

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Valentine Kusy**

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Valentine Kusy, 1942

Transcript

GOODSILL: Let's start with some biographical information. Can you tell me where you were born?

KUSY: I was born in Lavaca County.

GOODSILL: When?

KUSY: 1927.

GOODSILL: And were you born at home or in a hospital?

KUSY: Little town of Moravia (chuckles). At home.

GOODSILL: And tell me about your father's people. Where did they come from?

KUSY: Well, they all from Czechoslovakia. My father is from Czechoslovakia.

GOODSILL: How did they get to Fort Bend County?

KUSY: Well, they came to Lavaca County.

GOODSILL: How did they get there?

KUSY: Well, by ship.

GOODSILL: And do you remember the story of why they left Czechoslovakia?

KUSY: Well, they wanted to—my daddy wanted to leave so he wouldn't have to fight in the war.

GOODSILL: What year was that?

KUSY: That was in 1911 or something like that.

GOODSILL: Before the first World War?

KUSY: I mean, uh, 1911, yeah.



Valentine and Johana Kusy, Valentine Kusy's Grandparents

GOODSILL: And when he got here, what did he do?

KUSY: What did he do? He settled around Moravia. He was paying off his debt to the people who paid his way here.

GOODSILL: Yeah. And what kind of work did he do?

KUSY: Farm . Farm work. House work. Cook and everything else.

GOODSILL: How long did he have to work?

KUSY: And he was like a slave, let me tell you. Those people sent him to work, and they took the money and they just paid him \$7.00 a month. (laughs)

GOODSILL: How long did he have to work to work off his debt?

KUSY: Well he did that 'til he ran away. He ran away to his uncle. (laughing)

GOODSILL: Where did he run to?

KUSY: To his uncle.

GOODSILL: Where was that?

KUSY: He was living not too far away from there, from Moravia.

GOODSILL: So he got away from—

KUSY: He got away from it and then he was in Waco, doing some work in Waco and all that. Baling hay and stuff like that.

GOODSILL: Sounds like it was a hard life.

KUSY: Oh, he had a tough life. He died young. He was fifty-one.

GOODSILL: And how did he meet your mother?

KUSY: Well, he knew my mother from Czechoslovakia. In other words, my daddy and her brother ran away from Czechoslovakia to the United States. They came by ship and then they came by train from Galveston, up to Schulenburg. And that's where they settled, around Schulenburg. Because he had an uncle living in Schulenburg. That's the one he ran away to.

GOODSILL: And how did your mother get over here?

KUSY: Well, she came in 1919. Her brother helped her get here.

GOODSILL: Wow! That was a long time. Eight years.

KUSY: Yeah, well, they wasn't married. They got married in 1925.

GOODSILL: So she was in Czechoslovakia during World War I.

KUSY: Yeah, she was there through the war. And it was real tough down there. They didn't have no coats to put on or anything like that. Some sheets to put on the bed. It was a rough life, according to her. She came to the United States and settled—lived with her brother and she didn't like it here too much. And he told her, 'Well, you're gonna have to first pay what you owe for the trip to come here, and then make money to go back.' And that's how she wound up staying here.

GOODSILL: Because she could never make enough.

KUSY: Make enough money to go back. She married my daddy then.

GOODSILL: Hard life wasn't it?

KUSY: Oh, a tough life.

GOODSILL: It's not easy to be an immigrant.

KUSY: No.

GOODSILL: And with language problems.

KUSY: The language problem—she never could, and my daddy had a hard time learning how to talk English. But my daddy did get his citizenship paper in 1938. And he said he was a very proud man—that he could vote in the United States.

Yeah, I still remember when he came home—it was night—and he said oh how happy he is that he can vote. He was real proud of that.

GOODSILL: That's great. And do you remember what year your mother and father got married?

KUSY: They got married in 1925.

GOODSILL: STILL—she came over in 1919 and they STILL waited to get married!

KUSY: Oh yeah. Well, they had to work to pay what they owed. Nobody gave them anything.

GOODSILL: What kind of work did your mom do?

KUSY: Well, she was doing housework. But I done forgot who the people were. I would have to—I got all the details at home.

GOODSILL: And she was living in what county?

KUSY: She was living in Lavaca County too. A little town, what they called St. John.

