

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Lisa Rich Hunter**

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Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Megan Moore

Location: Historic Dew House, Kitty Hollow Park,
Missouri City, Texas

12 Pages



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*Lisa with her mother,
Marion DeFord*

Transcript

GOODSILL: This is Jane Goodsill with the Fort Bend County Historical Commission Oral History Project. Today, I'm interviewing Lisa Rich Hunter. It is October 3, 2013 and we are at the Dew House in its new location in Kitty Hollow Park, in Missouri City, Texas.

I understand you lived in this house at one point in your life.

HUNTER: Yes, I was here when I was sixteen years old. My parents rented this home from Muffie Moroney. At that time, the house was in its original location on Highway 6.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Linda "Muffie" Moroney interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=42954>

When she inherited the home from Jessie Dew, she lived here for some years after Jessie passed away. Then she and her husband ended up having to move to Virginia, or somewhere on the East Coast, and so she tried to rent it.

Luckily, we were in town from overseas. My dad worked for oil companies overseas. We were transferred to Houston with an oil company and needed a place to stay temporarily. I had a horse overseas and wanted a horse here. My dad was trying to figure out where to put a horse in Houston. It just so happened that the plantation fit our bill as far as a place to stay and a place to house my horse.

Muffie said, "Oh, that's great. I'll leave you my horses too." So, while I was here, I got not only my horse, but I got her two horses and a little pony. I was in hog heaven as a sixteen-year-old girl who was very 'horsey'. I had four horses to take care of and all this acreage. I used to ride in the pecan orchard that was next door. I mowed. They left the old-time riding lawn mower, and I mowed the yard. I let the horses go in the back yard because it would grow so fast. I'd turn the horses out from the pasture, let THEM mow it down and eat it in the back yard, and then I would get in there and mow all the way to Highway Six around that beautiful magnolia tree that was in the center. It just looked fabulous back then. We really took care of it. Nancy Woods came once or twice a week.

GOODSILL: Tell us about Nancy.

HUNTER: Muffie talked about how Nancy was kind of part of the house there. Mom said, "Oh, we would like Nancy to stay." So, we employed Nancy for the year we were here. She came once a week. She told us all the history and how to take care of the house and she helped my mom. The two of them were partners in maintaining the house.

It was great to have Nancy there to fill us in on everything. She and my mom became lifelong friends. They met here just two weeks ago. I brought Mom down to visit with Nancy.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Nancy Stephenson Woods interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=45528>

It was a project to maintain that older home and all that land. We had lived in company housing, like base housing overseas, and really never had a setup like this. So, it was a first for us, and we were running around and figuring out how to take care of this big place, too, and just thoroughly enjoyed it. I think because of the time I spent at this plantation, it made me appreciate having land. So, of course now, my husband and I live on ten acres that I have my horse on. I thoroughly enjoy taking care of my land and mowing. I think it all came from living on this plantation. And the feel, when you lived here, you just can't imagine. Really, what it was like to live in an historical house like this; it was a time warp – a move back in time. It's just amazing how it just got into your blood like that.

GOODSILL: What year was that?

HUNTER: It was 1975. I have a picture here with my parents. Nancy set the table for us, with all the Dew heirloom furniture and china.

GOODSILL: All the china was still in the house?

HUNTER: They left all her china and crystal in the butler's pantry. We were not to use it except on special occasions.



Christmas at the Dew House – Marion and William Hunter as renters in 1975. The heirloom table is set with the actual china and crystal from the butler's pantry.

Of course, Nancy called and got permission for us to use all this for Christmas. That's really the only time I remember us using any of that. We've since inherited my grandmother's stuff, and mom is very good at taking care of that. Unfortunately, I've heard we were the only renters. I think after that, Muffie had to get everything out because we were the only people who really took care of all her stuff. We could not go into certain rooms with special things in them.

GOODSILL: Which rooms were you not able to go into?

HUNTER: She left all her heirloom furniture in the formal living and the formal dining room. The bar didn't have anything except the bar. The bar was just fabulous.

GOODSILL: (laughs) I heard about the bar.

HUNTER: My brother set up his record player in there, and we would go in there and kind of dance and hang out and do stuff like that. That's all we did in the bar.

GOODSILL: The bar was kind of an add-on to the house.

HUNTER: It was added in the 1920s. It was on the side of the house outside the formal dining. There was a door on the other side of the fireplace that went to the bar. The bar ran along the back side of the dining room, so there were no windows in the dining room looking into the bar.

GOODSILL: June and Muffie told me that they used to party in there the same way that you did.

HUNTER: I know. Isn't that hysterical? It looked just like a John Wayne movie or something out of a western. It was all wood carving and brass rails on the bar. It had the mirror behind the bar with the shelves and the glasses in it. It was pristine. It looked like it had been built yesterday. It was in perfect shape. Even when we went by, you know in 2006 for the dedication, and saw the house in disrepair, I walked into that bar and it still looked the same like the day it had been built.

