

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Mary Jane Kocurek & Stan Kubelka**

Interview Date: 08/13/2016

Interviewer: Pat Pollicoff

Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

Comment: Czech Heritage Society – interview of brother and sister

18 Pages



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Transcript

POLLICOFF: Hello you two, you are brother and sister, right? Will you tell us how your families came to Fort Bend County?

KOCUREK: Yes. We lived on a farm between Kendleton and Beasley. Our farm originally belonged to our grandfather, and my parents and us lived with him, rented from him, and took care of him. It was kind of a farming situation. Our farm was located a little bit off the road.

KUBELKA: There was a farm between us and the public road. So, we had to go through another farm to get to the road. Actually, we didn't have a road, it was more like a trail; there was no gravel on it. It was probably about a half mile dirt road, and when it rained, you just had to wait a couple of days to go out.

KOCUREK: The reason I am telling you is that we had to walk a long way to the school bus.

KUBELKA: About a half mile.

KOCUREK: I was a twin, and I was born at home. I guess a mid-wife delivered us, and my mother did not know that there was another one, and the other one died.

Being land locked had a big impact on us. My parents did not send me to school until I was seven because I was a puny little kid. I was seven years old the first time it flooded a lot in Fort Bend County. We lived on Turkey Creek. On this particular day, it rained a lot and the bus driver let me off on what is Highway 59 now. I had to walk a mile home. It was lightning and thundering, and I just cried and cried. I still see that in my mind, being land locked, and we always had to walk to the bus. If it wasn't muddy, then maybe daddy would take us to the bus, but most of the time, we walked. Our childhood was spent walking to the main road.

POLLICOFF: Tell me your birth dates. When you were born?

KUBELKA: She was born in 1939, on August 6th, and I was born in 1944, on June 2nd. So, we are five years apart. She was the spoiled child, the first in her generation. She got all the attention, and that is why she is still spoiled.

POLLICOFF: So, you were the second, five years younger?

KUBELKA: Yes. But I was a son, and she just hated that. She did not get as much attention as before.

POLLICOFF: Probably had to take care of you.

KUBELKA: Yes, she did.

KOCUREK: I tried to drown him [all laughing].

POLLICOFF: Obviously you were not successful.

KUBELKA: I broke her doll, and I think she used me as a doll because I was little. She dropped me a few times, I don't know. See mom did not have good medical care, and we later found out she had diabetes which probably caused some of our siblings to die early.

Five of us survived. She is first, I am second, my brother Eugene is third. He was born in 1946, Bernadette was born in 1951, and Martha was born in 1955. So those are the surviving children.

We live here. Our sister Bernadette is in Temple, Martha is in Dallas, and Eugene lives in Houston. We are kind of scattered around, but we grew up on a farm. We didn't know that we were poor, because we didn't have anything to compare it to. Everybody else lived pretty much like us. One of the things that was unique in our situation was we were Czech. Czech farmers usually grouped together; Czech farms were in this area, and the Germans were over here. The Czechs and the Germans settled in that area, and the Czechs went to Catholic Church, and the Germans went to Lutheran Church, which was a protestant church. So, we associated with just Czechs from the Catholic Church and the Germans associated with each other.

In school, everybody was together, Mexicans, Germans, Czechs, and all of them. But socially, we were separated. A lot of the people still spoke Czech, and Grandpa John Kubelka lives with us. He came here in 1873 when he was five years old.

POLLICOFF: He immigrated with his family?

KUBELKA: Yes. His name was John Stanley Kubelka. At least that was his American name; a lot of people changed their names when they came over here. He never learned English. I think he spent some time in Burleson County. I am not sure where his parents lived when they first came. Eventually he moved to Fort Bend County and bought a farm.

POLLICOFF: This was your father's or mother's father.

KUBELKA: My father's father. When he went to town to buy something, one of us kids would go with him.

KOCUREK: I was always with him.

POLLICOFF: You spoke Czech at home?