GOODSILL: And so then they got married and then they began to have children.

KUSY: They settled down around the little town of Moravia.

GOODSILL: Tell me—remind me—geographically, where is Moravia?

KUSY: Moravia is right in the center, between Hallettsville, Shiner, Schulenburg and Flatonia.

GOODSILL: And they began to have a family?

KUSY: Yeah, they did.

GOODSILL: And who was the first child born?

KUSY: My first brother was Edward. Then I was.

GOODSILL: And how did you get your name?

KUSY: I got my name after my grandpa. My brother was named after his daddy, Edward, and the second boy was named after my daddy's daddy, Grandpa.

GOODSILL: He was still back in Czechoslovakia?

KUSY: Oh they all lived there. I never seen my Grandpa and Grandma in Czechoslovakia--none of them.

GOODSILL: But Valentine seems like it might be an Italian name?

KUSY: I don't know (laughing).

GOODSILL: You don't know, but that's what you were named!

KUSY: Well, let's see. It was his name and my daddy said he wanted to have his sons named after him and his daddy.

GOODSILL: You know, I forgot to ask. Tell me your father's full name.

KUSY: Eduard—they put it in Czech.

GOODSILL: Last name?

KUSY: Kusy.

GOODSILL: They didn't change it at all when they moved to America?

KUSY: No, no, no, no.

GOODSILL: Kusy. And what was your mother's full name?

KUSY: Bessie.

GOODSILL: Bessie. What's her maiden name?

KUSY: Socha.

GOODSILL: Kusy. And so there were, so far, two children born. Were there any more children?

KUSY: Oh yeah. There was a whole bunch! My brother, Oscar.

GOODSILL: And?

KUSY: And then Marcella, my sister and then Sydonia.

GOODSILL: Girl?

KUSY: Girl, uh huh. And another girl, Jerrlyn. And then was another one, Annie. But she passed away after birth, that same day.

GOODSILL: Any more?

KUSY: No, that's all.

GOODSILL: A lot of children! Wow. So, what was your daddy doing at the time you were born?



*Eduard Kusy, Valentine
Kusy's father*

KUSY: They were sharecroppers. Farming. In Moravia.

GOODSILL: So what was life like for you as a child?

KUSY: Terrible!

GOODSILL: Tell me!

KUSY: I didn't have shoes to wear. Went to school barefooted. (chuckled)

GOODSILL: Really. But everybody did.

KUSY: Not everybody. The people that had farms and were rich, they could afford tennis shoes. Tennis shoes were forty-two cents a pair at that time.

GOODSILL: See, now that's interesting! Forty-two cents a pair. And that was expensive?

KUSY: It WAS expensive.

GOODSILL: So when you were working as a sharecropper, just for the people who don't know; tell how it works if you're a sharecropper.

KUSY: Well, if you're a sharecropper, you rent the farm from the farmer that owns the land.

GOODSILL: You rent it.

KUSY: You rent it and he takes one-fourth of your cotton crop and one-third of the corn crop. And you got to pay by an acre on the corn crop. I knew a man that was charging \$7.00 an acre. If he had fifteen acres of corn, well, you had to pay \$7.00 an acre—seven times fifteen.

GOODSILL: AND then he keeps one-third?

KUSY: You got to keep the corn and all that to feed your animals on the farm. And cotton was one-fourth. In other words, if cotton was seven cents a pound, a 500 [pound] bale brought you \$35.00. But our landlord—he didn't sell it. He took every fourth bale and he stored it in the barn. And when cotton was way up there, then he sold it and made a lot of money that way.

GOODSILL: But did that do any good for your dad?

KUSY: No, uh-uh. Because he took—my dad had to share his, sell his.

GOODSILL: Because he needed the money now—to pay the farmer, to buy the feed.

KUSY: I still remember him—to buy a horse and he went to borrow money at the bank. And that's the first thing. When you made the first bale of cotton you have to pay your bank off.

GOODSILL: Did you ever go with your daddy to the bank to pay it off? Did he ever let you go with him?

KUSY: No, no, I never went. But he was very lucky that he could get a loan to buy a horse, like that, to farm with, and all that.

GOODSILL: Why could he get a loan? Because he was—

KUSY: He didn't have the money to buy it.

GOODSILL: Oh, no, he didn't have the money, but they gave him a loan because he a good reputation?