GOODSILL: The bar didn't get moved along with this house?

HUNTER: No. It wasn't considered original. But it was still really old-time, and it sure would have been cool if they'd maybe brought it here. It had wooden benches on the edge, and it was an all wooden floor and all wooden paneling. It still smelled like cut wood when you went in there.

GOODSILL: Is that your favorite room?

HUNTER: No, my bedroom was my favorite, but the bar was the second. So, this room was my bedroom, on the back here. We are above the kitchen, the back of the "L" above the kitchen. My bed was in a 1920s addition that had all shuttered windows around it. Unfortunately, they took that off because it was considered part of the sun room addition. It goes out to the balcony.

It was windows all the way around, so I could sit in my bedroom and have windows all around and you could see out the back of my bedroom here, basically to the horizon. You can see the pond that's still over there at the original property. It was just beautiful. It had the hardwood floor which was cool. Then I had my bathroom that was a 1920s add-on, with the black and white checkered floor and the claw foot iron bathtub. I had my own little suite when I was sixteen years old. I didn't have to share with my brother anymore. I thought it was fabulous. I'd just go right down and ride my horse every day.

GOODSILL: You were here for an entire year?

HUNTER: Yeah. One year.

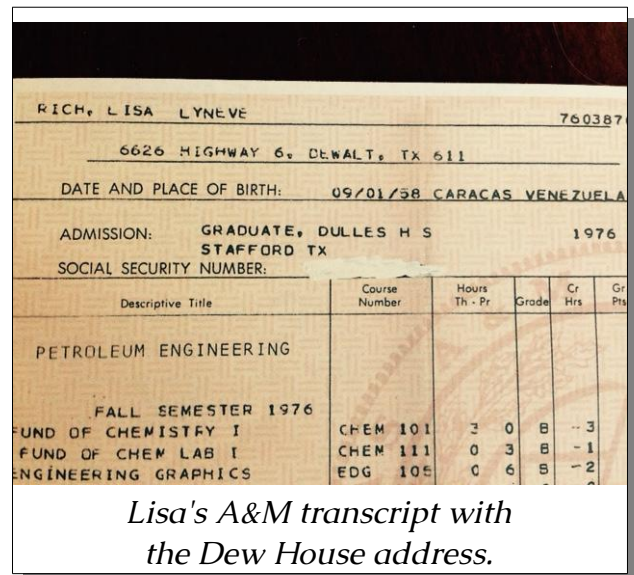
GOODSILL: So, after school, you'd come home and ride?

HUNTER: Every day after school. I graduated from John Foster Dulles High School June 2, 1976. Then I enrolled at A&M. I have a petroleum engineering degree from A&M. Here is my A&M transcript, and it lists this address: Ranch at 6626 Highway Six, DeWalt, Texas.

Dad's influence in the petroleum field – his oil field background – rubbed off.

GOODSILL: Had you lived in Texas before?

HUNTER: My mom is from Texas. My dad is from Missouri. But my mom and all her side of the family go way back to the 1800s. So, Mom had actually gone to high school here in Houston, went to UT, and then met my dad in Venezuela at the oil camps where my grandfather worked for Mobil Oil.



My mom was down there staying with her parents in Venezuela, and then Dad hired on as a new engineer with Mobil. They met down there. I was actually born in Caracas, Venezuela. So, I never really even lived in the states until I was sixteen when I lived in the DeWalt plantation.

GOODSILL: Oh, my gosh, it must have been such a culture shock!

HUNTER: Yes, it really was.

GOODSILL: But a good one?

HUNTER: Actually, living in the plantation made it perfect. How could you not just love being here? I had had horses in the desert in the Middle East, and I was not used to being in a big city. Houston was a huge culture shock coming from a little, bitty oil camp in the middle of nowhere.

GOODSILL: Where were you?

HUNTER: Dad had left Venezuela with Mobil and worked for Aramco in Saudi Arabia. We moved from Saudi Arabia to this house. He worked near the Galleria area at the Bechtel building there on Loop 610. I went from a school with 200 kids in it, to Dulles, which was huge. It had about 3,000 students in it.

To be able to be out here with my horse and away from the city, reduced the culture shock a little bit. It was a really neat place to live. We really had a good time taking care of it and just doing all the work. It was a lot of work to maintain. But my granddad, my mom's dad, would come down and help me with the horses and repair the fences. It had all those white, wooden fences.

GOODSILL: Your grandfather came out and worked on that? Just out of love?

HUNTER: Yeah. He liked horses. He would come ride with me, and he was a very good handyman. He was an engineer with Mobil Oil. He was a pipeline engineer, actually.

GOODSILL: Let's get some names. Let's start with your dad's name.

