

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Sue Reese Dinges**

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Interviewer: Roberta Terrell

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

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8 Pages



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Transcript

TERRELL: Please tell me your name and date of birth.

DINGES: My name is Barbara Sue Reese Dinges. I was born October 10, 1935 in Houston, Texas. My family never lived in Fort Bend County. I was a transfer student from grades 2 through 8 and continued grades 9-12 in the Missouri City school zone. I lived on what was Old Richmond Road and is now Bissonnet and we didn't live in the district.

TERRELL: Where would you have gone to school?

DINGES: Alief ISD. I went there the last half of 1st grade. Eventually Alief reduced to 8 grades and the high school kids had to make a choice to attend Missouri City or Sugar Land. I just continued in Missouri City.

TERRELL: How far was that?

DINGES: As the crow flies? Probably 12 miles or so.

TERRELL: Were the roads paved?

DINGES: No. Fondren Road was paved to the Braeswood area and then it was a shell road all the way to Highway 90. Riceville Road (now Gessner Road) was a dirt road that indirectly connected with Highway 90 in the Stafford area.

TERRELL: What kind of work did your parents do?

DINGES: My dad was in business with my grandfather, in the oil field tank construction business. My maternal grandfather started Federal Tank Company during the boom days in Mexia and my dad ran a branch of the office in Houston. My mother was a housewife.

TERRELL: Today we're going to talk about the Missouri City High School. Did you attend this school?

DINGES: Yes, I did. My high school years were 1949 to 1953.

TERRELL: Was it different from going to Alief?

DINGES: I only went to the last half of 1st grade in Alief and this is high school. Basically the school districts were about the same at the time. There were a lot of Hispanic kids in the Alief school district and in Missouri City, there was a separate school in DeWalt for the Hispanic children and a separate school for the black children in Arcola.

TERRELL: So it was very segregated. Do you still have friends that you went to high school with?

DINGES: Absolutely. We meet pretty often, my graduating class and some of the kids just below us.

TERRELL: Do some of them live in Fort Bend County?

DINGES: Many do.

TERRELL: Do you remember how the school was laid out?

DINGES: The elementary was a separate building on the far south end of the property. There was an opening with a walkway into the long building that was the combination junior high and high school. Junior high was on the south end and the high school on the north end. Then there was another open walkway over to the gym.

TERRELL: How did you get to school each day?

DINGES: I rode the school bus. I remember one time the bus was broken down. They didn't have an extra bus, so the bus driver came by driving a flatbed truck. Most of the children got to ride in the back, but since I was so young, the bus driver, Mr. Chiapetta, made me ride in the front cab. I did not like that at all. I wanted to be in the back with the rest of the kids. (laughing)

TERRELL: What was your life like in the summer?

DINGES: Since I didn't live in a "community", if I wanted to participate in anything with my classmates, I had to be driven to the classmates homes. After I learned to drive, I could drive myself to do things during the summer.

TERRELL: What about in winter? Were there extra-curricular activities?

DINGES: We had all kinds of things, such as football, basketball, and volleyball.

TERRELL: What about girl sports?

DINGES: We had volleyball and basketball. Our superintendent, Mr. Rodgers, would not let us play full court basketball, only half-court basketball.

TERRELL: That's interesting. Where did you eat lunch?

DINGES: There was a separate wooden building that housed the cafeteria and kitchen.

TERRELL: Did you take your lunch?

DINGES: No, I always bought the lunch.

TERRELL: Did most people buy their lunch?

DINGES: I think so. A lot of the mothers of the kids I went to school with were cafeteria workers.

TERRELL: Were they volunteers or were they paid?

DINGES: They were paid. Their bread pudding was especially good!

TERRELL: Do you remember any of your teachers?

DINGES: Mrs. Frances King was the social studies teacher. She lived here in Missouri City. The English teacher was Miss Dorothy Haygood McSparran.

TERRELL: Did you have a favorite teacher?

DINGES: Mrs. Minelma Tyng was the business teacher. She taught typing, shorthand and bookkeeping. She was my favorite. I was very interested in those subjects so I majored in Business Education in college. I taught school probably 10 years before I ever got to teach my major subject. I started teaching in Lufkin ISD. I had a self-contained class of 7th graders and taught everything except P. E., art and music. I had a lot of learning to do to teach all those subjects while I had three babies in diapers at home.

Then, when I came home to Houston in 1962, I taught junior high language arts in Fort Bend Independent School District. It was called RWS – reading, writing, and spelling. I taught at the original junior high in Sugar Land, which is now Lakeview Elementary. Then they built Dulles Junior High School and I taught there until they closed it and Dulles High School took over the buildings. Then I went to Missouri City Junior High on the old Missouri City ISD campus.

TERRELL: Who was your best friend in high school?

DINGES: Probably Sue Brinkman Alston. She was Sue B. and I was Sue R.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Sue Brinkman Alston interview on this web site at <http://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=30520>

TERRELL: Do you remember any of your other classmates?

DINGES: Oh heavens, yes. There were twin girls from Alief, Jiggie Herndon Hester and Mickey Herndon Ross. Bessie White who lived the rest of her life on the same property she was raised on, right by Jones Elementary School. Norma Dietrich MacAllister, who is deceased. Betty Hambrick Davis (deceased) joined us in high school, but the others were in elementary school with me. Bill Scanlin was from Missouri City and Glen Jochev lived in Stafford. Louis Rychlik, Gerald Rivette (originally from Louisiana) lived in Blue Ridge where my husband, Gene, was raised. That's the area out FM 2234 (Texas Parkway) where the salt mine and oil field are.