KUSY: For his honesty.

GOODSILL: And he was honest. And he was proud of that.

KUSY: Oh yeah! If he owed you a penny, and he'd give you two pennies if he had to cheat you out of it ??? That was his motto.

GOODSILL: So, working as a sharecropper, very difficult to get ahead.

KUSY: Oh well, now, that's what they did all their life, though. I mean, until they got to be 65, then they got what they call a pension. They had a little pension like we got Medicare now, and all that. They never accumulated anything. They died—they came here poor and they died poor.

GOODSILL: Do you think your father had any regrets about coming here?

KUSY: No. He didn't. What happened there, when his parents had a farm in Czechoslovakia, a place where they had cattle and all that. And they offered it to him, if he would come back. And he rejected it. He didn't want to go back. He just let his brother have it and that's it. He didn't want to have nothing to do with it.

GOODSILL: Did your mother seem to have regrets until the end? Or did she finally get used to it?

KUSY: No, no, she, after they got married, settled down on that farm and had babies.

GOODSILL: So what was your life like when you were a little boy?

KUSY: Oh, I was a little rascal. I hate to say that, but my daddy tied me to a tree with a chain (laughing).

GOODSILL: Really!

KUSY: Really. That started—he was smoking and wouldn't allow none of us to smoke and all that. We played with matches and we set the haystacks on fire. And after that he said, 'Y'all are going to behave and y'all are going to do what I tell you'. Anyway, I was playing with matches—we had sugar cane that we fed the cattle with in the summertime. There were dry leaves around the bottom so I pulled some of them off and I made a little fire in the sugar cane patch. Anyway he ???? the sugar cane and he seen that there were ashes there and said, 'Which one of you boys were messing around with matches?' And there was no way you would lie to him. I guarantee you that! So I told him I did and so he said they were going to town. At that time they had double scoops of ice cream. And he says, 'Well, since you were such a mean boy, I'm going to tie you to a tree like a dog.' He went to the neighbor to pick up the eggs and a little thundershower came and I got soaking wet underneath the tree. And he came back, and he asked me if I was going to be a good boy. I says, 'Yeah, I'm gonna be a good boy. I'm not going to play with no matches anymore.' (laughing)

GOODSILL: So that was a good discipline! It worked.

KUSY: It worked. Yeah! Yeah!

GOODSILL: Were you a better boy after that?

KUSY: Today he would be locked up in jail. But I admired him for that. That made me a good man.

GOODSILL: It allowed you to get straight.

KUSY: Oh yeah.

GOODSILL: That's interesting. Did you have to work in the fields?

KUSY: Oh yeah. When I was five or six years old, I had a little cotton sack I used to pull and pick cotton.

GOODSILL: How long was the cotton sack?

KUSY: Oh it was about four feet long.

GOODSILL: And when the cotton gets in it, does it get heavy?

KUSY: Oh it gets pretty heavy.

GOODSILL: Were you proud that you contributed?

KUSY: Oh yeah. They used to tell me what a good boy I was, that I picked that much.

GOODSILL: What's it like on your hands to pick cotton?

KUSY: Oh, you get stuck a little bit on the edge of your fingers, trying to pick it out of.

GOODSILL: Explain to people who don't know how cotton grows. Explain what it's like. How does cotton grow? What is it that sticks your hands?

KUSY: You plant it, it blooms and they turn into bolls and then the things open, and they're like a star. And you've got to pick the cotton out of that boll. There are sharp edges on the ends where it opens and a lot of times it'd stick you in the fingers.

GOODSILL: It'd be like an egg and the egg cracks open and the cotton comes out, but the edges of the egg shell are really brittle and broken.

KUSY: Oh yeah.

GOODSILL: So it's hard on your fingers.

KUSY: And we were barefooted too, when we picked cotton. We used to stand on the one row, under the shade so our feet wouldn't get too hot.

GOODSILL: So cotton is not very tall, is it?

KUSY: Well at that time they didn't use no fertilizers and nothing like that. If it grew two feet long, about 24 inches or something like that, that was the tallest. And you didn't make a bale per acre like they do now. You have to have about five or six acres for a bale. They didn't have no fertilizers or anything then. It was tough, trying to make a living on a farm. But we raised all our chickens and all our cattle and all that, so we got a---??? could catch a live chicken and kill it and have dinner.

