

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Georgia Kovar Sury**

Interview Date: 06/03/2011

Interviewer: Joanne Hargrove

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

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11 Pages



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Transcript

HARGROVE: When and where were you born?

SURY: I was born in Fort Bend County, about 18 miles from Damon, on June 19, 1918.

HARGROVE: Were you born at home?

SURY: Yes, at home.

HARGROVE: What type of work did your father do?

SURY: He was a farmer.

HARGROVE: And your grandfather?

SURY: I didn't know my grandfather. He was born in Czechoslovakia.

HARGROVE: Tell me about a typical day on the family farm.

SURY: Well, we got up early in the morning and went to the fields. We did our work, and chopped, picked or whatever we did until about 11:30. Then we went to the house and ate our lunch, took a little nap (chuckles) and went back to work. We stayed there until about sundown. Went home, ate our supper, took our bath and went to bed. That was our day! (laughing)

HARGROVE: What crops did your family farm?

SURY: Cotton and corn.

HARGROVE: Did you have memories of the cotton gin?

SURY: We just picked the cotton, and my daddy brought it to the gin, and they ginned it. From the start, it took a couple of hours to gin a bale. Now, they just run it through there in a couple of minutes.

HARGROVE: What was a normal day in your childhood other than working in the fields?

SURY: I went to school at Woodrow School, about a mile from my home. They used to ride buggies to school. Sometimes my neighbors, their children, would come down and pick me up. Sometimes they'd come get me on a horse, and I didn't like that. I was always scared of horses, and I'd rather walk. (laughs) So, I walked there every morning (chuckles). I went through the eighth grade.

When I first started school, it was a one-room school. Then they added on another little room. There was just one teacher, and they taught all the grades, first through seventh. The teacher had two or three grades at the same time!

HARGROVE: Tell me about your husband? Was he born here?

SURY: Yes, he was born in Fort Bend County, in Needville. His name was Arnold. We got married in 1940.

HARGROVE: So it was before the war.

SURY: Just when it was going to start. He was in the Home National Guard for a while.

HARGROVE: He didn't go overseas?

SURY: No. We farmed. We stayed on the farm from '40 to '47. Then we moved to Needville, and he went to work for my brother-in-law at the curing plant. He didn't stay there too long. He didn't like the job so he went back to farming. He did all kinds of stuff. He baled hay for people and worked wherever he could to make a living.

HARGROVE: So you were a housewife?

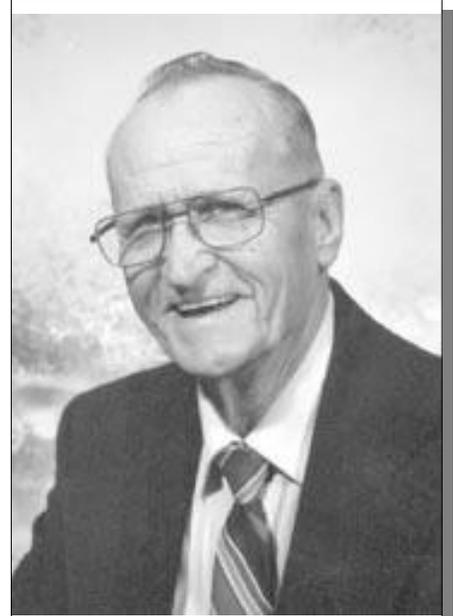
SURY: Yes, (chuckles) and I have seven children. My husband made enough money for us to live, and I had ALL those children. I used to sew all the girls clothes and even the boys, their shirts. We raised chickens and at that time the feed came in feed sacks that could be used. It was nice material so I made a lot of their stuff out of that. Even when they went to school, I did all the sewing for my kids.

HARGROVE: What were their names?

SURY: Jimmy, Robert, Genevieve, Thomas, Cathy, Donnie and Jerome.

HARGROVE: Do any of your children live in Needville?

SURY: Jimmy lives in Fairchild, Bobby lives in Needville, Thomas lives on Mennonite Road going to Rosenberg, Genevieve lives in Columbus, Kathy lives a little piece out of Needville, Jerome lives in Needville, and Donnie lives in Houston. I THINK I got all of them!