KUBELKA: We did.

KOCUREK: We spoke Czech first. I did not speak English until I went to the first grade.

POLLICOFF: Czech is the third spoken language in Texas behind Spanish.

KUBELKA: Really. Anyway, if you wanted something from him, some money a nickel or something, you asked in Czech. Our parents and grandparents spoke Czech to each other, and they spoke English to us. So, it was just a normal thing. It was really bad in a way because we had trouble with "th".

KOCUREK: And "v".

POLLICOFF: Because you would pronounce "w" as a "v". Like Novak, Nowak.

KOCUREK: I need to inject something here about this Czech and German thing. We were very much looked down upon.

KUBELKA: The Germans thought they were better.

POLLICOFF: Ah. Was your father born in Fort Bend County?

KUBELKA: Yea. He was Willie Adolph Kubelka, and he was born in 1905.

POLLICOFF: Was your mother born in this area?

KUBELKA: No, she was from Burleson County.

POLLICOFF: But she was also Czech?

KUBELKA: Yes. She was Annie Eileen Knesek.

POLLICOFF: How did they meet?

KUBELKA: My dad was a bachelor, and he had this friend that went to see one of his sick relatives in Burleson County. He didn't have a car, so he asked daddy to drive him up there. Daddy drove him up there, and they didn't have enough room for daddy to sleep in that house. So, they told him to go to my mother's family's house to sleep. He went there and met mom. Roads were pretty bad. We are talking about 1938, and so I think he saw her twice. He was tired of driving up here so he asked, "Why don't we just get married?"

POLLICOFF: So, she said yes. Were they married there in Burleson County?

KOCUREK: Yes, in the Catholic Church.

POLLICOFF: Moved back here in what year?

KUBELKA: 1938. January 11, 1938. She had to come live with my father, his father and two brothers. Before she came along, they had a black servant who would cook for them. But when he married my mother, they fired her. She had a tough time.

KOCUREK: It was quite a shock for her. But, I must hasten to say that my mother was the oldest of thirteen children. My father was one of nine children.

POLLICOFF: You said your dad was born in 1905, and your mother was born in 1917?

KUBELKA: She ran the family, and she was the type that was used to doing that. She was a short woman, kind of round. If she wanted you to do something, she would raise so much noise. So, to shut her up, you did anything she told you, and she probably did it then.

KOCUREK: She had a very hard life after she moved to Beasley. Living with all those men, and I guess cooking and everything. Then not too far into their marriage, my dad's father was burning trash, and he burned the home place down. Unfortunately they lost everything and had to start all over.

KUBELKA: Yes, they rebuilt a main house and "Grandpa's house" was a hundred yards away. He lived by himself and took his meals at the main house.

KOCUREK: I was very, very close to my grandfather. I would clean his house for him, and he was just real special to me. I enjoyed speaking Czech with him, and he was teaching me to read Czech before he died.

When he died, I was in junior high at Taylor Ray in Rosenberg, which no longer exists. Daddy came to tell me that Grandpa had died because he knew how close I was to him. I have to tell you a little bit about our grandfather.

After visiting Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic, I could see where he came from. He was a big gardener; he would have a huge garden every year. My grandfather and Aunt Vickie Bohacek were brother and sister. She lived on the next farm over in Beasley. Anyway, I would run away and go to her house. You need to understand that I was an only child for five years, the only girl, and we lived out in the country. I was mostly climbing trees, or I was at Aunt Vickie's house because she had this magnificent yard. Her house was always so neat and in order, and it made such an impression on me. I wanted to be like Aunt Vickie someday. She was a widow. She had four sons and a daughter.

I must tell you that there were never any books in our home, and if there were, they burned up in that fire. My grandfather read his Czech newspaper because we always had to go to the mailbox to get his Svoboda and Vestnik. My father read everything that he could get his hands on, and I am a reader, too. When I got to the first grade in Beasley, I hardly spoke English. We had that "Dick and Jane" book. I was a visual learner, and I learned that book in no time at all.