GOODSILL: And gardening? Any gardening?

KUSY: Oh yeah. Even poppy seed (laughing).

GOODSILL: Even poppy seeds?

KUSY: Oh yeah. We eat poppy seed kolaches. That was the MAIN thing!

GOODSILL: I believe you still love those!

KUSY: Oh yeah. Still. Oh yeah. If you look at me now, when I drink coffee here, I got to have my sugar and cream in my coffee. They tell me I ruin my coffee but I don't. I love it that way. When I was a little boy, that's what I used to eat for breakfast. I never liked oatmeal.

GOODSILL: They didn't give you coffee for breakfast as a little boy.

KUSY: We just had it on a plate and put some—broke some bread in it, and just eat coffee, sugar, and—that was our breakfast. Of course potatoes and sauerkraut was raised on the farm and that was our dinner again. And the meat came—like I said, if you wanted a chicken, you went and killed one. And the pork, we butchered usually five hogs a year. They put that into clear linen—baked it and put it into crocks and put lard on top of it, and then they would go out there and they'd dip that much when it was warming up and eat it. And sausage was put into quart jars. They was packed in there and they cooked them in a copper kettle on the stove. Then when they wanted sausage for dinner, they would open a jar and take the sausage out. They didn't have no refrigerator. They didn't have no electricity or nothing like that. Everything was coal oil—kerosene—

GOODSILL: And all the food was put up by your mother and sisters?

KUSY: She put all the food up, that's right.

GOODSILL: And she grew the cabbage to make the sauerkraut?

KUSY: Oh, the sauerkraut, that was my job! I had to walk in the crock and stomp it in the crock. You have to put that much salt so often and then you have to dip the water out—

GOODSILL: Wait, wait. Start at the beginning! You grow the cabbage and then what.

KUSY: Grow the cabbage and when it forms into heads; then they had a deal that they would cut it up—slice it up—they had a special slicer for that. And then they put it in a crock and somebody had to walk. So I had to wash my feet and walk in the crock. And

every time, that much of it, you put salt in there so it cured – fermented. And they left it in the crock for two weeks and then they put it into fruit jars. And that would be sauerkraut all year long.

GOODSILL: And you were in charge of mixing it with your feet.

KUSY: Yeah, I was in charge of walking in there, because I was the stomper!

GOODSILL: That kind of toughens your feet – salt and—

KUSY: No, it didn't. For me, it didn't make no difference.

GOODSILL: No difference. Oh, that's interesting. You can imagine the kids these days don't know ANYTHING about that.

KUSY: No. And then water well – we didn't have no—we just had a well with buckets that we had to draw the water, one bucket on each end and pour the water out. When the water was not sufficient to dip in the water, Daddy would tie a stick of wood on one end and he'd drop me down in the well and I had to pick all the sludge out of there to clean it out and the water would be good again.

GOODSILL: Was that scary for you?

KUSY: No, I was real brave then! Today I'd be scared!! ; That it might crumble on me—the rocks.

GOODSILL: It was rocks along the sides of the well?

KUSY: It was rocks.

GOODSILL: And rocks going all the way down?

KUSY: All the way down, yeah.

GOODSILL: And he'd put you on a rope and down you'd go, to clean it out.

KUSY: He'd drop me down in there to clean it out. Yeah.

GOODSILL: Those are important jobs—picking the cotton, making the sauerkraut, cleaning the well. Those are important things.

KUSY: Yeah. We had horses and everything needed water. I mean, it was farming with horses; didn't have a tractor then.

GOODSILL: Farming with horses. Oh wow; VERY labor-intensive. And everything you need—you can't just turn on the faucet. You've got to haul the water to the house, for the horses, for the crops.

KUSY: Carry it in the house. If you wanted to take a bath, they had a foot tub. And you took a bath in the tub. And that was once a week.

GOODSILL: Once a week.

KUSY: That was usually on Saturday.

GOODSILL: And what was Sunday like?

KUSY: Oh, Sunday. We belonged to a meat club. We'd get meat on Sunday. The neighbors would get together and we'd go swimming in the creek.

GOODSILL: When you say 'a meat club' do you mean meet together?

