

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSIONER

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Mary Agnes Miksch**
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BAUMGARTNER: Today is March 28, 2019. My name is Karl Baumgartner and I am interviewing Mrs. Mary Agnes Miksch in Needville, Texas on behalf of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. This is the story of a young couple, Mary Agnes and her husband Leroy Miksch, who moved to a small rural town in the 1950's. When they arrived, they rented a brand new three bedroom home for \$50 a month and she walked to school where she taught. Without knowing a single member of the community initially, over the next fifty years their spirit of cooperation and accomplishment and family enhanced the community at all levels as they grew into civic leaders and exemplified the American dream of their era.

What is your full legal name?

MIKSCH: Mary Agnes Miksch.

BAUMGARTNER: What are your date of birth and your place of birth?

MIKSCH: My date of birth is January 25, 1933 and I was born in Brazos County, Bryan, Texas.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you grow up in Bryan?

MIKSCH: Correct. I worked for a while in Austin but mainly I was raised there before I moved to Needville later in life. My mom and dad were from the area. Their names were Frank and Mary Kalinec.

BAUMGARTNER: What about your grandparents? Were they from the area too?

MIKSCH: Yes. My grandparents came from Czechoslovakia. In order to move to America they had to have someone who was like their sponsors, and they came to live in Bryan.

BAUMGARTNER: You fit in perfectly with Needville; it seems like two thirds of original Needville citizens came here from Czech Republic, many had to have a sponsor, and they started around Brenham or somewhere in the area.

They came here around the turn of the century?

MIKSCH: I don't know the date; both sides came through Galveston.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you know your grandparents?

MIKSCH: Yes, except my dad's father I did not know, but I knew my grandmother from his side and my mother's parents.

BAUMGARTNER: Were they in farming?

MIKSCH: Yes. They lived out in the country.

BAUMGARTNER: Where did you grow up, in town or the country?

MIKSCH: In town. I went to elementary school at St. Joseph Catholic School until the eighth grade; that was as far as the school went; then to Lamar Junior High and then to Stephen F. Austin High School in Bryan, where I graduated.

BAUMGARTNER: What would you say school was like in those days compared to today?

MIKSCH: It was a lot more relaxing. No one ever bothered anybody. We could go outside for lunch; you did not eat in the cafeteria and you could go sit out on the lawn. Everything was real nice.

BAUMGARTNER: It wasn't as regulated as it is now?

MIKSCH: Oh no. It was just really neat and everybody got along.

BAUMGARTNER: How big was the high school there?

MIKSCH: I do not remember exactly, but my graduating class was something like a hundred and fifty. High school was just tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades.

BAUMGARTNER: That wasn't too much different from Needville back thirty or forty years ago, was it?

MIKSCH: The classes were smaller when we came here but they kept getting bigger. At our time we had a lot of activities. We played soccer, shuffleboard, all kinds of stuff. For football games we would go out of town like Nacogdoches and places that were in our district. They would take us by bus, anybody that wanted to go. After the game they would let us stay for dances for a little while with the other team. When the other schools came to Bryan we did the same thing. We usually entertained at the County Club there in Bryan.

BAUMGARTNER: That was neat. I had not heard of that before in high school football. When the game was over we got on the bus and headed out.

MIKSCH: We always got to stay for a while and have a little snack and dance a little. That way we got to meet the people from the other team. Every place we went they had a little social afterwards.

BAUMGARTNER: So you would actually have the opportunity to get a little rapport with people from the other communities. Did they have the same stuff, cheerleading and things like that?

MIKSCH: When I was in high school there were three boys and three girls on our cheerleaders. We had boys because they thought they could lift the girls and do the different cheers and stunts.

BAUMGARTNER: What were your teachers like in those days?

MIKSCH: They were good. It was departmentalized; we had different teachers for different subjects. I believe now there are more problems. Kids are so different now. We did not dare to disrespect our teacher in any way. We looked up to them.

BAUMGARTNER: How old were the teachers?

MIKSCH: Our English teacher, Mae Goodlich, was probably one of the older ones and the Latin teacher was a little bit older; the others were fairly young. I had a lot of young teachers for the other classes.

FOLLOWING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

BAUMGARTNER: What did you do when you got out of high school?

MIKSCH: I went to a business school there in Bryan. A friend of mind lived with us a while so she could go to the business school.

BAUMGARTNER: That was about 1950. Business College was a one year program?

MIKSCH: We did it in a year. We just did shorthand and typing, and stuff like that to do secretarial work. When we graduated both of us girls went to Austin. We lived with this couple we knew from College Station. Mother was friends with their family and they let us live with them. They were very nice helping us get back and forth to Austin. My friend worked for the Highway Department and I worked for Texas Unemployment Commission. Austin seemed like a huge place already.

We worked there until Bryan Air Force Base opened up, and then we came back to Bryan and worked at the Air Force Base. I worked on the flight line for some of the pilots, took shorthand and stuff.

BAUMGARTNER: The flight line, what does that mean?

MIKSCH: It was for the airplanes to take off and if there were any crashes or something wrong and then they could ask me to come in on a Saturday and they would have a bunch there so I could take the minutes.

BAUMGARTNER: That was an exciting time.

MIKSCH: Yes it was.

BAUMGARTNER: What about college; were there any colleges you could not attend?

MIKSCH: We could not go to A&M. A&M was strictly a male college, no girls allowed.

BAUMGARTNER: That is the way it was in those days.