*Georgia and Arnold Sury
were married for 63 years,
until his death in 2008.*

HARGROVE: Is there any other type of work in Needville besides working on a farm?

SURY: Yes, my sister and my brother-in-law owned a confectionery for a number of years. My brother-in-law and my sister have owned a Zero Market for many a year. My oldest sister and her husband owned a garage in Fairchild.

HARGROVE: So everybody didn't farm.

SURY: No. Just one of my sisters lived on a farm.

HARGROVE: Have you seen a lot of changes in Needville in your lifetime?

SURY: Oh yes! A long time ago, the streets were so narrow. They had places where you could tie horses when they came to town. Roads were muddy! I remember walking to school. There was no road, just kind of a path, and I'd have to walk in my boots. A lot of times the mud was running over the top of my boots by the time I got to school! Many times, it was freezing in the winter and the school was locked. We'd have to wait until the teacher would come and build a fire in this big old stove. We'd sit around the stove. The good old days (laughs)! There were good days.

HARGROVE: That's the way life was.

SURY: Now the time goes so fast. At that time, it seemed like it was FOREVER from one Sunday to another. The weeks were SO long, we thought. But now the world turns so fast, a week is gone in no time!

We used to do a lot trading with the Rabinowitz Brothers and the Dailey Brothers. That's where we did most of our shopping.

HARGROVE: And probably Blaises?

SURY: Oh, yes. The Blaises even had a store in Needville at one time. They had a big fire there. A bunch of stores burned up, but I don't know exactly what year. I think it might have been somewhere around '47 because it was right after we moved to town. They used to have a theater here, too, but I never really went to the show there. My husband used to like to go to westerns and those old cowboys that were running around.

HARGROVE: Tell me about your family.

SURY: I had some good parents. They were real church-going.

HARGROVE: Which church?

SURY: The Catholic Church. We went every Sunday. We'd come to Needville, and it was about eighteen miles we had to drive. Many times, the roads were muddy and the car would be going this way and that way. First thing we'd know, it would slide up in the ditch! (chuckling)

HARGROVE: Did most of the people in Needville go to the Catholic Church?

SURY: Well, I think at that time. I think it was a majority of them. I don't know when the church was built here. My confirmation was in 1929.

HARGROVE: Did you marry in that church?

SURY: Yes. All my children were baptized there. I got married and hope to be buried from there!

HARGROVE: Even though you had to drive 18 miles to church, you still were involved?

SURY: Oh, yeah. We really went to church every Sunday. It was VERY seldom that we missed, even if the weather was bad. We lived on the farm until we got married.

Then my mother and daddy took in my cousin (Charlie Dybala). They didn't adopt him, but took him in and raised him after his parents died. They raised him as their own, and didn't change his name or nothing. When we got married, we had a double wedding with my cousin Charlie. My brother got married a week before, so then my mother and daddy moved to town, and my brother stayed on the farm.

HARGROVE: What was his name?

SURY: Joe Kovar, Jr., and my daddy's name was Joe, also. My brother named his son Joe Kover III, who lives on part of the farm.

HARGROVE: Does he still plant cotton?

SURY: He retired a few years ago, but they planted cotton and maize and I guess corn on the farm. It was a different life. Sometimes I think it was better. We didn't have all this.

HARGROVE: It was simple.

SURY: Yes. Maybe we didn't have everything, but we didn't have to have everything like people do now.

HARGROVE: What did you do if you wanted to celebrate something? Did you have a party or a festival at church?

SURY: Well, we used to visit with just about all the families that went to church, and there were a WHOLE bunch of families. Every Sunday after church, we would have lunch at somebody's house. We'd take turns. There was a bunch of kids who'd run around and play, and the mothers would cook the dinners. We had no refrigerators, so they had to do everything at the last minute. I always remember the men would eat first at the table. We would serve it at the table – not like now. Then the women would eat and then the children would eat. We always had plenty to eat. Now, you see, the children are first! (laughs)

HARGROVE: Did you have church bazaars?

SURY: Oh, yes.

HARGROVE: Was it a big deal?