The cotton pickers were Mexicans, and they didn't come to school until after cotton picking time. My teacher let me teach them when they came, and that is how my teaching career started.

POLLICOFF: So tell me what kind of crops you raised?

KUBELKA: Corn and cotton. We did not raise maize back then. The corn was to feed the hogs and the cotton was a cash crop. You could sell the cotton and get money right away. The corn fed the hogs, and if you needed money, you would sell a hog or sell some calves. We had a pasture for some cattle.

POLLICOFF: How many hogs did you have?

KUBELKA: We might have had about thirty or forty at one time and probably about twenty head of cattle. We had chickens and turkeys. I remember that we would go pick the eggs, and we would go to town with ten dozen eggs. They would give us a box to separate the eggs in, and you go there and sell your eggs for the groceries. Sometimes you would need feed for the chickens, and it came in sacks that were patterned. We would ask each other what kind of shirt do you want (to be made out of the cloth when it was empty)? I wanted a Mickey Mouse print! When the feed was gone, momma would make a shirt out of it. She wore a lot of feed sack dresses, and she was really proud of them. The feed store was attached to the grocery store.

POLLICOFF: This was in Beasley?

KUBELKA: Yea. I barely remember because I was really young, four or five. We had a cream separator, and you cranked it and separated the cream.

KOCUREK: And sold the butter.

POLLICOFF: How many cattle did you have? Did you have dairy cows as well as regular cows?

KUBELKA: We had about twenty cows. It depended on how much pasture land you had. Usually, you had one dairy cow, Jersey or Holstein, and usually the dairy cow was like a pet. You fed her some cotton seed while you milked her, something like that.

POLLICOFF: So, basically, you used the milk for the family, and the rest was sold?

KUBELKA: Yes. Then we would butcher a hog, typically in the winter time. January, cooler months.

KOCUREK: I hated butchering time. They had to shoot the pig.

KUBELKA: Of course, we did chickens, and the kids would have to go out and catch the chicken so momma could butcher it. Daddy only went to the fourth grade, but he was a good reader.

KOCUREK: He was very smart.

KUBELKA: I think sometime in the twenties, grandpa wanted to buy a car, but he was not going to buy a car until someone in the family could repair it. So, in about 1923, he sent my daddy to Texas A&M for a six-week vocational course. When he came back, he could fix cars. Of course, since then he could fix anything; building a barn you built your own.

I remember they had a little blacksmith shop in the garage, and daddy didn't use it anymore. He had a bin for coal and a blower for coal, a drill press, power drills, and all kinds of tools from when they used to do horse shoes in there. Of course, they had already switched to tractors by the time I came along.

KOCUREK: I need to inject about the egg business and grocery shopping. The eggs were sold at the IGA Store in Beasley, and we bought sugar, flour and coffee mostly because we grew everything else. What the eggs did not pay for, we charged. We paid the grocery bill once a year, in August, when the cotton came in. That is the only time we got candy.

POLLICOFF: Did you participate in bringing the crops in?

KUBELKA: We picked a lot of cotton and corn.

KOCUREK: Chopping cotton.

KUBELKA: Kids back then were a labor force. You wanted to have a lot of kids if you were a farmer.

POLLICOFF: You came along five years after Mary Jane, so what about your other siblings? How old are they, and what are their names?

KUBELKA: I was born in 1944, a brother in 1946, and a sister in 1954.

KOCUREK: He and his brother Gene were close. Those two boys were in the creek all the time. It flooded all the time. Our momma was screaming and yelling because it was around the time of polio. She was convinced that they would catch polio from the creek. They would board up part of the creek and make a swimming hole, and that is how they learned to swim. I never learned how to swim. I climbed trees and played in the barn, and that was my entertainment.

POLLICOFF: Tell me a typical day growing up, what you all did and the chores.