MIKSCH: Everybody at A & M had to be in the Corp and then go into the service and all that stuff. We got to know some of the boys and some of our high school classmates went to A&M. They would have what they called the bull ring when those who were caught on campus without their uniform or whatever, and they always brought the bull ring and the cadet would have to walk in a bull ring.

BAUMGARTNER: Was it common for women to go to college in those days?

MIKSCH: No, not really because like us we would have had to leave and our parents could not afford to send you to a four year college.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have brothers and sisters?

MIKSCH: Yes, I have an older brother and a younger sister. My brother ended up owning his own business, A-1 Wrecker Service. My sister also worked at the base, and then she moved to San Antonio and worked there. She met her husband when he was stationed at the Air Force Base there in San Antonio.

BAUMGARTNER: How big was Bryan in those days compared to now?

MIKSCH: It was small. When you left Bryan to go to College Station there was nothing, no houses in between. There was nothing there; you knew exactly when you left there how far you had to go to finally get to College Station. Now it is all grown up.

We had a school called Allen Academy in Bryan too.

BAUMGARTNER: What was Allen Academy?

MIKSCH: It was an all-boys school. It was commonly used by parents with problem kids who had the money to send them to private schools. It was all male, and they wore uniforms.

BAUMGARTNER: That never seemed to me to be a good deal for a kid.

MIKSCH: I don't think so, to be away from their parents.

BAUMGARTNER: You had to send the boy off to school and he loses the social benefits of growing up with girls...

MIKSCH: The only all women's college I knew was Texas Women's in Denton. It was all female; I am sure that they are not now.

BAUMGARTNER: You were working there at the base. How did you meet Leroy, who became your husband?

MIKSCH: I met him at a dance. I used to go to Somerville with my girlfriends all the time to dances.

In those days you "tagged." Someone would tag you to dance, cut in on whoever was dancing with you, and that is how I met Leroy. He was there with a bunch of Aggies and I knew some of his friends. They came to the dances and they talked him into coming that night.

BAUMGARTNER: That was just like a social event, like going out on a Saturday night.

MIKSCH: Yes. Nobody went with anybody because all of us wanted to be free to be tagged.

BAUMGARTNER: Somerville is how far from Bryan?

MIKSCH: It is not that far, about a half hour. A lot of Aggies came in those days. It was not like it is today. You had tables to sit at and the parents sat around.

BAUMGARTNER: Whose parents, the girls, the guys or both? Did any of your group go?

MIKSCH: I think Mother went one time when my sister and I were there, just to see what we were doing.

The floor was open but they had chairs.

BAUMGARTNER: That was the first time that you met Leroy. So was it love at first sight?

MIKSCH: No, not for me [both laughing]. It was for him, but not for me [both laughing], I was too busy.

BAUMGARTNER: You started dating after that.

MIKSCH: It was his senior year at A & M, 1953. He had a basketball scholarship to A&M.

BAUMGARTNER: Where was he from?

MIKSCH: Wealder.

BAUMGARTNER: That was a little bitty town.

MIKSCH: It still is. They did not have anything but basketball; they were too small to have any football in those days. He got a scholarship to go to A&M that is how he got to college because his parents could not afford to send him there.

BAUMGARTNER: What was his family background like?

MIKSCH: They had a cleaner. We would visit there because his mother was still there. They would have a Waelder Homecoming and we would go to stuff like that.

BAUMGARTNER: So Mary Agnes, you started dating Leroy and he was still in school then.

MIKSCH: Oh yeah. It was his senior year.

BAUMGARTNER: He had a basketball scholarship. He was tall?

MIKSCH: Yes, 6'5". He was the team captain.

BAUMGARTNER: Really! 6'5"! How tall are you?

MIKSCH: I am about 5'6" or 5'7".

BAUMGARTNER: That is only a foot difference.

MIKSCH: Yeah. I got to go with him to all the ring dances and all that stuff they had at A&M and then we decided we were going to get married. We set it for November so he could finish his basic officers training at Fort Sill, in Oklahoma. He graduated in '53 and had to go to Fort Sill because he was in artillery so they sent him there. We got married November 8, 1953.

BAUMGARTNER: Was the Korean War going on then?

MIKSCH: Yes, during his term of service.

BAUMGARTNER: Was he involved in that?

MIKSCH: No he was very lucky because of his sports. His senior officer was Colonel Stratton and he loved to find guys that had played college sports. So a whole bunch that was in his artillery group had played in college and the Colonel put together his team and he got them. That is the reason Leroy did not have to leave and they kept them at Fort Sill instead of going on to Korea. Somehow he worked it to keep those guys there.

BAUMGARTNER: What a benefit.

MIKSCH: In fact when our first son Randy was born, they were headed for a game out in another state and Leroy did not really want to go because I was due and we didn't know if the baby would be two weeks early or two weeks late. Colonel Stratton came to me and said I promise you that if you let him go you can call me or Leroy, and that minute I will have him flown back right away to Fort Sill. And he did.

BAUMGARTNER: Really, I didn't know they could fly so conveniently

MIKSCH: Colonel Stratton had a lot of pull. He just told them that he may have a guy that may need to leave and I want him flown back.

BAUMGARTNER: In '53 you were about twenty one then, I guess.

MIKSCH: In fact he thought about making the service a career, and he said no, we do not want to start moving around, and he got out.

BAUMGARTNER: That was a good choice probably.

MIKSCH: It was. After Leroy got out of the service he went back to A&M and got his Master's degree. While he was there one of his professors, Dr. Landis, told him You need to go and get your certification to go into administration, and Leroy said, I am never going to do that, I am going to coach until I retire. But he had his GI Bill and got his Masters and it was a blessing. Dr. Landis just begged him to do it and Leroy did and thank God he did. That was one of the best decisions he made.

