

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Sadie Ponish Lorfing**

Interview Date: 07/15/2009

Interviewer: Diane L. Ware

Transcriber: Carlos Rubalcaba

Project: Interview takes place in Stafford, Texas, and is recorded for the Fort Bend County Museum Association the DeWalt Heritage Project.

9 Pages



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Transcript

WARE: First of all, I want to ask you when and where you were born.

LORFING: I was born 1912, June 27, 1912, in Lavaca County, a little town midway between Hallettsville and Schulenburg. Hallettsville was the county seat, so we were right in between the two towns, about thirteen miles either direction. Our town was Hackberry.

WARE: How old were you when you moved over to Fort Bend County?

LORFING: I moved to Fort Bend County in 1938, so I was about 26. I was married and pregnant with my first child, Carlton, when we moved here. It was July the 12, 1938.

WARE: What year did you and Fritz get married?

LORFING: 1935. My maiden name was Ponish. I had three sisters, we were four girls.

WARE: Did any of your sisters move to Fort Bend County?

LORFING: No.

WARE: Where did you move? What part of Fort Bend County did you move to?

LORFING: Sartartia, now New Territory.

WARE: Right, and what did you do in Sartartia?

LORFING: I didn't do nothing, I had a baby, and I had my hands full. My husband started out mixing all the feed for the cattle. They had four hundred head of milk cows, Guernsey, and he mixed feed for those. After a while, he graduated to a nursery for the baby calves, he raised all the little girl calves.

WARE: (laughter) Who owned that Sartartia out there?

LORFING: Clayton, Benjamin Clayton. He was a big cotton baron. He lived in California. Mr. Buckhannon ran the farm. I think that was 2,800 acres there. Bob Smith owned all that land between there and all the way to the river.

WARE: Okay, so it was between the prison system and the Smith land out there?

LORFING: No, ha-ah. On the opposite side of the highway than the prison system. Where the airport is now, was all prison system. We just lived across the street from that highway, from that prison system, in a little two-bedroom house.

WARE: That was not owned by Sugar Land?

LORFING: No, no, no it was further east.

WARE: When Carlton was born there, was he born by a midwife or a doctor?

LORFING: He was born in Eldridge Hospital. Dr. Slaughter delivered him. Oh, that guy was a corker. (chuckle) He was a wonderful doctor, but he had a habit of drink, drinking.

WARE: Why did you move out to Frost Ranch?

LORFING: They were building this new highway through here, and they had a milking parlor. They were milking cows. They had a glass enclosed path, and they would automatically milk it. Their highway came right through the middle of that dairy. Well they bought it out you know. You can't stop the State.

WARE: Was that Highway 6, around 1945?

LORFING: Yea. That just destroyed the Dairy. They didn't want to go on no more with it.

WARE: So then, how did Fritz learn about the job out at Frost?

LORFING: Frost owned, I don't know how many acres. Mr. Frost came to the dairy where Fritz was working and bought some of their dairy cattle. He saw that Fritz knew everyone of the cows by name. He thought, "Well, I just got to have that man working for me." So, he offered him a job.

WARE: Tell me about where you lived out there on Highway 6.

LORFING: Do you know where Walmart and Kohl's are now? That's where the Frost headquarters was.

WARE: Very close to the Dew house, that big old Dew Family house. Did you ever have any interaction with the Dew family?

LORFING: I would say about three miles, just down the highway a little distance. I don't know what the Dew's did forever. They were a plantation.

WARE: Did the Frost Ranch ever use any of the Dew land for their cattle?

LORFING: No, they leased the Humble Oil Field.

WARE: What was the name of Mr. Frost that ran the ranch?

LORFING: Milo.

WARE: Milo, and he had brothers that helped him?

LORFING: No, he had a son, Jay Milo

WARE: When you were at Frost Ranch, where did the children go to school?

LORFING: Missouri City. The bus picked them up.

WARE: Where other children around that they played with?

LORFING: There was a Spanish family with eight children. Sam and Delia Magaña were Hispanics who lived there on the ranch. Mr. Grover Smith was a ranch foreman, he went by C. J., but his name was Grover. His wife lived in Winnie. She was one of these that didn't want to come out on the farm, out in the country. They furnished a house for us. It was a two bedroom, with a bath, a kitchen and a dining room.

WARE: Where did other people live in that area?

LORFING: Well the Lacosas lived in DeWalt, you know where that big two-story house was.

WARE: Were there other houses at DeWalt at that point?

LORFING: Yea, there was one...I'd say there was one there and one there. There was a little store at DeWalt, too.

WARE: Did you ever go to that store?

LORFING: Oh, yea. It was just a little ole country store. It carried everything, and it was a post office at one time.

WARE: At DeWalt, were there white families and Mexican families and black families, do you remember?

LORFING: There wasn't too many families, the Dew sisters lived in that big house, and then the Smittys lived in the Humble territory. He worked for the Humble Company. His wife ran the store and the post office. They had children named Claranell and Ginger, they had five or six. Five for sure. One was Charles, one was Pam.

We went to Sugar Land to shop. Old Sugar Land, that's where we did all our shopping. That was a big store. We would buy gas in DeWalt.

WARE: Did the trains still run through there?

LORFING: At that time, they did. But it's been disbanded for I don't know how many years. We always called it the Dinky. It did not stop in DeWalt.

WARE: Do you remember what kind of things the train hauled through?

LORFING: It was more or less sugar cane, you see it was shipped into Galveston. Then this little train picked it up and brought it to the sugar company.

WARE: Do you remember the two Dew sisters, Jessie Agnew and Ruth?

