when I was in school one year, I got a letter from basketball, baseball and penmanship because I was the copy editor of the school newspaper.

I was one of the first people employed when F. W. Woolworth opened up. When Rosenberg opened up F. W. Woolworth, I helped set up the store, and I worked there. I had a counter and sometimes I would do cash, but mainly I was the personnel supervisor. Then I had my daughter, Darlene, so I quit. She was seven years below the smallest one.

GODBOLD: Did Woolworth's have a lot of employees that you supervised?

LOLLEY: Mainly I would take applications and I would watch them. I had a counter, but I would watch what they were doing. It was not as complicated as it is now. I worked for the post office in Richmond, and then I went to Sugar Land. That is where I ended up retiring; I was finance clerk there. When I first started out I was one of few women. There is an article in the *Herald Coaster* about me because there weren't a lot of women working in the post office when I started. There is a picture of me delivering mail. We got there at four o'clock in the morning, and there were 50-75 pound sacks we had to dump. When you are 5'2" and about 110 pounds at the most, you have to learn techniques.

GODBOLD: I bet you did.

LOLLEY: In those days, you could get chicks through the mail, and they would get loose on the dock. We were chasing baby chicks! It was funny. Being that I worked in Sugar Land, a lot of times at Christmas we had the prison farm, and people would send them things like fruits and vegetables. It would get stacked up in the post office because they couldn't take it. I guess we took it to food centers.

At that time, Imperial Sugar Company had kit boxes of this kind of sugar and that kind of sugar for \$3.50. They were very popular, and they would mail them out to the customers and friends. We had a lot of big shipments of that kind. Sugar Land was kind of my second home. I worked there, and I had split shifts sometimes there at the beginning. It was my other home. My husband worked shift work at NALCO, so "hello", "good morning", "good bye", and "I will see you later".

In Richmond, I started working at the little office behind the McFarland House, which is now the church. I ended up working the window, and I learned how to change the combination on the lock boxes. I mostly sorted mail and got it out to the carriers. When the mail came in the evening, you would have to throw the mail in the different city bins, sort it, bundle it, put it in sacks, and then the truck would come. One time, this big old heavy truck, with all these heavy sacks of mail, ran over my little toe, and I was the only one there. Ouch that hurt! They would sort the mail in Wharton, and by the time they got to Rosenberg, you had your mail the next day or whatever. Now it goes to a downtown distribution center, and those people don't know the people that live on the street, and they are sorting the mail. That is why it is not as efficient as it was. It's more efficient but not accurate.

We used to go fishing a lot. Our ideal vacation was to go out on a boat, take some fried chicken, and go fishing or something like that. In our day, we didn't have the kind of money that kids have these days to spend and go and have fun.

GODBOLD: Where did you go boating?

LOLLEY: We just had a little eighteen-foot boat, and we would go down to Sargent, Matagorda, somewhere there. We did a lot of river fishing. My husband loved catfish, so he did a lot of river fishing. His uncle had this place in Boling, Texas. He worked for him in the rice field and we would go there and play dominoes on Saturday.

Once he convinced me to go fishing with him, so I am carrying this bait, carrying the lantern, and it was muddy. I slipped and fell on my behind and said, "I don't think I like fishing." [both laughing]. Catching them with the pole and the little cork is fun, but on the river bank, no. Not so much.

They would go frogging and bring those frogs home. I said, "Those things look nasty! You bring those things to me when they are skinned and ready for the skillet. I do not want to see them in this stage." It would be right over there where you turn left on Foster School, that little creek there. They had cane poles there to fish with.

After I retired, I went to Prague, Germany, and Rome. It was one of the best trips I had. I went to Switzerland one time, and then we bought an RV and traveled for thirteen years. A lot of people retire, and they don't get to do anything, but we did before he died. That was fun. I didn't think it would be fun. Of course, we took a cruise off the coast. I did a lot of trips with the museum docents; they did some really good trips that I enjoyed.

GODBOLD: When you go to downtown Rosenberg these days, does it feel a lot different to you than it did?

LOLLEY: Not a whole lot. They have done a good job in making it still like hometown, small town. I would like to get a little more into it, just don't have time. I loved the Cast of Theatricals, the "Melodrama", that play was really good that is on right now. I had season tickets to that all the time. That is where this all started out with Rosenberg, Historians doing a walking tour downtown. Of course, I love the Railroad Museum and my great grandson does too. I guess you can say that my heart is with the museum more than anything.

GODBOLD: Back when you were growing up in the earlier years, do you feel like the Czech folks that moved into Fort Bend County integrated well and were accepted when they came in?

LOLLEY: Yes, because there are more of us now. I have friends in Brenham, and Brenham was not as accepting. They said that they couldn't speak English, and you could not speak Czech or German in the schools. Of course, I went to the Catholic School here, and I was one of the first ones. The children out on the farm would have to pick cotton, so they couldn't go to school when school started.

Sometimes school was later and I remember that they would come to school with their little syrup buckets; syrup used to come in a bucket, and they had their lunch in there. The city kids had theirs in a paper sack. Guess what, the country bumpkins had the last laugh because ants got into the paper sacks, and they didn't get into those cans.

I have enjoyed being part of Fort Bend County, and I am proud to be a member of the Historical Commission. I am on the Cemetery Committee also.

GODBOLD: You said you remember when the school was consolidated. Was that a popular idea or was there fighting about it?

LOLLEY: Not too much fighting. Rosenberg and Richmond were rivals. It was a little bit before my time in high school. I was in elementary, but of course I went to a private school.

GODBOLD: Were there doctors in Rosenberg?

LOLLEY: Oh, yes. They were in the downtown area. There was a doctor's office above the soda fountain. There was a Dr. Scott where Dostal's is located now. It was also where we had the Selective Service; you had to register when you turned eighteen. The ophthalmologist, Dr. Jack Wilkerson, was on Avenue G. They had an office in the back, and that is where he started out. Then they had a dentist; I don't know about dentists in Rosenberg. They had a dentist in Richmond when I was a kid. It was in the upstairs office across from Sandy McGee's.

I remember when the old hospital was at the end of Third Street. We had a lot of discussion about that when we were doing the book. It was a big two-story building. At one time, it was a rooming house or they had people that rented. Then the hospital was on Avenue G, and down at the end of that street is a dead-end street, just one block past me. That is where the other hospital was before Rosenberg Hospital was there. It was kind of a blue gray building, and I believe the emergency entrance came off of Avenue G, and the main entrance came off the main highway, but it was kind of set off the highway.

GODBOLD: Do you know who built the hospital on Third Street?

LOLLEY: I remember Judge Roan lived near there. His daughter Barbara is on our Historical Commission. They lived in Rosenberg in a big two-story house. When I was young, I went to one of her birthday parties, and I remember that they had that big screened in back porch.

GODBOLD: So Rosenberg has grown a lot in your lifetime?

LOLLEY: The last ten years to me have been tremendous, and I keep telling people that I am so glad that I live here, that I am learning the streets as I go. They are tearing up that overpass on 90 now at 762, and there is hardly any place you can go that something is not going on.

I remember when I worked in Sugar Land, and they were working on Highway 6. It took forever, but look how grand it is now. It was a two lane gravel road basically back when I was little. I am really blessed to see all of this growth, and I have seen Sugar Land grow from just a little sugar company town to what it is today. Rosenberg and Richmond are growing. Richmond is really starting to grow now. I like Del Webb and would have loved to live there, but economically it is better to stay where I am.

GODBOLD: I really appreciate you coming and talking with me today.

LOLLEY: I wrote some notes this morning and I think I covered most of them.

Interview Ends