MOVING TO NEEDVILLE

So we moved here to Needville in 1956. When we came to Needville for him to interview for the teaching job, I am thinking that I am not coming to this place. I saw nothing but old people and the roads were dirt and mud. I thought I would never play bridge again and never see any young people again. I had just had Randy and Ronnie my second child was a preemie and just a few months old when we got here. I told Leroy two years and we are out of here. I am not staying in this place. He was offered a job in Clear Creek and different places and we talked about it. We were renting and the roads were muddy and we got stuck. I am not staying.

But Leroy said I really kind of like this place just let me try. We started thinking; it was a good place to raise kids.

BAUMGARTNER: People keep telling me trying to get from Fairchilds over to Needville on country roads...

MIKSCH: It was horrible.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you live in town?

MIKSCH: Yeah, we rented right down the street from this house by that little daycare. It was a little house that Ms. Schmidt lived in and we rented from Mr. Schroeder. It was just a two bedroom house and in those days, we have the seasons and it was so cold in there during winter I can't stand it in there because I was afraid my babies were going to freeze to death in their room. When Cindy was born I said oh gosh, we need three bedrooms. Mr. Skrabanek built three new brick homes there and Leroy asked about renting and he said they were for sale.

BAUMGARTNER: Had you been renting before?

MIKSCH: Yes. Then he called us and he was having a hard time selling them and he said we could rent one of them. We did because we knew that we wanted to build. Leroy and I had already bought this land from Mrs. Horak but the street was not here yet, there was nothing here. It was just a field. We knew that we were going to build. We stayed in that house of Skrabanek's until we built our house, then we moved in here and have been here ever since.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you have any recollection of what you had to pay for rent in those days.

MIKSCH: I think we paid fifty dollars. But when we moved to the brand new house that Mr. Skrabanek let us rent with hardwood floors we paid sixty five dollars.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow that is amazing how inflation works; people don't realize. Now to rent a house is fifteen hundred and for small ones, maybe eight hundred.

MIKSCH: We paid fifty cents an hour for babysitters for three kids. My babies were little and I wanted to go to the ballgames and so I hired a sitter. Everything was cheaper than.

BAUMGARTNER: It is amazing how things have changed.

MIKSCH: We knew that when we bought this lot that we were going to have to

donate part of it to the City for the street because we knew that they were going to build a street. There were no roads here for a side street; just Union Street in the front. More than half of the road they built for the elementary school is from our land.

BAUMGARTNER: When did you build?

MIKSCH: We built and moved into this house in February of 1962.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow that is almost 60 years!

MIKSCH: It is a good thing that the Lord knew what he was doing. He kept me here because at that time you knew everybody, but not so much now. I knew all my neighbors here. The kids across the street and the ones behind me I taught all those kids. It has worked out pretty good for me.

BAUMGARTNER: When you came here, you were raising your babies and you were not working?

MIKSCH: No, I wanted to stay home with them. I stayed home until Cindy; I don't think she had started school yet. The boys were both in school and Cindy stayed with the neighbor across the street because she had a little boy just a couple of months older than Cindy and she said that she could stay there with them.

BAUMGARTNER: When did you start teaching?

MIKSCH: Probably 1964 or 1965.

BAUMGARTNER: That was like seven or eight years after you moved here.

MIKSCH: I wanted to stay home with them and it was almost cheaper to stay home with them. This was all fields and when the boys were in school, and Cindy was little we would sit out there and see them come walking across the field.

The elementary school was in town where Amegy Bank is now. I would stroll

into town because we only had one car. I would take the kids down to the grocery store if I needed something from Ladd's Grocery. I would think why are all of these kids running into the drug store and running around all over town at lunch. We had an open campus before they ever thought about one and they just let them go because they were fine. The classes were not that big, I guess. Kids were running all over the place while I was in Ladd's shopping.

BAUMGARTNER: Did most mothers try to be home when their children were being raised or were they starting to go to work.

MIKSCH: All of my friends that I played bridge with at the time, we all had children. Most of us stayed home with our children until they went to school.

BAUMGARTNER: How did you get involved with teaching? Did you have to go back to school?

MIKSCH: I went to the University of Houston and commuted from here.

BAUMGARTNER: What did your kids do?

MIKSCH: They all went to school in public school here in Needville.

BAUMGARTNER: And how long were you a teacher?

MIKSCH: I taught for 26 years. In those days schools were self-contained and I started out with the fourth grade.

BAUMGARTNER: What do you mean self-contained?

MIKSCH: I taught all the subjects, all day long. Then they decided to departmentalize so they moved me to the fifth and sixth grade where I had to take a teaching cart and go teach science. So I had to go wherever fifth and sixth grades were. We stayed there until they built the middle school. Then they moved fifth and sixth to the middle school and it housed seventh and eighth grade at the middle school.

BAUMGARTNER: Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth were in one building.

MIKSCH: Then they moved sixth grade back down here. I was able to come back here and I liked it because I could walk to school in the morning. I did not have to drive because the middle school was out there behind the high school.

BAUMGARTNER: Thinking back, what have been the changes like from when you started teaching and when you retired from teaching?

MIKSCH: When I started teaching we could go outside and they do not do that anymore. I loved it because I could take the kids outside during science and show them the clouds. We ate with the children and you saw them in a different light there, and did PE with them and you got to know them, not just see them in the classroom.

To me there is not enough time today that they can socialize. Everything is Do this and Do that. I am glad that when my kids went to school they could still have recesses and play because they cannot now.