HUNTER: Dad was William Rich. He went by Bill Rich.

GOODSILL: And your mom?

HUNTER: Was Marion Wier DeFord. My parents were divorced. Her father, my grandfather, was John Weir. He was married to Mabel Perkins. Her family was from the Stephenville area and had to go hide from the Indians in Comanche County every now and then. Yeah, they were in Texas a long time ago.

So anyways, my granddad would come down and help me repair the fences and take care of the horses and do the work around there. We fixed up the old barn; we were always just fixing things around here.

GOODSILL: It must have been so special for you to have your grandfather, especially since you'd been gone most of your life.

HUNTER: Yes, we only got to see our grandparents once a year when we came back. They came down at Christmas. That's why we had this huge table set for Christmas.

GOODSILL: What is your brother's name?

HUNTER: My brother is Steve. He's two years older. He had the room in the front. The family dog was Lucy.

It's just funny to me to look out back and see all those houses there and remember there was nothing but cottonmouth snakes when we rode back there. I would NOT get off my horse because it was kind of swampy back there, and there were a lot of cottonmouths. But they didn't mess with the horses, you know. But, when I mowed, I'd be going around and yeah, cottonmouths! They are called cottonmouths because they don't run away. They opened their mouths and went "Ach" (hiss noise) at you when you were trying to mow.

GOODSILL: Did you ever know June Maroney, Muffie's sister?

HUNTER: No.

GOODSILL: June lived in this house when she was a girl, about sixteen or seventeen, she rode her horses all by herself down to the creek and back. She got out of school, came here, rode her horses and had freedom. She talked a lot about it. It reminds me of your experience.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the June Emerson Moroney interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=45711>

HUNTER: Yeah. We all did the same thing. Wow, that's amazing. They had cows and of course, the oil wells were back there, but I think a lot of them maybe had been plugged since the fifties. The Exxon area was back there with the cows. I didn't get off the horses that much because there were so many snakes. It was really fun to go in the pecan orchard. The horses ate the pecans. I know deer ate the pecans, but the horses sat there and they'd munch on the pecans. Then you had wildlife. There were bunnies and armadillos.

I told Muffie the story of the opossum. Dad went to a lawyer's office down in Houston to lease the house. Dad leased it without us seeing it. I guess he had come and looked at it and thought, "Oh, this is perfect," so he signed the deal and signed the lease.

As he was leaving, it was either Muffie's husband or the family attorney said, "Oh, by the way there's a ghost in the house but don't worry about it." "What?" They said, "Okay, see you later." And he thought, "Okay, so they're just teasing me. Why would they have said something like that?" We moved in and you could hear all this crawling and scuffling behind the wall. Dad thought, "Oh, my God. There IS a ghost here." He was like, "What is that noise?" Then, "Okay, I don't believe in ghosts. It's gotta be some critter back there." But you could hear them crawling and stuff. We watched outside and, of course, we had the German shepherd, Lucy. One evening, she caught – well, luckily, she didn't CATCH it – the opossum. He said it was the biggest opossum you'd ever seen.

It came out between two bricks and there was a screen or something in there. Anyway, it had figured out how to come in. It most probably had been living here for years. Anyways, so the dog chased the opossum out the back yard and it got away. Dad figured out how to shut him out, He put some more wire screen there and we locked the poor opossum out of the house, and we didn't have a ghost anymore.

GOODSILL: This house probably wasn't too well insulated.

HUNTER: No, it was not insulated, I don't think, really at all.

GOODSILL: Hot in the summer?

HUNTER: Not really, because of the tall ceilings and you know, just the way it was built kind of with the overhangs and stuff. You didn't feel hot here. I do remember it being cold when a Norther would come through, and on this back room it seemed like the wind just literally blew right through this room.

There was no air conditioning or heating. We just had little space heaters. I had one little window unit. So, I don't remember the summers being bad. But when it really got cold, the space heater really was not adequate.

GOODSILL: It obviously didn't tarnish your memories.

HUNTER: No. I still loved the house even though we froze in the winter a little bit. But luckily, we don't have the coldest winters down here.

GOODSILL: Is this house the same orientation on the lot as the original house?

HUNTER: When I was looking out the back of my bedroom, it was to the west. The sun would set back there.

GOODSILL: You stayed for one year because your schooling was over?

HUNTER: I graduated and went on to A&M and Dad was transferred back. He just had the two year transfer. Then he went back to Saudi and didn't retire until about 1982.

GOODSILL: Does the rest of the family remember this as a pleasant interlude?

HUNTER: My grandparents, yeah – unfortunately they're passed away now. Yes, everybody remembers the plantation. I remember us talking about the plantation an awful lot.

GOODSILL: Tell me what your reaction is to the job they've done renovating.

HUNTER: Oh, I cried when I walked up to the house.

GOODSILL: You did?