KUSY: Well the club was—they had twenty-five members and every farmer or renter that was renting the farm, had to furnish—feed a calf out—and they had by numbers, what time you are going to have yours ready for them to butcher.

GOODSILL: OH, meat! Go and have your meat butchered, but social time as well.

KUSY: Well, they would do that on a Friday night. Saturday morning you picked up the meal. My mom would be cooking it all out. We had a little screen cage on the porch. So Saturday it was fresh, but Sunday you had to cook it all out, because it would spoil. And the upper neighborhoods, they would all come down to the house and we'd play.

GOODSILL: How close were your neighbors?

KUSY: Well, we had neighbors all around us. I would say about half a mile, each one. But we had a creek running through the place we were renting, and we'd go play 'alligator' in the creek. You had to catch somebody and tap them on the head three times and then HE was the alligator. (laughing)

GOODSILL: Kids find ways to play, don't they?

KUSY: Oh yeah. We had a game we called—in Czech they called it schweinebite.

GOODSILL: Tell me how to spell it?

KUSY: Sow bites. A hog, a sow. We played that with sticks. We took a can and you had to get that thing to a certain position.

GOODSILL: Swinging? Swinging a can on the end of a stick?

KUSY: No, no, we would be hitting it. And the most important game was washers. Throw washers into a little hole and then whoever got—I think it was five points for hitting the hole and one point was the closest to the hole. We didn't have no toys. My uncle that came with my daddy from Czechoslovakia—he was living in San Angelo, and he sent us a football for Christmas. And so all the boys got together and we played football. I was playing block and the guy come out there and he hit me and nearly knocked me out. And since that time I don't care NOTHING about football! If they ask me anything about football today, I wouldn't know. I didn't want to play football after that.

GOODSILL: I can understand that! (laughing) Well, what age did you start going to school?

KUSY: I started going when I was six years old. And I went to Komensky School. We had a Czech teacher because we didn't know how to talk English when we started school. Because our parents were Czech and all that, and—I hate to even talk about it but I was sitting there, squirming in the desk, and she seen me and she says, "Pojd' sem, come here".

GOODSILL: What did she call you?

KUSY: Pojd' sem, in Czech, come here.

GOODSILL: Pojd' sem, oh, that means come here.

KUSY: Come here. And so I came up there and she said, 'What do you need?' (then he says it in Czech) I said, 'I've got to go to the toilet' (first he says it in Czech). She says, 'Well, go on!' And went to a reunion—she passed away two years ago—and when we had a reunion, she always told me 'I got to go to the toilet' (says it in Czech). That stayed with me the rest of my life! (laughs)

GOODSILL: She couldn't have been too much older than you.

KUSY: Well, when I started school she was started teaching the first year. But she talked Czech and she was a very, very good teacher. She lived to be 102 years old!

GOODSILL: What do you remember about learning English? Difficult?

KUSY: It just came by itself, you know. Kids talking—

GOODSILL: You're young, you just learn it.

KUSY: But if you'd just have to go out there and try to learn it, it's rough. And about English, the thing that you learn was the nasty words first. (laughs)

GOODSILL: That's funny. Were you ever able to help your father by translating for him at the stores or for business?

KUSY: No, mostly the stores and all that, there were Czech people running it and they just talked Czech. In fact, the guy that had the store in Moravia, he name was Paul Broz. He was from Czechoslovakia. So they knew each other from Czechoslovakia. We didn't go to a town like Schulenburg. We just traded in the little grocery store. What we bought groceries for—we had chickens on the farm. We picked the eggs and we sold eggs once a week. That's how we got our money for groceries and a little flour that we had to bake bread from. At that time you didn't buy no bread like you do now. My mama had to bake bread every day. With six kids you had to bake bread every day.

GOODSILL: She had a FULL time job!

KUSY: Full hands on her?

GOODSILL: And so did your daddy. FULL time, keeping everything going.

KUSY: It was a hard life. We didn't have a life of luxury, in other words.

GOODSILL: At what age do you remember that you were able to begin wearing shoes?

KUSY: Well, we gradually—what happened there—as we were growing up, we would go to the neighbors and help the neighbors. And the neighbors would pay us. Like, picking cotton, we got fifteen cents a hundred. And that took all day to pick one hundred pounds, when you were a kid. And from that we bought our clothes that we wore to school. When we got a little bigger--we wore little overalls--but when we got a little bit bigger, we wanted to be fancier, so Mama says, 'Well, you've got to iron them'. She'd wash them but we had to take an ironing board, heat the little deals that we ironed with, on the stove. And then you'd have to bake it and iron it.