BAUMGARTNER: It seemed like then the teachers would have so much more influence on the children.

MIKSCH: We did. For instance we could discipline them by spanking them. My kids would “get an education” when another teacher would go out there and walk them in the hallway. Then it got to where you could not discipline a student without supervision, and the last few years I thought it got ridiculous. If a kid had a problem I would have to walk down to the principal’s office with them and if the principal was not there, I would be told they will call when he gets in. By that time this kid has forgotten what he had done wrong and it was not effective.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you use paddles?

MIKSCH: Yes we could use paddles.

BAUMGATNER: I remember when that was normal for schools.

MIKSCH: I used to tell my kids that if you get it at school you are going to get

it twice as bad at home. You respected that teacher. Now the kid's parents can sign a statement that they do not want their kids to be disciplined and stuff like that.

BAUMGARTNER: I did not know that paddling was even allowed anymore at all.

MIKSCH: They still can as far as I know if you have the parent's permission.

BAUMGARTNER: What percentage of the parents grant that?

MIKSCH: Very few. I had one little boy who was lazy and he did not have his homework and I called his mother. She had signed the paper that he could not be disciplined. We had it on file; every parent had to do that. Some would give permission but most of them would not.

BAUMGARTNER: This was in the early years when you were teaching or later on?

MIKSCH: That was later; before that we could discipline them. She got tired of me calling but I was going to make her decide what she was going to do. So she called me and I guess she was afraid she was going to get fired from her job because she had to leave all the time to go up to the school, and she told me that she was coming up there. The principal always attended these meetings with me and I said ok, she is coming up here so we will see what she is going to do. Of course we had the little boy there too and I said here is the paper you signed. She said, let me see that and she looked at her little boy and I thought she was going to kill him. She spanked him more than the principal would have and she let him know that he could be punished anytime and she was taking back the paper that she signed. And he was fine after that.

BAUMGARTNER: Really, I have always considered that as a grievous error when you could never give a spanking.

MIKSCH: It never hurt my kids. You could punish the kids and it was a lesson for the whole class and now I understand it is so different. That is why the

kids are like they are today. We would go outside and sit and study and we never had to worry at school, nobody did anything.

BAUMGARTNER: You have three children?

MIKSCH: I have Randy, Ronnie and Cindy. Cynthia but we call her Cindy.

BAUMGARTNER: Where are they now?

MIKSCH: Both of my boys got athletic scholarships to the University of Texas.

BAUMGARTNER: What kind of scholarships?

MIKSCH: Football-- though their dad had a basketball scholarship and at A&M! When they were little they were true Aggies. They ended up going to UT and here in Needville these die hard Aggies would come up and say, how can you let your son go to Texas? Leroy said you know what, nobody told me where I went and I had to go to A&M because I had a scholarship there. My boys got a scholarship and that is where they are going. Our daughter graduated from North Texas, she had a volleyball scholarship there.

BAUMGARTNER: Was she tall?

MIKSCH: No taller than I am. All three of them majored in biology. Randy went to Sweeny High School as basketball coach and moved his way up to being the principal and stayed there and became the superintendent of schools. He just retired last year. Ronnie went into banking and has done really well, vice president of Frost Bank on Congress Street in Austin. Cindy became head volleyball coach at Klein High School, took her team to state, stayed here all these years and just retired three years ago. She lives in the



Miksch Children: Randy, Cindy, and Ronnie.

Woodlands.

BAUMGARTNER: One in The Woodlands, one in Sweeny, the other in Austin. You are right in the center.

Do you have grandchildren?



The Miksch family at a senior citizens benefit in Needville in January 2006.

MIKSCH: Yes, I have six grandchildren and I have eight great grandchildren and we are expecting my ninth one in May.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh my goodness, how wonderful. How often do you get to see them?

MIKSCH: I see the ones in Brazoria quite a bit; I go there to watch their activities every Saturday. My oldest great grandchild is now eleven and she is a swimmer so I go. We were at Rosenberg last week. Almost every Saturday is a swim meet. One of my grandsons is going to be the principal at the new Johnson High School in Buda and they just opened and you only start out with freshmen and sophomores. It is humongous; I don't know how many are in it.

BAUMGARTNER: It just runs in the family. What is his name?

MIKSCH: Brett. Brett Miksch. He just loves it. He has been there a while already since they have to hire teachers. The dedication doesn't start until school starts. Their dedication is on August 3rd and he already told me that I better be there.

I just hate that Leroy did not live to see them because he loved the kids and the grandkids just loved him and he never got to see his great grandkids.

BAUMGARTNER: He liked working with children, he liked to coach.

MIKSCH: He loved it. He liked teaching biology too. He liked children that is why I said I hate that he never lived to see any of his great grandbabies. He would have had fun with them. He was the type that liked challenges and he would think about making some challenges for them.

MARY AGNES' HUSBAND, LEROY MIKSCH

BAUMGARTNER: I am going to make some comments about your husband Leroy. The interview is about your life and you were married to Leroy for 51 years so let's get some of his background. I am going to read a little summary of his remarkable professional life to enter into the interview.

Fresh out of school Leroy started as a biology teacher at Needville High School and became high school Principal, basketball coach, Superintendent of Needville Independent School District, served as mayor of Needville, an active leader in numerous organizations, Lions Club, Knights of Columbus, American Legion Needville Branch, Fort Bend County Central Appraisal District, Chamber of Commerce, Needville Little League, and on and on.

You and Leroy came here and you had babies and lived happily thereafter. Though I was living in Rosenberg and never met your husband, I had heard of him for years. What was it like to be involved in all the different activities and leadership roles that he was involved with?

