

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **Blanche Pater**

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Interviewer: Diane L. Ware

Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

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Richmond, TX

5 Pages



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*Transcript*

WARE: Blanche, you were born in Ellinger, Texas. What year was that and how has Ellinger changed since then?

PATER: 1934. Ellinger was a quaint little village, a town that was very famous for its Tomato Festival and a parade that would draw in thousands of people. It had a Main Street that was full of stores and it was a pretty little town but it burned in 1970 and has not been reconstructed. All the buildings were wooden except for one building, which was stone and they never rebuilt.

WARE: So you moved to Fort Bend County, but you were not teaching in Fort Bend County at first. Where were you teaching at first?

PATER: I began teaching in LaGrange. Then I moved to Wharton and taught there for three years. When I was teaching at Wharton, I came to visit my uncles who had a Men's Store on Main Street in Rosenberg. I believe this was in 1958. We had coffee in the original Frank's Pharmacy.

I mostly taught third grade. I had a wonderful experience and taught for twenty six years at Jane Long Elementary which was the campus of the Richmond School District. At that time Rosenberg had their own school district and the high school was where the Dollar Store is now. That was the campus for Rosenberg. When I was teaching at Jane Long we used the gym until about ten years ago, when they rebuilt it. Until then we used the gym for PE, and a cafeteria.

WARE: All of the schools for Richmond were at that campus?

PATER: Right. The old kindergarten and first grade were on Houston Street. Across the street from there was the home of Jane Long's grandson.

WARE: There was a little house on the campus, correct?

PATER: No, it was before. Mr. Graeber was the superintendent for the Richmond School District and he lived on campus. There was a little house on what is Jane Long now. In the corner there was a white house and Mr. Graeber lived there. Kathy Graeber lived there with her father, and I used to visit quite often and the kitchen and the stove were still there. I enjoyed the years that I taught in the little white house.

WARE: What years were those?

PATER: About 1980 to 1982.

WARE: We are trying to discuss some unusual things about your job. You were teaching at the Calvary School.

PATER: I began teaching at Calvary when they just went to the third grade, and then they added the fourth grade. I taught from 1973 to 1978. A wonderful experience and I met many great people there before I moved on to public school.

WARE: Why did you move on to public school?

PATER: Mostly financial reasons. I had a masters and I was making peanuts. It was a wonderful experience and it was a great place for my daughter. At that time, kindergarten was not public yet. Everybody had to find a place for kindergarten, if they went to kindergarten. She said that she enjoyed church service every morning for about fifteen minutes except on Fridays. She said it always calmed her down. She sent her kids to Catholic School but she enjoyed that part.

WARE: Does she still live in Fort Bend County?

PATER: No, she lives in New York.

WARE: That is a ways away. What did your husband do for work?

PATER: He was an electrical engineer. During the last part of his career he was instructing and doing sonic scope testing and we moved here because I had visited my friend in Boling, Texas.

WARE: What about racial segregation?

PATER: I was an old fashion teacher. I didn't do the computer and I still don't. I was at the chalkboard and my principal left me alone because she said, "You are teaching all of the time." I was standing up all day long at the chalkboard. My kids passed the test. Some of the other rooms didn't. I would have matched my little children with any school in the United States. I am a stickler about following rules. In geography they knew the locations and they could travel all over the United States and the world. They knew their directions and their countries. They were good and they passed that test. My principal would come in and say, "I know they are going to pass the test." That was an equivalent of praise.

You said racial, I did not see color. I just didn't, I just loved these kids and I taught until I was 72. I would have taught longer but everything had to be on the computer. I would start doing my lesson plans and I would hit the wrong key and my lesson plans would disappear [both laughing]. Once I wrote them on my sheet and I would have to repeat them on the computer. It was time for me to retire because I am a dinosaur.

WARE: Children know the computer better than we do.

PATER: Definitely [both laughing]. Pat Parmer would come into the room at Jane Long and we had to do our email every morning. I would do it but I could not get into it and there came Pat and she would set down at the desk and touch something and I would tell the kids, watch her. It was a joke because I could not do the computer, but the kids were very understanding.

WARE: Do you see any of the children?

PATER: Yes, I do. Every so often they tell me I was teaching grandchildren of these people. They recognize me because I did not change, but they did because they were third graders. It was so nice to see these kids. Some of them are teachers and lawyers and are doing well in life.

WARE: That is very nice. You raised your daughter in Richmond, were there any issues with medical care?

PATER: No.

WARE: What about shopping?

PATER: I went to Houston at the beginning of the school year and coordinated her clothes. She was always very well dressed. She was an only child, but she was truly not spoiled. I would fill up the car with kids and tried to compensate her.

WARE: Grocery shopping?

PATER: We had a Weingarten's. It's where the Dollar Store is now and that is where Rosenberg High School was before.

When I had the gifted and talented group we would do an election each year. We had commissioners; fire chiefs and one of the boys became the mayor. They would get their picture taken on the front page. I made badges for them.

WARE: What kind of productions did you do with the children?

PATER: Every September at the first PTA meeting; my daughter was the representative at Girls State in Pasadena and I was so impressed with the closing performance and I said, "I want to do this with my kids". So my daughter wrote the script for years and I would do the opening ceremony. It started out with songs with emotions and then whatever was happening in the country. We did a program every year for twenty years.

WARE: I want you to tell me how you took your class children with your daughter around town and showed them historical sites and how Richmond has changed over time.

PATER: We would start off with Jane Long's grandson, Winston, and then we would go down past the museum and down by the courthouse and we saw where the old fort was. Actually it was not ever the real log cabin, but at the beginning that is where it was. Carrie Nation's house was there. Carrie Nation used a hatchet to break whiskey kegs. When we moved here in 1972 we had to clear our lot and it had a lot of poison ivy. I walked into a hardware store on Morton Street which was where the Carrie Nation Hotel had been and I bought a hatchet. I still have it [both laughing]. It is now closed, but when I walked in you could see that it was a hotel and Carrie Nation's husband ran that hotel. We'd walk down Morton Street and talk about events and I'd how them the fourth courthouse. The first courthouse is in the river because of erosion.

WARE: Are you saying that there was a red light district down there?

PATER: Yes, two streets behind where the railroad was and it was really trashy.

WARE: And what cleaned that up?

PATER: Marvin Zindler did a TV program and talked about how terrible it was. So they tore it all down and now it is beautiful [both laughing].

WARE: I have no more questions, so I am going to say "thank you".

Interview Ends