GOODSILL: Did mom do the ironing?

KUSY: No, we did. We had to since we wanted fancier clothes—better clothes.

GOODSILL: So she would wash them but you had to iron them.

KUSY: She would wash them but we had to iron them so they wouldn't be wrinkled.

GOODSILL: That's a good system! Makes you proud then, of how you dress. And when it was—I guess it was in the fall, when you began to harvest the crops, did you get out of school in order to work?

KUSY: Well, we—the work was so tough at that time—we would harvest our corn. Corn came and the cotton was just before the school started. But we stayed out—we didn't to school for two or three weeks. Corn was always in September but we had to break that by hand and haul it by wagon. You broke it and threw it on a pile and then they went with a wagon and threw it on the wagon.

GOODSILL: Now you told us about harvesting cotton. Tell us about what it's like to work with corn.

KUSY: Well, the corn—

GOODSILL: Imagine people don't know. There's a stalk and there's a—

KUSY: You cut all the corn tops. You cut them right above the ears and let them dry. Then in the morning we'd go and we'd tie them together and we'd stack them in a haystack. A stack in other words. And that's what we'd feed the animals during wintertime.

GOODSILL: So, which was harder, cotton? Harvesting cotton or harvesting corn?

KUSY: Well, it was all hard work. I mean, the worst thing about corn, you had to tie it into bundles. You had pick the stalk and tie it into a bundle with the stalk and sometimes there would be a snake underneath the pile! Then we'd go and carry it on the pile and haul it in the wagon and put it in stacks. And that's what we fed the animals with in wintertime.

GOODSILL: So I'm guessing that missing the first couple weeks of school sort of set you behind.

KUSY: Put us sort of behind the other kids, you know. But it was tough.

GOODSILL: So tell me what you grew up to do? What happened after? How far did you go in school and how did you find a career?

KUSY: What happened—my daddy had arthritis and he was very sick And when I got to the eighth grade, he told me that to drive four horses and a plow, I didn't need no education—to stay home and plow the fields and all that. So I quit when I was in the eighth grade.

GOODSILL: And so then what happened? How did your life—

KUSY: So it went on and then World War II broke out. My older brother had to go into service and I didn't want to go in the infantry, so I begged my daddy to let me volunteer into the Navy. He didn't want me to go and so just before I was eighteen, he was telling a guy at the Moravia store, that I've been giving him so much hard time that I want to go into the Navy, and he said he didn't know what to do about it. And this guy told him, 'Well, Ed, I tell you what. My brother—his son wanted to go into the Navy and he wouldn't sign his papers. So they drafted him. And you know where he is at now? He's in the cemetery. So my brother hates it that he didn't sign his papers.' So the next day, my daddy—I come home—I had a date that night with a girl, and I come home and he says, 'Well, if you want to go into the Navy, I'll sign your papers.' So that's how I got to serve in the United States Navy. I served almost eighteen months and during that time I was twice in Japan, in Guam and Hawaii.

GOODSILL: What did you do? What was your job?

KUSY: In the Navy, I was taught to be with the unexploded ordinance. Disarm bombs and set off depth charges and stuff like that.

GOODSILL: Were you good at that?

KUSY: Well, I was lucky the war ended. I was just on my way and the war ended. I was supposed to ship out of Treasure Island. But anyway, we went and—by the time I got to Japan, they had everything cleaned up then. The war—so. And after that, from Japan I went back to the United States and they loaded us right back on a ship that went right back to Hawaii and Japan again. And then to Guam, I was lucky. I didn't have to go to the what-you-call-it—the ??????????

GOODSILL: Any of the theaters of war in Japan?

KUSY: It was not the Viet Nam War, it was the Korean War. I missed the Korean War by going into the Navy and serving my time. They couldn't draft me after that.

GOODSILL: So what did you do when you came back from the war?

KUSY: Well, I farmed with my daddy. One year with my daddy because—after that he had a heart attack and I farmed another three years with my mom. Then my mom remarried. Then I went on my own.

GOODSILL: Where did you go, what did you do?