MIKSCH: He was just a person that could handle it. Everybody came to him and wanted him to do something and he did not turn them down. He was on

the board of the Central Appraisal District because they came and asked him. Like with the Chamber of Commerce, it was the first year they started a Citizen of the Year and he got the first award. He just believed in helping people. He was very compassionate for the old people, the Senior Citizens, he always worried about people. Even when he was still superintendent of schools and they started the program where you could deliver meals to the seniors, he would do it during his lunch hour. At the KC Hall they named it the Leroy Miksch Family Pavilion. The basketball tournament is named after him and it was named for him before he passed away. They just changed it to a memorial after he passed away.

BAUMGARTNER: Everybody looked up to him. What is it like to be a role model for everybody?

MIKSCH: When kids wanted to go to A&M or any college, they came to ask him for help. He would write a paper of recommendation; that is the only way they got into some of the places. He did it for a lot of kids here, but I do not think they do that anymore.

BAUMGARTNER: With him being superintendent of schools, wouldn't you have to answer peoples' questions all the time on issues that came up?

MIKSCH: There was like a process parents went through if you didn't like the teachers. The parents would go visit with that teacher and they would go to their principal and you do not end up in the superintendent's office until you did not get any help from the others.

BAUMGARTNER: Would they expect him to be a referee? Some say, the buck stops here. Did that affect you personally or you were out of the loop?

MIKSCH: No, I just knew that he was doing what he was supposed to do. He also felt that he was blessed with the talent to be able to organize. He organized and started so many different things that we had around here because he was good at it and he thought he should use his talent.

BAUMGARTNER: You were insulated from a lot of the pressure and stuff,

personally.

MIKSCH: When he would come home I told him I do not want to hear anything that happened at the board meeting because I don't want to go to school the next day and get questioned. And they would. They asked, what happened at the meeting last night and I could say I do not have any idea. I know they probably thought I knew, but Leroy and I did not discuss it. We had one secretary and she would find out stuff that came from the board. I think she was friends with someone and she already knew what went on and she was telling everyone and I would say you've got to be kidding me. They would look at me and I would say I don't know. I don't know and I don't want to know.

BAUMGARTNER: What was his background personally that would make him stand out more than other people?

MIKSCH: It was just the way he was. Everybody just liked him. All his students. He got thrown into the mayor's office when he was superintendent because the mayor died.

BAUMGARTNER: Who was mayor then?

MIKSCH: Allen Ray Raska and Leroy had to take his place for a while. He would get up and work at that office because they were not organized when he got there. There was no paperwork at all and so he went and visited the mayor in Rosenberg to look at their procedures.

BAUMGARTNER: Who was that?

MIKSCH: I cannot remember his name, he was an older man.

BAUMGARTNER: Probably Ben Babovec.

MIKSCH: Yes, I think it was. He went to him and asked to look at some of their stuff because Needville had nothing on file, and he helped Leroy get started. Then Leroy did all the paperwork.

BAUMGARTNER: You mean procedures and meetings.

MIKSCH: Yeah, on what they needed to do. At that time the mayor and the people in town were not paying their water bills and he said we are all going to pay our part just like everybody else so he changed all of that, made sure that everybody pays the same thing.

BAUMGARTNER: What year was he mayor?

MIKSCH: 1977-1981. Our oldest son got married in 1977 and the city council members were not paying their water bills and he would go to the office and get everything done for the city and then he would go to his job at the school. I said you can't be burning the candle at both ends.

BAUMGARTNER: You mean as superintendent. How many hours would he work?

MIKSCH: A lot. The school board meetings lasted really late. And he had to set up stuff because they had nothing. He had to organize all of that.

BAUMGARTNER: I met with Delbert Wendt who had later become mayor for ten or fifteen years. He worked at it, but it did not seem like it was as demanding as the school board.

MIKSCH: Delbert lives right down the street and he told me he found many things with Leroy's name on it. Leroy was the one who got it organized.

BAUMGARTNER: My old friend Beatrice Lehman told me you are still very much involved in the church?

MIKSCH: Yes. Leroy was a convert. He did so much with the church.

BAUMGARTNER: So Leroy converted to Catholicism? What denomination did he convert from?

MIKSCH: He was probably Methodist but not active. I didn't know. I don't think his mother and father were that strong in their particular faith?

BAUMGARTNER: When did this take place?

MIKSCH: That happened at the time of our marriage in 1953.

BAUMGARTNER: That was important to your family or you...

MIKSCH: I never asked because I was going to keep my religion, no matter what. After graduation he was sent to Fort Sill, Oklahoma in the service and we had planned to get married that November, and I did not know he was going to a priest there and got the faith. So when we got married he said something about going to communion and I said you can't because you are not Catholic and he said yes I am. So that is how I found out. He just surprised me. He went on his own, I didn't know. He just knew that I was not going to give up mine.

BAUMGARTNER: I guess perhaps he felt that it would be better if you both belonged to the same religion. Has the role of the church and religion in the community changed much since you grew up?

MIKSCH: Are you talking about when I went to the Catholic School?

BAUMGARTNER: From childhood, all the way up.

MIKSCH: The church is very involved in the community. Our churches, The Church of St Michaels and The Immanuel are the two largest churches in Needville. My church is St. Michael's. They have all these new churches that have popped up.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you think the church plays as an important role as it used to with the community.

MIKSCH: Yes.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you know Benny Wleczyk and his wife Claudia?