LORFING: No, they were too much of a high society to deal with a little country gal.

WARE: Did you ever talk to any of the people that worked over there?

LORFING: They were mostly colored or Spanish. They had a little school house at DeWalt. There was a school for Spanish kids.

WARE: How big was that school, do you remember?

LORFING: They had two teachers.

WARE: There is a pretty big Spanish community out there, huh?

LORFING: Oh yea, yea. Well you see all these plantations employed either Spanish or black help. They usually had pretty good size families, most of them.

WARE: The Frost Ranch land came right up to the Dew family land, right?

LORFING: The fence divided them. The Frost ranch was beef cattle, there wasn't much dairying, they raised Brahmas. They bought this ranch from Sugarland Industries. That was all owned at one time by Sugarland.

WARE: Did you know T. C. Rozelle?

LORFING: I guess I did, (chuckling) and Pam Rozelle. Pam went to school with my daughter.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read Marjorie Bidwell Rozelle's interview wherein she talks about her husband, T. C. Rozelle, on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=40620>

WARE: Well Margery Roselle's daddy ran the store when she was a child, and she lived at DeWalt. Did you know that? Her maiden name was Bidwell. She lived over by the store.

WARE: How long did you stay out in that Frost Ranch area?

LORFING: We moved from there in 2001. They finally had to sell out there, too. Pressure with the high taxes.

WARE: Right, right and they kept cattle up until the end, right?

LORFING: Yes, they still have cattle down there in the oil field. Their headquarters are right next to the Elkins High School.

Do you remember the black church that burned?

WARE: Yes, Saint Johns.

LORFING: I didn't know what the name... yea Saint Johns. The Agnew's built that church for their slaves.

WARE: I think Saint Johns sits on acre of land right in the middle.

LORFING: The Dew's and the Agnew's saw that their help got that land and kept it. I think it's dirty for anybody to try to burn it down.

WARE: Carlton was born in what year?

LORFING: 1939. Fay was five years younger, so born in 1943. I lost a little girl, eleven days old between Carlton and Fay.

WARE: Oh, I'm sorry. Carlton must have started at Sugar Land schools?

LORFING: He started at Sugar Land school. When we were at Sartartia, and of course when we moved to Frost, he started going to Missouri City, and he graduated from Missouri City. Fay was one of the first graduates when we consolidated Missouri City and Sugar Land. She graduated from Dulles.

WARE: When you moved here from Lavaca County to Sartartia, were the living conditions better at Sartartia than they had been in Hallettsville?

LORFING: Oh, heck yea. We liked to starve to death out there, trying to farm in Lavaca County.

WARE: You had your own farm down there?

LORFING: No, no we lived on my husband's daddy's farm. He had a brother, my husband had a brother, Jay, that was employed at Sugarland Industries. He's the one that saw that Fritz and I got to move down here when there was an opening at the dairy. When they offered Fritz the job, well naturally we took it! They started him with \$75 a month wages. The first month came around, well the man came to the house and paid him. The second time, he came and paid out, him and my husband went to his brother and said, "Jay, what am I going to do with all this money?" (hearty laughter from Lorfing and Ware) \$150 was more that we had ever had in all our lives!

LORFING: We saved enough money to make a go of it, and after the children got in high school, I went to work for the school district. I worked in the cafeteria. I started at Missouri City, and then when they consolidated, I transferred to Dulles. I worked for the school for 19 years. and I retired in 1963. I started working with the school when we moved to the ranch. At that time, segregation was over. The blacks and the Spanish all went to one school.

WARE: Did Walter Brinkman's children go to school there? Did Sue Brinkman or Walter Brinkman, Jr. go to school there? They were related to the Dew's. She was the daughter there at the house.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Sue Brinkman Alston interview on this website at <http://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=30520> and the Walter August Brinkman, Jr. interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=38862>

LORFING: That's what I was thinking that she was a daughter. Did you know the Patterson's from Sugar Land? James was a teacher at Dulles for a long time and a basketball coach. After he retired from the school he won that commissioner job. When he was coaching basketball at Dulles, we rode to all the games with his wife, Mary Jo, my husband and I did. You know they had a child that was disabled. He was a wonderful man, I tell you.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the James David Patterson interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=40647>

WARE: When you were out at DeWalt, I guess if you needed to go to the doctor or anything...

LORFING: We went to Sugar Land. Slaughter was there for a while, then Dr. Kuykendall came in.

We had a garden, yea. We did a lot of church work. See, we drove to Rosenberg to church for a long time at Saint Paul's. When New Hope was built, we transferred our membership down here.

WARE: You said that Fritz's brother, Jake, came to Sugarland Industries first, correct? Do you know what kind of work he did in Sugar Land?

LORFING: He was a bookkeeper. He was the oldest child. My husband had ten brothers and sisters.

WARE: (chuckling) That's a lot.

LORFING: Well, they were nine and ten all together. Ten children. There is only one left alive, it's a girl, Adel.

WARE: Is her last name Lorfing still?

LORFING: Lorfing, her name is Opala, and she lives in Austin with her daughter.

WARE: Do you remember why Jake came to Sugar Land to start with?

LORFING: I guess just for a job, I'm sure.

WARE: Was his family with him, living in Sugar Land?

LORFING: No, she lived down on the coast, Port Lavaca. She came to Sugar Land, she had a sister living there to find work.

WARE: What was her name?

LORFING: Babe Stutzenbaker, it's an old German name, but I don't know how it was really spelled.

WARE: But she and her sister actually came up to Sugar Land from Port Lavaca? Then she met Jacob there?

LORFING: Yes.

WARE: Thank you.

Interview ends