KUSY: I went to San Angelo, because my uncle was living down there, and I was like a lost sheep. When I came down there, he told my mama that I should come there and I could stay with him. And when I got there, well, his son-in-law sold his house and he'd moved in, and he told me, 'Well, you can stay with me this one night'. Of course my daddy had a cousin and she was living down there in San Angelo, and I asked him, 'Where does she live?' and so I went to visit her and they said to stay with them. And I worked there in a cotton gin and helped them pick cotton. And I accidentally went back to Schulenburg and that's where, through my sister, I met my wife. And that's how we got married.

GOODSILL: What year were you married?

KUSY: 1951.

GOODSILL: And what was your wife's full name?

KUSY: Bernice.

GOODSILL: Bernice? And her maiden name?

KUSY: Kossa.

GOODSILL: And then you got married in 1951 and

KUSY: And then I got a job. I was working at National Biscuit Company.

GOODSILL: Oh! What did you do there?

KUSY: I was sweeping the floors and working on the machines.

GOODSILL: But that was better than working in the fields.

KUSY: Oh yeah.



Valentine and Bernice Kusy on their wedding day, 1951

GOODSILL: That was a big job – a promotion!

KUSY: Yeah.

GOODSILL: National Biscuit Company. What did they make?

KUSY: They make crackers. Oreos and all that.

GOODSILL: Oh! Where was that?

KUSY: I worked there from 1951 to 1956.

GOODSILL: Where was it? What town?

KUSY: It was in Houston. Crawford Street.

GOODSILL: And then what happened?

KUSY: Well, I quit and went to work for W-K-M.

GOODSILL: What did you do there?

KUSY: There I was a machinist.

GOODSILL: Did you like that work?

KUSY: Yeah. I worked there thirty-five years. That's where I retired from.

GOODSILL: Wow. Where is W-K-M? Is it out here?

KUSY: Well, it was in Missouri City, but now there is nothing there. The land was contaminated and they wouldn't let them build nothing there. They just cleared everything off.

GOODSILL: Just out of curiosity, what was it contaminated with?

KUSY: I guess the oil and stuff that they used for cutting steel.

GOODSILL: That the machine shop used?

KUSY: The waste from the machines and all that.

GOODSILL: Interesting. So, you and your wife had a family?

KUSY: Oh yeah.

GOODSILL: Tell me about your children.

KUSY: Now here I'm going to have to go about my wife.

GOODSILL: Tell me about your wife.

KUSY: Well, she was born on April Fool's Day. She was the fifth child.

GOODSILL: April 1 – what year was she born?

KUSY: 1933. You want the name of the other ones?

GOODSILL: Yeah, go ahead and put them down. Start with her—

KUSY: First one was Agnes, and the second was Evelyn, and then Janie and then Dorothy, and then my wife, and then when my wife was supposed –they didn't have no kids – no boys. And so the daddy wanted a boy SO bad, and so my wife was born, and she was born on April's Fool Day and she fooled them again. She was another girl!

GOODSILL: She was NOT a boy!

KUSY: She was not a boy. And so anyway, then after that they had two more kids, and they were boys. Sylvan and Lawrence.

GOODSILL: And so she grew up, where?

KUSY: She grew up at Ammansville , that's between Schulenburg and La Grange.

GOODSILL: And so when you and she got together, then you had children?

KUSY: Yeah.

GOODSILL: And what are your children's names?

KUSY: Well the first is Marilyn, second one is Gloria, and then Kenneth and then Kevin.

GOODSILL: And at that time you were living where?

KUSY: We were living in Alameda. We got destroyed by BFI. They dug a –it was a commercial sand company and had a sand pit there, and they put a garbage dump by our place. That's how we moved to Quail Valley. I traded our home because it—I built the home by myself and so we couldn't sell it. The guy wouldn't give me the price, but anyway,

we traded it in for a house in Quail Valley. And what happened down there, the guy that traded the house for us, he let his kids live there. They were doing dope and one of them died up there and so guy that had the commercial sand company finally went and gave the guy the price that he wanted to get them out of there. I didn't like living in Quail Valley because it was golfing and all that. I was selling real estate and I was selling a place down here at Needville and that's how I got to Needville. The place was for sale.

GOODSILL: And have you been happy living down here?