HUNTER: Yeah, I was just so thrilled to see it and to see that it looked so good and that they'd saved it.

GOODSILL: When you were living here did they tell you all about the history? Did you come to feel like you knew the family?

HUNTER: Nancy kind of made us feel a part of it, and Muffie came visited. She was so nice to us and seemed thrilled that we were there, and the place looked so good. Nancy was just like part of our family, too. It was hard to leave. It really was. All these years later, I still feel like it is our house, too.

GOODSILL: Were you kind of heartsick when you had to pack up the horses and move out?

HUNTER: Oh, it was hard. (laughs) I took my horse to college with me. But it was hard to leave the little pony. Oh, he was so cute. When we arrived, he was overweight and his feet were all overgrown. I got a farrier over, we trimmed up his feet and I got him exercising, and I cleaned him up. He was just the cutest thing, and we were able to ride him. Muffie showed up, and she couldn't believe – I had her horses looking so great when she came back to visit, and she just couldn't believe they were in good shape.

GOODSILL: Oh, what a good story! When you came back and the house was neglected, what was that like.

HUNTER: It was heartbreaking. I showed up in 2005 maybe. The dedication was in January 2006, and they did not move it for another year or two. It was a long process. My husband and I were driving to the coast and I said, "Oh! We've got to turn in to the plantation." I could tell it looked vacant, and I was just so saddened to see what disrepair it was in.

GOODSILL: Are you happy with the relocation and renovation job they've done?

HUNTER: Wonderful! Yes. I cried again. I cried for joy this time! I cried sad the other time. But I was just thrilled to see the house all in its glory again and it looks just like the pictures from 1910. They did a fabulous job. Oh, I was just so happy.

GOODSILL: How about those several places where they cut out the wall and put Plexiglas across so you could see what was behind the wall?

HUNTER: I can't believe that! There was a half bath underneath the stair when we were here. It wasn't a closet. It was a little half bath. I had no idea there was a little trap door underneath. I think it is so funny that all that stuff was there the whole time we were living here. We had no idea. But there was stuff stashed everywhere. It was a much bigger house when we lived in it because it had all these additions. They had all the formal furniture in the formal living and dining room. Then the bar was there and there was extra room here that had furniture that they'd stashed; I remember there was an old brass bed and there were all sorts of stuff. We only used about half the house. We had my room cleaned out and the master and one room for my brother, but the other rooms had stuff in them.

GOODSILL: Which one was the master bedroom? Upstairs?

HUNTER: This one up here. It's got the post office stuff in it now.

GOODSILL: Where did your brother have his room?

HUNTER: His was in the front where – the very front one. There was a bathroom off there that was called the blue bathroom.

GOODSILL: He had his own suite, too.

HUNTER: Yes, and my parents had the add-on bathroom with the black and white checked floor and a black and white checked shower. It was very twenties looking. We each had our bedroom and our own bathroom.

We were only using half the house. There were like two or three other bedrooms. There was a bedroom over the bar and there was a bedroom between my brother's room and mine that had furniture all stored in it. We never went in there.

GOODSILL: Did your mom have any trouble cooking in the kitchen? Was it a little outdated?

HUNTER: Yeah, it was, but I'm sure it had been redone in the sixties because the family room that we really lived in is down where the porch is now. So that was all enclosed with plate glass windows that looked out the back, the view.

GOODSILL: Well, that would have made the house bigger right there.

HUNTER: Oh, yeah, it was huge. All the furniture that we brought was in this family room. We had the TV and it was all from the sixties. So, we mainly lived there and then the kitchen, but I don't remember mom complaining about it.

GOODSILL: Probably in comparison to Saudi it was great.

HUNTER: Yeah. We had little base housing from the fifties and sixties so, no she didn't complain about it. There was a wash room that was added on the other side of the kitchen. It's since been removed, too. There was a three-car garage out there, and there was the breezeway between. It was a really big place. We had a good time. But I was outside so much. I'd go get feed for the horses, I was messing with the horses, and then working in the yard, and riding my horses.

GOODSILL: Were you driving at that time?

HUNTER: Yeah, at sixteen I got my license, I think the month after I got here. I was able to drive. Highway Six wasn't quite so crowded as it is now.

GOODSILL: Well this interview is a vignette of the year that you lived in this house – and I think that's just totally sweet. Is there anything else you need to add?

HUNTER: No, I think that's it. But I could talk forever about the house. I'm just so thrilled to see it, and I just really appreciate all the effort that Muffie and everybody else put into preserving it. It just would have been a shame to have it gone. Thank you.

Interview ends

EDITOR'S NOTE: To read more interviews on the Dew House, refer to the Fort Bend County Historical Commission website and reference interviews with Nancy Woods, "Muffie" Moroney, June Moroney, Lynn Edmundson, and Sue Alston.