SURY: Yes, it was pretty good sized. But at that time, there weren't THAT many people, so you served the food on the table, in bowls. Us girls were probably sixteen years old or so. We had to serve the people and make sure that everything was taken care of. It was a LOT of work, but it was nice. We had a church bazaar on August 15th.

HARGROVE: That was an every year thing?

SURY: Yes.

HARGROVE: Let's talk about the farm a little bit. When you had your crops come in, were you paid for your crops, and then you had money to pay your bills?

SURY: Not at that time. The crops weren't taken in by that time. Now they grow everything so much faster than they used to. I remember picking a lot of time, we had to pick what was left, and there was frost in the morning. It was cold. We'd have to go pick every boll we could get! One year, I remember my daddy made five bales of cotton, and he gave us kids each one bale.

HARGROVE: How much was a bale of cotton worth?

SURY: The best I can remember, I think \$500 or something like that.

HARGROVE: So he probably made about \$2,500 that year, when he had the five bales.

SURY: Of course, he didn't have that much expense, like nowadays. Now you have to put out fertilizer, but we had horse manure because we had horses. You raised the corn to feed them. It was hard work, but we made it. We didn't feel like we had to suffer or anything.

I remember when they would ration food. We had to have stamps for sugar and stuff like that. You could only buy what you would use. We had some kind of ticket or something, and you could only get so much.

HARGROVE: Do you remember rationing during the war, when it was hard to get food at the grocery store?

SURY: Yeah.

HARGROVE: Did you raise a garden?

SURY: Oh, we ALWAYS had a garden. My daddy was real good at that. We had all kinds of fruit trees. We raised all the fruit there was, I guess. We grew grapes, strawberries, peaches, pears, figs, plums. You name it, we had it. We had a good life.

HARGROVE: Did you make jelly?

SURY: Oh, yes, and we canned a lot. We had our own meat, always. They would butcher always on Saturday. There was like a club. More people belonged to it. Every Saturday somebody would butcher a calf, and they would cut it up and share it. So, we had fresh meat that way. We raised our own chickens and geese. I remember geese chasing me sometimes (chuckles). It was fun!

HARGROVE: Do you remember getting air conditioning or having telephones in your house?

SURY: Oh, we didn't have air conditioning until after we got married. We didn't have electricity until 1941. About a year after we got married, we got electricity on the farm. No phones. Just mail, and we had to go a pretty good distance to get the mail.

HARGROVE: 1941 to get electricity for the first time!

SURY: Oh yeah. That was something! We had LIGHTS! We used to have kerosene lamps and candles.

HARGROVE: Did you have a wooden stove to cook on?

SURY: Oh, yes, a wooden stove and a wooden heater, and it was COLD. We'd sit around the heater. We had a big house, a two-story house. But, it was a good life. Outdoor toilets...using Sears Roebuck catalogs (laughing).

HARGROVE: Did you have a septic tank? Or just outdoor?

SURY: Just the outdoors. We had running water to the house, but we didn't have it IN the house. We had it just on the porch.

HARGROVE: Like a pump?

SURY: Well, we had a windmill, and they ran it to the porch. Then we had a faucet there to bring water into the house to wash ourselves. We had a cistern for water, and under that cistern, we had a big bathtub. When you wanted to take a bath, they'd always have to bring us some more water in the wintertime because it was COLD. I don't think we'd have to go through all that now.

HARGROVE: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

SURY: I had one brother and there were six of us girls.

HARGROVE: What were their names?

SURY: The first one was Mary and she married S. A. Stavinoha. They had a filling station and a garage in Fairchild. She had two boys and a girl. Then the second one was Annie, and she married Richard Stavinoha. They were brothers and they farmed. The third one was Elizabeth, and she married Jim Barta. They had that confectionery in Needville for many years, and they didn't have children. The next sister was Rosie, and she didn't marry. She lived to be a hundred. Then there was Joe, and he married Henrietta Bartosh the same year we did, and they had three girls and two boys. Then my cousin (Charlie Dybala) that my mother and daddy raised, got married at the double wedding with my husband and me. He married Pauline. And Frances, married Ladd Stavinoha, and they had the store here in town. And me, I married Arnold Sury. I'm the last one, and we had seven children.