KUSY: Oh yeah. It's a good place to live.

GOODSILL: Wow. Quite a life.

KUSY: I was always thinking about moving back to the little town of Moravia, around there, but now when I go up there, I don't know nobody there.

GOODSILL: What is Moravia like now?

KUSY: Well, it's just a little town. It's got a little Catholic church in there and there's one store.

GOODSILL: Are people still farming?

KUSY: Oh yeah. They are farming around there. But mostly cattle. Corn, feed, like that. It used to be a place where they used to plant cotton like they do around here, Needville and Fairchilds. But that's all out now. There is no cotton gins or anything left down there. Just strictly animals.

GOODSILL: And you don't have any family left up there.

KUSY: Yeah, I got family that live out there. My sister-in-law lives down there. They call it Kusyville, between Moravia and St. John. My brother incorporated it, and all of his kids live in Kusyville now.

GOODSILL: OH, I see. Like after your last name! Kusy! Kusyville! (laughing) Okay, let me look at my list and let me see what else I should have asked you. Are your children still living in this area?

KUSY: No. Marilyn is living in Waco, and Gloria is living in Fort Worth. Kenneth is living at home. Kevin is living in Pearland.

GOODSILL: Just because I'm interested in families---your father came and he was like a slave. He had to work off his debt. He had to work as a share cropper, he had arthritis, he had his children. His children had a little better life than he did. How about your children? What are your children's lives like?

KUSY: Not very good right now. Like Marilyn was married twice. Her first husband died with cancer. Then she remarried and they were married one month—I hate to talk ugly—but they were having sex and when they through, her husband got off and said, 'Oh my God' and he fell and he died of a heart attack. So she didn't have a very good life.

My other daughter—well, she lives in Fort Worth and she used to live here in Houston. But they moved to Oklahoma and now in Fort Worth. Her husband is sickly all the time. He just had a kidney removed because he had cancer in it. So, we're supposed to go there tomorrow to visit her.

GOODSILL: Is your wife still alive?

KUSY: Yeah, she's down there. Her name is Bernice. We've been married 59 years this month!

GOODSILL: You'll have to introduce me to her. That's something. My parents were married a long time like that too. Well it's interesting to see how difficult it was to come to a new country and raise your family and survive.

KUSY: The thing about that is—I didn't go back to Czechoslovakia. They came down here to visit with us and all that. And all my brothers and sisters were out there, and they couldn't figure out how come they was running from there up here.



John and Frances Locha, Bernice Kusy's parents

GOODSILL: For political reasons.

KUSY: it's so beautiful there, and all that.

GOODSILL: But not safe. It was very difficult.

KUSY: But the thing now is, my sister's kids all—one is an R.N., teaching school, and one is in Vancouver and they are going to open an SAS shoe store in Vancouver, Canada. In other words, my sister—they used to own all the SAS shoe stores in California. But now there are a lot of other people coming in there. My sister lives in Rosebud now. We're going to stop by and visit her tonight.

GOODSILL: How nice. Well, let me ask you this. Do you have any photos or old documents or anything that would be interesting?

KUSY: Well, I got old photos of my parents and when I was a little kid.

GOODSILL: Of parents and growing-up years. Okay. Let me see if I got the address here. No, I didn't! I need to get your address. Tell me your address.

KUSY: <Gives address>

GOODSILL: And the phone number.

KUSY: <Gives phone number>

GOODSILL: Good. So if we need to contact you or if we have a need to get pictures, we'll contact you. But you know, I'm really glad that you interviewed, because, among other things, there is so much about your growing up days that seemed normal to you. But to a kid growing up now – he knows NOTHING of things you went through. And what life was like back then. And it's part of American culture. I think it's important for us to capture it.

KUSY: It wasn't really beautiful, I tell you what. When you think about all you had to go through. We you got a big family like that, we took care of each other, then. To help Mama out. We'd work in the fields from sun up to sun down.

GOODSILL: Not much time for fun or recreation.

KUSY: And you know what was amazing? My daddy always—we used to have a ball made out of an old sock. And we used to play with that. And my daddy told me that you can't make money playing ball. To get out there in the field and work. And look what the ball players are making now! (laughing)

GOODSILL: I really appreciate your taking the time. This was VERY interesting. I really enjoyed it. Thank you so much.