MIKSCH: She volunteered at the hospital with me. She just passed away recently. I knew his wife, real, real well.

BAUMGARTNER: I was recently talking to Benny and as you know they were Catholic and I asked Benny that question, is the church as important now as when you were growing up? His comment was that he thought more so.

MIKSCH: More important.

BAUMGARTNER: I only met Claudia one time and she was struggling with her health but still had her spirit. She was struggling and Benny is struggling with the loss at times; they had been married 60 years and raised a wonderful family. How did it affect you when Leroy passed away?

MIKSCH: It was not expected at all. He had never been sick. He always went faithfully for his physicals and stuff. He played golf that day; golf day was always on Tuesday and Thursday. He played golf. A normal day, he came home and mowed and did his things outside. He was fine, we went to bed fine. He had a habit to wake up about two o'clock to go to the bathroom and I was a light sleeper so I could hear when he came back to bed. A lot of times he would lie on his back and start snoring and I would not be asleep yet and I would say Leroy turn over you are snoring and he would and that was the end of that. That particular morning he came back and I heard this strange sound and I said Leroy turn over you are snoring too loud and there was no response. I jumped up and put the light on and then I called for help.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow. Wow.

MIKSCH: It was a shock. The kids did not get to say good-bye.

BAUMGARTNER: My best friend in college who I stayed in touch with throughout, about six or eight years ago his wife called me. She never called and I knew there was a problem. Anyway they were in the kitchen together washing dishes, he was washing and she was talking. He was like Leroy, he took all his physicals, didn't smoke, took care of himself, and he was just washing dishes with his wife and they were talking and he fell, dead when he hit the floor.

MIKSCH: I know it was just like my neighbors the Wenzel's. Thank God we

had just got home from school and thank goodness Leroy had gotten home early that day and I was cooking and the phone rang and it was Marge and she was screaming, please come over. Leroy runs over there and I cut the stove off and ran over there and Paul had not been sick at all and he was in the kitchen, he had just come home and fell backwards and had an attack. He died there too. It was a real shock. Ours was a real shock because Leroy had never been sick; he never missed school or anything.

BAUMGARTNER: When you don't have time to say good-bye, looking back is there anything you would have tried to do differently in your life?

MIKSCH: I always believed or I was taught to believe, my mother always said, that you do not belong to me, you belong to God, he is just loaning you to me for whatever time he is going to give you. I kept thinking that it was his time and there was nothing I could do about it. He was on loan to me for all those years and I was thankful for what I had. I know our oldest grandson was getting married and Leroy was teasing him before that. He said OK Bradley be sure you have some good ole polkas and waltzes and Bradley and Rachel said Oh we will. He did not make the wedding.

BAUMGARTNER: That is a great philosophy to absorb and to live with. Of course it is true.

MIKSCH: And people say why do you stay in that house by yourself? I say I am not afraid here and I said why would I go anywhere else, my memories are here. I need it when the kids and their families are here and especially for Christmas when all of them are here and I said no, I am not going anywhere until I have too.

Leroy used to tell me when we were outside working in the yard, he would say Mary Agnes if anything ever happens to me you have to move. I would say, why? He said you do not know all that I do here that you would have to do. I would tease him and I would say just leave me enough money and I will be able to get me some help. We would laugh about it and I learned what he did because I have to now.

CHANGES TO NEEDVILLE OVER THE YEARS

BAUMGARTNER: How has Needville changed over the years as far as different stuff; the economy and demographics?

MIKSCH: A lot. One thing, we have that tower that they are always talking about.

Editor's note: A decades old, out of service Water Tower remains in Needville city limits, and residents are discussing whether to order its removal or spend money on it to preserve it as a memorial.

We moved here in 1956 and that tower was not here. I can tell you for sure that there was an older tower and I think Rosenberg has our old tower and it is better than this one. Way back then, the City put up a new one, we were invited, and I guess it was all the merchants but they invited us to come too, like a grand opening. I remember sitting there with some friends that we knew but of course we knew everybody at that time. We were eating hot dogs and stuff and we got this new tower. They painted it because it was a hideous color and I said "oh my gosh this is not pretty". Some are saying that this tower has always been there but it has not been here. It was moved here after we moved here. That would probably be somewhere in the early sixties.

BAUMGARTNER: Has the economy here changed much?

MIKSCH: When we moved here it was mostly farming. Kids lived on farms and they came here to school. The population wasn't much because the kids came from out in the country.

BAUMGARTNER: I asked Delbert Wendt what the population was, and he asked right here in town, or the real Needville population? The real population extends out, outside the city limits. Anyway I guess the farming is not the same today.

MIKSCH: Most of the farmers have given up their land and it has been turned into homes and smaller properties.

BAUMGARTNER: That is no doubt going to continue.

MIKSCH: If you notice downtown there are so many empty stores. When we moved here it was full.

BAUMGARTNER: You would think that with all the growth around here stores would be prospering.

MIKSCH: You would, but there was the old drug store, and one whole block when we moved here was a department store. Rybacks ran it; I loved it because I could go in there and get Buster Brown clothes for the boys. She had material, you could pick up patterns and you could buy everything. It burned and they moved to Rosenberg and they ran Ace Hardware.

BAUMGARTNER: Was that Ernest Rybak?

MIKSCH: Ernest and Martha. The Rybacks were the ones who owned the department store. There was the drug store, real small, and in between there was a grocery store. Rudy Paweleck, he didn't start it but he had it till the end. The whole block was full. Then they all went out of business. Stores moved over to the strip on Highway 36. That whole original block is empty and the grocery store is empty now.