KUBELKA: We always had to feed up; when you fed the animals, that was called feeding up.

KUBELKA: We kind of got up with the sun, I guess. You would eat your breakfast and go feed the hogs; you had to shuck the corn to get the husk off to give to the hogs. In the winter time, the cows did not have much grass, so you had to feed them hay. You always had to feed the chickens; you had to take it off the cob. We had a sheller that you had to crank.

POLLICOFF: For example, how much corn did you have to shuck to feed all these animals?

KUBELKA: I don't remember. Maybe two five-gallon buckets. It varied on how many hogs you had at one time. If a sow had a litter, when they got to a certain size, you sold them, and she would have another one. It kind of fluctuated. The cows would have calves in the spring, and when they got bigger, you took them to the auction.

KOCUREK: Things go down the disposal in the kitchen now, but we saved all of that, and it went to the pigs.

KUBELKA: We had a meat club. A bunch of farmers, let's say fifteen, got together and each week one of them would butcher a calf on a Friday. They would put it in this little building they had built, and on Saturday morning, they would cut it up. A different farmer would donate a calf each week. One day, you might get steak, and the next day you might get brisket. You might get this and that. You had fresh beef, and you probably had meat for a week because you got twenty pounds of meat or so. When I got to where I could drive, I had to get it every Saturday morning.

POLLICOFF: Did you freeze it?

KUBELKA: No, just the refrigerator. We got electric power in 1948. We got it from Houston Lighting and Power Company, which is now called Reliant. I remember going to Kendleton, which is a town where black people lived. We traded there a lot at this black store, and I remember we got a refrigerator there. Before that, we had an ice box. Whenever you went to town, you got a block of ice to put in there, and it would last a few days, depending on how much you opened it.

POLLICOFF: When you harvested your crops, where did you take them?

KUBELKA: We had to go to a cotton gin, and I think we ginned most of it in Kendleton because they had a cotton gin. They had one in Beasley and one in East Bernard.

KOCUREK: I need to interject this about Kendleton. It was before integration, and we were supposed to go to the black school in Kendleton. But somehow, we were able to go to the Anglo school. I think the first year I was in school, Beasley had its own school all the way to the twelfth grade.

KUBELKA: I think it was to the eleventh grade at that time.

KOCUREK: Anyway, we had to get up early to ride the bus to Beasley, and then get on another bus to ride to Rosenberg. So, one had to get to the bus on time, get up early, and get dressed.

POLLICOFF: What time was that?

KUBELKA: Bus picked us up at seven. Probably seven because you had to go all the way to Rosenberg and you had to ride the route, too.

POLLICOFF: So you took your cotton crops to the gin in Kendleton and Beasley mostly.

KUBELKA: They ginned it. You have cotton, then you have the seed, and the seed was valuable. You could take that and feed it to cattle, or you could give it to the gin to pay them for ginning your cotton. Then you would get a sample of the cotton with a receipt on it. You would go to a cotton buyer, and he would check the quality of the cotton. He would say, "I will give you so much for that bale of cotton, so much a pound." If you were okay with that, you sold it to him. But if another buyer gave you more, you would go to him. People bought and sold cotton, so that is how you got your money from the cotton.

POLLICOFF: You talked about how you got your money at the end of the year and you settled up your bills at the grocery store.

KUBELKA: Of course, when you plant, you got to have seed and you have to borrow money. Of course, they still do it, but you have to go to the bank now. We'd borrow money, get a loan for seed, fertilizer and a lot of gasoline to run the tractor. With your cotton, you paid it. Hopefully, you made a good crop so you could pay the bills off and have some left over. If you got a storm or a hurricane or something.

POLLICOFF: Was there a bad year?

KOCUREK: Many.