TERRELL: So your husband went to the same school?

DINGES: Yes, he went to Missouri City schools as well, 1st grade through 12th. He was one year ahead of me in school.

TERRELL: Who was your principal?

DINGES: Mr. E. A. Jones.

TERRELL: What did you do for entertainment?

DINGES: On Thursday nights, we played games in the gym. This was mostly all year round, but probably not in football season. We had Christmas dances in the gym with a big Christmas tree. We had Halloween carnivals. Those were usually moneymakers for the junior and senior classes. Arthur Murray Dance Studio from Houston taught dance lessons. We had a juke box in the gym so we could dance at lunchtime. It was fun.

We had basketball and volleyball tournaments, donkey basketball that was sponsored by the FFA (Future Farmers of America). Even Rice University used our gym for basketball tournament overflow. We had plays, band and choir concerts, Christmas and graduation dances, 8th grade and 12th grade graduation ceremonies, class reunions. When Missouri City School District had class reunions, we had them for anybody who ever went to Missouri City. The last one we had was in 2005 at Sugar Creek Country Club. No one has taken it on to sponsor or organize one since then. My generation retired! (laughs)

I think the gym was used for some weddings and receptions at one time. It was used as a polling place for voting. It was also used during WWII as a place for the women to wrap bandages. It was very well used.

TERRELL: When you danced at lunch, was this boy/girl dancing?

DINGES: Oh, yes. Absolutely!

TERRELL: You had a fun school.

DINGES: We DID. I always said if I had a choice, I would go through high school again. It was such a wonderful, fun experience. You knew everybody, the community was involved, parents would come to the dances sometimes and sit in the bleachers and watch the kids dance when we had prom or graduation dances. Senior prom was always in the gym. The banquet was in the school cafeteria. We didn't go off to fancy hotels.

TERRELL: How many people were in your graduating class?

DINGES: 28.

TERRELL: What was the ceremony like?

DINGES: It was pretty traditional, with the caps and gowns and the band playing the processional and recessional. It was in the gym.

TERRELL: Were you involved with FHA (Future Homemakers of America)?

DINGES: I was involved with FHA and I was the FFA Queen one year. I played volleyball and basketball. I was a cheerleader for several years and was in the Pep Squad. I was never in the band but I was in the choir. Everybody was part of something. I didn't participate in the County Fair.

TERRELL: Tell me about FHA.

DINGES: I took Homemaking one year and then I relied upon the business courses as my elective subjects. Mrs. Alice Ehmann was the homemaking teacher. I remember making biscuit dough. I dropped the dough on the floor so I had to take a pinch of the surrounding girls dough so I would have enough to show the teacher when she came by! (laughing)

TERRELL: How was the Missouri City High School gym laid out in terms of lighting, flooring, etc.

DINGES: It had wooden floors and they were refinished many, many times. I'm sure they have the original floors. I don't think they were ever replaced.

TERRELL: Was it cool?

DINGES: No. There were open windows. Not ones that raised up and down but were pushed out. [glass jalousies]. It wasn't too bad.

TERRELL: Was there a lot of light?

DINGES: Yes. There was a lot of good ceiling light.

TERRELL: Do you remember any of the coaches?

DINGES: Lawrence Elkins was a coach before he became superintendent of FBISD. Mrs. Rose Bono Morris was the girls' coach.

TERRELL: Did you know anything about the school board?

DINGES: Oh, yes. A lot of the parents were on the school board. Mr. W. A. Brinkman was one of them; Mr. Claude J. Borden, Shirley Borden Renfrow's dad; Mr. Ralph O. Senior, Sr. from the Fresno area, and Mr. Lawrence Vacarro from Stafford.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Lawrence Vaccaro interview on this web site at <http://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=30602>

TERRELL: How was the school funded?

DINGES: By the taxpayers.

TERRELL: Was the gym or campus used as a community center?

DINGES: We had things in there for the community but other than voting, I don't remember any activities we had in there just for the community. Except the Halloween carnivals that was open to the community.

TERRELL: Do you have memories of the consolidation with Fort Bend?

DINGES: That was after my graduation from Missouri City high School in 1953 and shortly before I started teaching in FBISD in 1962.

TERRELL: Did your children go to school in Fort Bend?

DINGES: Yes. All four of my sons graduated from Dulles High School. They started in Junior High there. At that time, teachers could bring their children to the school where they taught. I lived in Houston at that time. I moved to Fort Bend County in 2005, when my husband passed away.

I remember we had a superintendent named Mr. Patton. He was a graduate of A & M. On Friday's we had a belt line out on the football field. The boys who had misbehaved or cursed ran the belt line. School was dismissed, we all went to the football field and sat in the bleachers. The boys who weren't being punished lined up on two sides with their belts off. One time Mr. Patton had to run through there himself!

TERRELL: What did he do?

DINGES: I don't remember. I think he used a curse word that Mrs. Sammie Petrie, who was the assistant principal and later became Mrs. L. P. Rodgers, overheard. So he ran the belt line, too.

TERRELL: About how many swats was that? Sounds painful!

DINGES: Absolutely. There was a double line and there were probably 20 on each side. That was a lot. I don't remember how long Mr. Patton was here or how often that event occurred. I'd never heard of it before and never heard of it afterwards.

Mr. Leon Scarcella was the band director, and when I was in the 3rd grade, there was a boy who was probably 15 years old in the 3rd grade. He shot a peashooter and hit somebody near the eye. He knew he was in trouble and he ran away. Mr. Scarcella was very good at running and he caught the boy and brought him back to be punished.

TERRELL: Ha! I really appreciate your input and nice to see you, Sue.

Interview ends