BAUMGARTNER: It seems surprising. The population has grown but it hasn't exploded like in some places.

MIKSCH: It seems like something would make a go there. On Main Street there was Marie Café, across from the bank, First State Bank, and now it is a shame that they are all gone. It is like a ghost town because the whole block is empty and it is just sad.

BAUMGARTNER: Are the people satisfied with the City Administration now and how the City is being run?

MIKSCH: I don't know I don't get involved with that too much now.

BAUMGARTNER: Has the school system changed much?

MIKSCH: I know when they were going to build the new high school, they asked me to be on the board so I could present a certain part to make people want to pay the taxes to pass the bond election. And it did.

The new school is nice and the younger people all love it. When they built the new one they wanted to take me for a tour there and all the rooms have what you call smart boards. They were proud of them but I don't think I would like them. When I was teaching I enjoyed walking around and seeing what the kids were doing, and you wrote on chalkboards. You did not use the board all the time, but with these smartboards the teacher can just sit there and she can teach from her desk. I guess they like it but I am glad I never had to do it. I would not have liked that.

BAUMGARTNER: Boy it has changed.

MIKSCH: I know it has. I still have a few kids that I taught that became teachers and they will tell me Mrs. Miksch it is so different now and it is not fun like it was when I was in school.

BAUMGARTNER: It is interesting to me because you read all the time that the kids are not getting a good enough education and they are weak in reading or they are weak in math or their scores aren't high enough or one thing or another. It seems to me though that teaching instruction today seems to be so sophisticated compared to when we went to school, and young kids seem advanced for their age level. My daughter teaches 5th grade math and those kids are getting good instruction. When we grew up our teachers were not that advanced and we did not have all the technology and we did fine. We got out and were successful in our careers or our lives and we can read and spell along with anybody.

MIKSCH: Now the kids cannot spell because they do not have to because it is all corrected on their little computers. It's like math; they do not know their

facts, the arithmetic tables. One time I was in Hobby Lobby and the little girl was checking me out and something went wrong with the register and I said You do not know how to figure that out in your head, do you? You cannot add that and get a total? And she said No ma'am. I said something about not having a computer and she said you need to be with the times. I said, who is better off me or you, I could figure that out in my head with a piece of paper. I do not need a machine.

BAUMGARTNER: They cannot make change without the machine.

MIKSCH: They cannot do basic math. She was just lost when that happened.

LEROY BECOMES MAYOR

BAUMGARTNER: How did Leroy become mayor?

MIKSCH: The mayor, Mr. Raska died and they told him to take over.

BAUMGARTNER: Who were "they"?

MIKSCH: City council, and so he did. They wanted him to stay on and run for office. He said I can't; I've filled in but I can't do both jobs anymore. He said he had to do his school job. He was just doing mayor as a favor.

BAUMGARTNER: The school superintendent job was more important.

MIKSCH: He didn't mind helping them out at that time but he didn't want to do it on a regular basis.

BAUMGARTNER: Who were some of the families that were here when you moved here, or some of the old time people?

OLD NEEDVILLE FAMILIES

MIKSCH: The Cosby's had just opened the grocery store, so they were young so we got with them so we could play bridge and they had children the same ages as we did. The Kunkels always ran the bank.

BAUMGARTNER: Are any of them around anymore?

MIKSCH: Ollie Kunkel is and in fact his wife, Brenda still works at Prosperity Bank. Ollie is retired but she still works there. The Ferguson's ran that variety store, we knew that family. Junior and Helen ran the drug store. His mother owned it at first and he inherited it. The Post Office was downtown; it was a little place next to an insurance office where the bank was. The Koefflers had Western Auto and it used to be called Lack's and the Kettlers ran it.

BAUMGARTNER: I thought the Kohleffels had been there forever.

MIKSCH: No Melvin and Maggie Kettler; they lived right next door. They had Lack's and I guess they sold it to Western Auto. Most of our circle of friends were people living here in town.

BAUMGARTNER: Who were some of the large farmers?

MIKSCH: Rice farming was the Todds.

BAUMGARTNER: Are W. C. and Karen still around? I used to see them at the bowling alley about 100 years ago.

MIKSCH: W. C. builds fences; they are still here except Mitchell who moved to Dallas a long time ago. His sister Sandra Todd Dorr is running for City Council.

CATHOLIC FAITH AND EDUCATION

BAUMGARTNER: People have told me that you've stayed involved with the community.

MIKSCH: At the church I volunteer and I've worked CCE with the kids for a long time.

BAUMGARTNER: What is CCE?

MIKSCH: Catholic Christian Education. It was for the youths, like our catechism classes or bible classes and I sing in the choir. I still do that. I lead the rosary on Sundays and I do adoration ever Monday morning from six to

seven.

BAUMGARTNER: Some of this I am not familiar with. What is adoration?

MIKSCH: We have a chapel which Leroy helped to build and he was in charge of it. Adoration Chapel for the Catholic Church is where Jesus is exposed and we spend an hour and I love it. It is a ceremony that allows us to spend time adoring the presence of the Lord in front of us. Enjoy my hour with Jesus!

BAUMGARTNER: CCE, do you teach?

MIKSCH: I started teaching when we moved here in 1956.

BAUMGARTNER: How do you teach and what do you teach?

MIKSCH: I taught the elementary there and then I taught the 7th and 8th grader classes too. Leroy would teach too. And there were night classes. We had different groups. I was teaching some parts of the bible and different questions we asked them and teach them their prayers. We would teach them mainly their prayers on how to go to confession and all that kind of thing.

BAUMGARTNER: How old were they?