KUBELKA: I was born on June 2nd, and you usually planted cotton in April because it had to be warm. When I was born, it was a really rainy year. On June 2nd, daddy had a son, but he had not planted his cotton yet because it kept raining. I don't know what kind of crop he ended up with, but he was happy he had a son. He probably didn't make a crop, but he had the cattle, the hogs and eggs. Daddy might take some kind of job and work on an oil rig or something. In World War II, mom and dad did real well because they had a lot of chickens, a lot of hogs, and some cattle because they had so much pasture. They did pretty well because everything had a pretty good price during the war.

Of course, they were not rationing for beef because they had their own beef. They did pretty well during the war. Daddy was too old to be drafted. They tried to draft him about the time I was born. He went to the county seat to the office, and they said, "What is going to happen to that farm if you are drafted?" He was already thirty-five, so they were probably getting short of men. They would call him up and say, "Who is going to run that farm if you leave?" He would say, "Nobody. There is nobody to run the farm." So, they sent him home because they needed that farm more than they needed him.



Mary Jane Kubelka Kocurek was honored at the Fort Bend Museum's Derby Day Garden Party on May 7, 2018 for her many years of community service. She started volunteering as a docent with the Fort Bend Museum in 1975, just after the museum was given the Moore Home. Mary Jane is a member of the Garden Club of Richmond, membership chair for the Friends of George Memorial Library, contributes to the Rainbow Room, and helps with the library at the Houston Museum of Natural Science in Sugar Land.
 --courtesy fbendherald.com

POLLICOFF: When did you get married?

KOCUREK: I married William Kocurek in 1958.

POLLICOFF: Did you go through college?

KOCUREK: No. I graduated from high school at Lamar Consolidated ISD. My husband was ten years older than me. He was already educated and had been to the Air Force and all. He finally talked me in to going to Wharton Junior College and then the University of Houston. I got a BS in Elementary Education, and after three years of teaching, I discovered I loved books and libraries. I went on to get certification in Library Science at the University of Texas and North Texas State. I give him credit for doing that for me.

POLLICOFF: What did your husband do?

KOCUREK: He was probably a renaissance man, he graduated from A&M and had a pest control business until the poisons gave him trouble with his lungs. His family ran many different businesses. His sisters had a flower shop. He had a business in fencing, but we also had rentals. Later on, we had a cattle ranch. We just worked. He died almost ten years ago. He kind of worked himself to death. We did not have any children.

POLLICOFF: Where did you teach? You taught for three years and then got your Library Science Degree.

KOCUREK: I was with Lamar for twenty-nine years.

POLLICOFF: Tell me about you?

KUBELKA: Well, I graduated from high school, and then I went to college at Blinn and Texas A&M. It got pretty tough for me, so I joined the Navy for four years. I was pretty much a mechanic most of my career.

KOCUREK: Master mechanic?

KUBELKA: Actually, I worked in Houston, but I lived here. I have a son and he is twenty-six. He is at the University of North Texas Health Science in Fort Worth getting his PHD. Now he is doing research on mice brains.

POLLICOFF: Something you can relate to.

KUBELKA: He calls every day and says he has to do surgery on these two-day old mice, and get certain brain cells so they can do research on them. He has a degree in biology, a degree in chemistry, and a minor in statistics.

POLLICOFF: Did you ever have hired help, either in the home or for the crops?

KUBELKA: At picking time back then it was different. You did not have herbicides, so you got weeds in your cotton patch. We hired some people to chop cotton, cut the weeds out and then pick cotton. They were migrants from Mexico, and they would come in a big flatbed truck.

You would put them up in your barn or the garage, which ever you had, and they would stay there the whole season and pick your crop. They would stay there probably a month or so.

POLLICOFF: How many people was it about?

KUBELKA: Probably ten people or so.

POLLICOFF: So, they worked this farm, and they worked another farm.

KUBELKA: They would pick the cotton, but not so much chopping. We did a lot of it ourselves, but picking is a really hard job.

KOCUREK: But eventually, we did have mechanical tractors.

KUBELKA: After a few years, we got machines to pick the cotton. Mid 50s I guess. That is about the only time I guess we would have hired help.