HARGROVE: How long have you been married?

SURY: This year, on October 8th, it will be 71 years. We were married 65 [years] when he passed away.

HARGROVE: You were a young bride. How old were you when you got married?

SURY: I was twenty-three, I think.

HARGROVE: You have a big family!

SURY: Yes. We all made it! Always went to church, all of us. I always took the kids. I never had no baby sitters. I remember one time, I left the first one of the children at my mother's for a little while. They had a submarine in Richmond. They weren't real, but they had that submarine there. It was more or less a fundraiser, so we went to see that, that one time. We didn't go too much (chuckles). You know, you couldn't go too much. We had a long way to drive. To drive in, it was about eighteen miles into Needville.

HARGROVE: Did you go to the Fort Bend County Fair?

SURY: We went a few times, but not too many times.

HARGROVE: Did you ever have animals in the fair?

SURY: My children did. Not so much in the county fair. Needville has a fair of its own.

HARGROVE: Tell me about where your husband and family came from.

SURY: My husband was born over here around Needville, somewhere. We stayed on the farm about the first seven years, and then we moved to town and built a house over here, next to the light company. We lived there until '72, and then we bought a house on Padon Road, and I've lived there since then. That must be about thirty-nine years?

HARGROVE: Where were your parents born?

SURY: Czechoslovakia. Two of my nieces went to Czechoslovakia about twelve years ago and found the place where my daddy was baptized in the church. My daddy and his sister came with his uncle. I think this uncle lived somewhere around Fayetteville, and he told his sister that he was going to take care of the children. He needed them, I think, to help him in the field. He was a farmer, and when they came here, he didn't treat them right. He made them work, and he didn't. When my daddy turned eighteen, he left on his own. From there on, he made it on his own somehow. Like I said, that uncle didn't treat them right. When my daddy left, that uncle forbid him to come see his sister. So, she had to take care of herself. When she turned eighteen, she also left. She found a place where some people took her in, and she helped this lady. Then she married, and they lost track of each other.

My sister-in-law went to Dr. Greenwood there in Brazoria. When they called her name, Mrs. Kovar, when it was her turn to walk in, this sister's daughter was there and heard that. She waited for her until she got out. They got to talking and found out that her mother was my daddy's sister. She had moved to Brazoria, and she passed away a couple of years before we finally found out where she lived.

The world is small. She married a Simmons and my daddy didn't know. Like I said, we didn't have no telephones, we didn't have nothing. I don't know whether she did look for him, I don't know.

HARGROVE: What about your parents?

SURY: They got married I think in 1900. I think my Daddy was born in 1884 or something like that. My daddy's name was Joseph (Joe), and my mother's name was Mary. They were over 90 when they died.

HARGROVE: When do you think you got your first car?

SURY: I remember when my daddy came home with a car, the first one. I don't remember what year it was. I was about eight years old or something like that. We thought we had something! Which we DID. (laughs)

HARGROVE: How old are you now?

SURY: On June 19th, I'm going to be 93. I was born in 1918.

HARGROVE: So it would have been about 1926 when you got a car for the first time. What kind of car was it?

SURY: I don't remember. He had a car before we got married. Then in one year, I don't know what year it was, he was hauling gravel. He had dump trucks, and he was hauling gravel from the river for the county.

They were having a celebration on 4th of July at the American Legion Hall. This was some kind of fundraiser for that. They were selling tickets so he bought one or two tickets, and sure enough, on 4th of July, they drew his name, and he won this car! I think it was maybe in 1950.

HARGROVE: He DID! How wonderful!

HARGROVE: Did you make quilts?

SURY: Oh, yeah. Oh, man, I wish I HAD all the quilts I made (laughs). Wish I could see them! I finally quit. My fingers don't want to work, and my eyes don't want to look. I'm through (chuckling). Yeah, I made many a quilt. I gave, I would say maybe, fifteen of them to the church for the bazaar. Every year when they would have an auction, I would give them a quilt. I quit that, too.

HARGROVE: I've enjoyed talking to you so much! You've taught me a lot about Needville. Thank you so much for today. I appreciate your coming.

Interview ends