MIKSCH: The little ones were elementary, first, second and third and then I had seventh and eighth graders later.

BAUMGARTNER: When at Catholic funerals the priest reads something out of the bible, and the people respond back, is that something that they learn at an early age?

MIKSCH: Yes, that is part of our mass.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you teach some of that, the responses to it? How do they pick that up?

MIKSCH: They pick that up from mass.

BAUMGARTNER: Don't you volunteer at the hospital too? When did you start

that?

MIKSCH: A few months after I retired from teaching. I have been there for twenty something years.

BAUMGARTNER: What do you do there?

MIKSCH: I am at the information desk at Oak Bend Hospital.

BAUMGARTNER: So you were there when it was Polly Ryon Hospital?

MIKSCH: Yes, they changed the name to Oak Bend. And we have two hospitals now, but I am at the one on in Richmond.

BAUMGARTNER: There have been changes, but I am a little bit surprised that Needville has not changed more.

MIKSCH: I am too. I thought when they built the new school and when they made that housing addition next to the elementary school there would be more growth. People say some new residents are not as friendly because they were people from Houston; they move here and the next thing you know their place is for sale. They say they are used to the booming city, so there are always houses for sale in that new addition.

TODAY VERSUS THE OLD DAYS

BAUMGARTNER: Well, we grew up in a really good era. After the war it was just a good time to grow up. Maybe it was less complicated. Right was right and wrong was wrong.

MIKSCH: None of us had ever heard of drugs until my daughter was in high school. I think that is when it became obvious that some people were using drugs. We never had anything like that.

BAUMGARTNER: In College or high school?

MIKSCH: High school. And in college then, nobody did that; the worst you could do was drink a beer and smoke a cigarette. But when Randy went to

college, I think his first roommate got kicked out and he did not last the first semester on the football team because they caught him with drugs. He was from San Antonio or someplace and they caught him. I told Randy just keep yourself clean and he said Mom, I am not going to do drugs.

BAUMGARTNER: A lot of people ruined their lives because for a kid it is too easy to make a wrong turn on experimenting.

MIKSCH: The kids have too much money now to get the stuff.

BAUMGARTNER: Yeah, that was another problem that we did not have. Having too much money was not an issue.

We are getting close to wrapping things up here. As far as today's world versus when you grew up, which do you think was a better healthier environment or more fun or whatever?

MIKSCH: Well for one thing when I was growing up you didn't worry about violence. Nobody was going around shooting people that you hear about every day now. We could play out in the neighborhood in the dark.

BAUMGARTNER: Chase fireflies.

MIKSCH: I used to catch them and put them in a jar. My sister and I shared a bedroom so we put them in a jar or you would use them like a lantern to see where someone was. We could walk to town and Mother never worried. No one was going to pick us up and nobody was going to bother us. Now you cannot do that.

BAUMGARTNER: Yes, it has really changed.

MIKSCH: We did not have any problems, everybody helped each other. When Leroy was in college the only way he could get back and forth to home was hitchhiking because students did not have cars. They would hitchhike and they would go as far as they could with a driver and get dropped off in LaGrange or somewhere and they would hitchhike from there until they got home. That is how they got back home from college.

BAUMGARTNER: Wouldn't you say that is a significant indicator on what has happened to society? Hitch-hiking used to be safe.

MIKSCH: Safe. We would pick up hitchhikers when we came from Bryan late at night and it would be kids hitchhiking and Leroy and I would say we would have room for one. It was OK and they were always fine. Sometimes we saw kids from here that were hitchhiking, and we picked them up.

BAUMGARTNER: Today would anybody pick up a hitchhiker?

MIKSCH: No.

BAUMGARTNER: I used to hitchhike all the time. That was nothing. To me that represents a significant change in America right there. A change in attitude and the way you perceive the other people around you. Nobody would do it anymore and it was commonplace in your generation.

MIKSCH: Of course in those days, nobody had to lock their homes. I am not going to be locked in my house and be a prisoner in my own home. We never did when we moved to Needville. We would go to Bryan on weekends for a ballgame when Leroy got through with basketball practice and we would take off so we could get there before the campus bonfire activities. Our house was completely unlocked. Everybody we knew went to a football game and the town was deserted when it was an out of town game and nobody bothered anything.

Now you cannot do stuff like that? Things are different. I feel safe here because I have all my neighbors I know and the police chief lives right behind here and another one lives down the street. I couldn't imagine a safer neighborhood. Later on, when the kids started dating, we would say, Last one in please lock the door when you come home. We would get up in the morning and all the doors were unlocked. The kids would forget to lock it because they were not used to locking the doors.

BAUMGARTNER: Who had it better --us in the old days or the way things are today?

MIKSCH: For me I like them both but especially from our days. Back then we kind of got to know everybody because it was so small and the kids had all their friends at school. It was calm and you didn't have to worry about people. But now it is different, we all lock our houses now with so many strangers moving into Needville. I can go to the grocery store here now at Lowe's and I may see one person maybe that I know, but the rest of them are all strangers. At church there are so many new people. When I was teaching it was easier to get to know everybody.

BAUMGARTNER: I remember when you used to go to the county fair. You knew maybe half the people there that you bumped into and recognized and now you do not recognize anybody.

MIKSCH: Now it is so different. That part I liked the best is because you kind of knew everybody, you knew your neighbors, and you were not afraid of anybody. Everybody helped everybody.

BAUMGARTNER: Thank you, I have enjoyed talking with you very much and meeting with you.



The Miksch family: Mary Agnes, Leroy, Ronnie, Cindy, and Randy.