POLLICOFF: Anybody in the home?

KOCUREK: No, never.

POLLICOFF: Did you have a church or where were the community centers where the Czechs got together? Was it mostly families or church?

KUBELKA: They had their own lodge halls.

KOCUREK: SPSJT. It is an insurance thing, and it still exists today.

KUBELKA: It is Slavonic or something like that.

KOCUREK: Also the Czechs had these dance halls where they held weddings, and in the fall it would be picnics.

KUBELKA: Like a church bazaar.

KOCUREK: A church bazaar, I guess. You would visit all day, eat barbecue and dance at night.

KUBELKA: And drink beer all day.

KOCUREK: Beer was a big part of the Czech life. I always resented it, and I don't drink to this day.

POLLICOFF: Was it home brew, or was it a particular kind?

KUBELKA: It was store bought. I want to say about weddings, you just didn't have a cake and punch wedding because no one would come. Somebody would give the bride and groom a calf. They would butcher a calf and barbecue it at the wedding, and they would have beer. Everybody in the family would come out. A lot of times, it was on a week day. People would skip work and skip school. I don't know why they were on weekdays. I think it had something to do with the church. I don't know. You would get married in the morning, and you would have lunch, barbecue, and drank beer all afternoon. The kids were playing, running around, and being crazy. In the evening, you had more barbecue, and then you would have a dance with a band and everything.

I have an aunt who was an orphan and married this guy. Her siblings and their spouses contributed to the wedding. She didn't have any parents to pay for the wedding, so everybody pitched in; I think we gave a calf for the barbecue. Everybody brought potato salad and cakes and kolaches.

POLLICOFF: Were there some traditional foods that you guys always had?

KUBELKA: Kolaches and sausage.

KOCUREK: Kolaches and sausage and homemade bread. Oh yes, we made sausage.

POLLICOFF: Tell me about access to medical care because you guys were pretty isolated on the farm.

KUBELKA: Hopefully the roads were passable, when we had to make it to a doctor here in Rosenberg. She was born at home, and daddy couldn't take the screaming any more. After she was born, the rest of us were born in the hospital.

KOCUREK: I remember being taken to the doctor with yellow jaundice when I was nine years old. I don't ever recall being at the dentist until I got married.

KUBELKA: No, we didn't get any dental care.

POLLICOFF: How did you get your crops to the varies places?

KUBELKA: At that time, we had a car with a hitch on it, and we pulled a trailer. You took the trailer to the

POLLICOFF: Do you remember the trains at all?

KUBELKA: Oh, yea, we didn't ride trains, but trains came by the highway, and we could see trains coming by.

KOCUREK: The Darst Ranch was next to Highway 59 and our farm bordered it. Then there was the Bohacek farm. We were in the middle. You could see the train. I used to think those steam engines put out a lot of smoke. I used to think that is where clouds came from. I don't know if you have ever seen a locomotive at night, but they had a fire box, and it just flashed a fire coming out. When I saw it at night, and I thought that is where stars come from, that train.

These locomotives were huge, and they made a huge noise. We would be in the grocery store in Beasley, and we would be just across the road. It would come by going sixty miles an hour, shaking the town. I would hide behind momma because I was so scared of that train. Now, these diesel locomotives just hum through town. Those things were the biggest and scariest things in the world.



Richmond Garden Club members learned which types of plants are best suited for outdoor pets at the monthly meeting in March 2017. From left are Carolyn Pope, Laurel Wendt, Mary Jane Kocurek, Rennie Knipling, Peggy Mathis and Sammie Wright.

--courtesy ftbendherald.com

POLLICOFF: Is there some favorite or tough memories of growing up in this area; anything like that you would like to share?

KOCUREK: I guess for me it was when my grandfather died. Our lives changed dramatically after that. The farm belonged to the grandfather, and there were eight other children. Mom and dad wanted to buy the farm. Someone else gave them more money. We had to move after two years. After that, it was really, really hard. We spent two years outside of Rosenberg and in just terrible straits. Then I married, and the rest of the family moved back where my mother was from, at Frenstat, in Burleson County. With my grandpa's death, things kind of changed dramatically.

KUBELKA: I agree with that. Mostly, it was a great impact, but luckily, Mary Jane was almost out of high school.

KOCUREK: Anyway they stayed two more years in dire poverty so I could finish school at Lamar. It was all because of me, and I tried all these years to make up for that. My family is just super outstanding, and I became a teacher and a librarian. Stan was a master mechanic, and Gene, my brother, is a retired petroleum engineer. My sister from Temple is a retired homemaking teacher, and my youngest sister is a practicing Micro Biologist in quality control. Then their children, you already heard about his son; he is the youngest one of the bunch. My sister in Temple has two daughters. The oldest daughter has a doctorate from the University of Texas and teaches genetics there. She has a little girl. The other one is an HR person and has a daughter. My next sister has three children, two have MBA's and one is an Engineer. She has four grandchildren.

POLLICOFF: Very accomplished.

KOCUREK: We had a lot of hardship, but at the time, we did not know we were having hardships. We had to learn how to make do. When you worked hard on the farm, and at the end of the year, you didn't have anything, you resented it. After that, any job was better than that.

KOCUREK: None of us wanted to be on a farm, ever.

KUBELKA: We had it beat out of us.

KOCUREK: Really and truly, we have had good lives. Towards the end, my parents had a good life. They had their own farm in Burleson County.

KUBELKA: Daddy just lost it in farming, and he got a job as a custodian at Somerville High School. Then all the kids were gone, and mom was at home by herself. Mom was one of these people with a motor on her butt, and she had to be doing something, or she would go crazy. She managed to get her a job at the school sweeping.

KOCUREK: So they both had retirement after that. We also had an oil well on the property, so they ended up having a good life.

KUBELKA: I want to add one more thing. With all that hardship I was able to go through some rough times. In 2004, I had a heart, double lung transplant with complications. I was in ICU for a hundred days.

KOCUREK: That is the other bad time in our lives.

KUBELKA: Doctors were talking about hospices just out the ICU door, and the Chaplin tried to talk to my wife. She would not talk to them. She willed me to live, and I lived. It was both lungs and heart. Finally, they were able to get some organs from a nineteen-year old person, and I got a heart and two lungs at the same time.

POLLICOFF: You look amazing.

KUBELKA: That was twelve years ago. They keep saying that I am exceptional in living this long. The longer I live, the better they look. They have to monitor me and adjust the medicines. They call my

Every year, they have a meeting of family members that donated or received organs. The best one is people that donated. One time, a lady spoke and said that her son got killed. She decided to give organs and told the whole story on how her son got killed. She said, "Anytime I want to listen to my son's heart, I put my hand on that man's chest back there." There wasn't a dry eye in the place.

POLLICOFF: Have you met the family who donated your organs?

KUBELKA: No. You write a letter to the transplant office department, and they forward it to the family. In another story, a woman had lost her father ten years ago, and they donated the organs. One man got his heart, and she was getting married and she asked that man if he would walk her down the aisle. We send thank you letters yearly but we have not heard from his donor family.

POLLICOFF: That is very nice.

KOCUREK: We have to say that the credit has to be given to God and to his wife, Kathy Graeber. She was the one who found the organs; you just don't get on a transplant list. Kathy Graeber did all that.

KUBELKA: Any other woman could have done it. I can say I had a hard time, but see how much luck I had. Married the right woman, got the right facility, and got the organs and all of that.

POLLICOFF: Thank you so much for your time today. You really provided some great historical information for a lot of people to be interested in.

KOCUREK: I am proud of us. We came from such simple beginnings, and we made it appear that we had such a wonderful life. We are educated, and we are wild. I am 77, and he has a transplant!

POLLICOFF: You both seem amazing!

Interview Ends