

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH IMOGENE BRUMMERHOP

This is Kevin Knight and Sam McJunkin interviewing Imogene Brummerhop on June 6, 1989.

Kevin: Mrs. Brummerhop, when were you born?

Mrs. B.: 1918. April 28, 1918.

Kevin: O.K. Were you born in Seabrook?

Mrs. B.: No.

Kevin: How did you happen to move to Seabrook?

Mrs. B.: My husband was born in Seabrook. He lived here here all of his life and I met him. We were married and our children started school when we moved to Seabrook permanently, but he lived in Seabrook.

Kevin: Where were you born?

Mrs. B.: I was born in Pine Valley, Texas. It's up near Huntsville.

Kevin: What are your earliest memories of Seabrook?

Mrs. B.: Well Seabrook was such a fun place to live in the early days. We lived up in Seabrook right next to the fire station. You know where the fire station is? We had a little house where Gino's Jewelry is and our children went to school in our back yard practically because the school was where the Seabrook City Hall was. In those days we had no telephones, we had no water and sewer. It was just a little, small town.

Kevin: What are your fondest memories?

Mrs. B.: Well, it was such a fun place to live to raise children. They had horses and all kinds of animals and everybody in Seabrook at that time knew about each other and they cared about each other. It was like one big family. Everybody were friends and loved and cared for each other. If anything happened to one person everybody was always there to help. It's just been a very great place to raise a family.

Kevin: Do you remember anything funny or exciting happening?

Mrs. B.: Well I'm sure there're a lot of funny things because we used to be - when they first gave us telephones we had about 8-party lines and it was so much fun to listen in on all the conversations everybody had. But we had everything here. We played baseball. That was our hobby - baseball and fishing and things like that. We had a lot of fun playing baseball. And we

all went to the postoffice. I think the most fun thing was we all went to the postoffice to get our mail every day when the train came in. That was a gathering place and then we'd all get together and talk and have fun and visit together. One time we did have a fire. We all - my husband was on the fire department and one man was on top of the house with a hose and someone turned the wrong hose on and he came sailing off of the house, hose and all, but it didn't hurt him very badly. But there's been a lot of fun things happen in Seabrook. We went fishing and crabbing a lot. I know you know Mr. Royal - Mr. Kenneth Royal, the school teacher. He used to go crabbing and floundering with me a lot out here. And he bought some new lanterns one time. This is a funny story on Kenneth that I'm sure he would get a kick out of because we were crabbing one night and he had just bought some new lanterns and they wouldn't work. And he went to put it back on the land before he went out into the water because he didn't want anyone to steal them and he walked off of the pier in the dark. He was really excited.

Kevin: Do you remember anything tragic happening?

Mrs. B.: Well, we had a lot of tragic things happen. We had people killed in accidents and things like that. But one of the saddest things I think I remember about Seabrook was when Texas City blew up. We made a kind of a semi-hospital at the community house. And the people were so frightened in Texas City they were just trying to get out, so we set up a hospital there and kept everybody that had been injured that could go no further than Seabrook. They would catch a ride and come to Seabrook. For about 3 or 4 days we took care of a large group of people. A lot of them were Spanish and a lot of them couldn't speak English. We even had a baby born there during the scare. And they'd come in cut up so badly. I don't think I've ever seen anything quite like that. That was one of the most tragic things that happened.

Kevin: Did you ever attend any schools in Seabrook?

Mrs. B.: No, I never did, but my children grew up and started here and went straight through high school and now greatgrandchildren are going here. My grandchildren went here. No I never did. Now Sidney did. My husband did.

Kevin: Do you have any idea how he got to school? Did they walk?

Mrs. B.: Yes, they walked or they rode - they had a bus - they called it a bus, but I'm trying to think whether it was a horse and a wagon or what.

Kevin: You said your children went to school here. Do you remember anything extremely... really out of the ordinary about the school that your children told you?

Mrs. B.: Well I was involved in the school a lot when my

children were in school. I'll tell you one thing. I don't know if anyone told you that we used to use the community house for the cafeteria. And Kemah would come over and eat with us because we got a lot of government surplus foods. And all the women in the area would cook up the food and everybody even the residents of Seabrook would come and have lunch with us because we had so much government food like potatoes and carrots and corn and all sorts of government vegetables. And they'd send them to us in huge hundred pound sacks and we had to get rid of it, so everybody came in. And Mr. Bay would help cook and we'd go around and he'd serve everybody with a big old pot - carry it around from table to table and serve everybody. Now that was one of the things that was interesting about the school. And every year we had a May Fete - every year at the close of school. Everybody went to that because that was the highlight of the year as far as the school year was concerned. But our school had always been a real good school. We used to take them by bus to Houston to the Symphony and we'd take them in to see the different things that happened. We'd take them in the school bus. At that time we had a train that ran through Seabrook that brought our mail every day and we'd get on the train and ride to Galveston and back for a field day. We just did all sorts of fun things with our kids. Our school's always been one of the best schools.

Kevin: Was it a one room school?

Mrs. B.: No it had 3 or 4 rooms. It was built right where the city hall is when my children went to school.

Sam: What were some social events that you remember?

Mrs. B.: There weren't too many social events at that time except the PTA and the churches. They had all of their things. And like I said baseball. That was our greatest thing. Everybody came to the ball games. The girls played and the boys played and the men played about once a week. Then we would go out of town. Then the fire department has always been one of the more or less back up things of Seabrook. And we had different things like a wedding to raise money where the firemen all dressed like women. And we had rummage sales. And we did everything at the community houses or the school for fun things. But we had no movies, no anything here actually. We'd hold dances at the community house. That's the sort of social things that we did.

Sam: How did you and your family spend holidays like Christmas?

Mrs. B.: We'd either go up to see the children's grandparents up near where I was born or we usually stayed in Seabrook cause we always felt like this was home. And we had everybody come to Seabrook cause they liked to come down here to fish and crab. Of course sometimes we had Christmasses where you could wear shorts. It would never be that cold. It would be real hot. We did a lot

of outside bar-b-queing and things like that.

Sam: What do you on Halloween?

Mrs. B.: We had a carnival at the school. We always had a lot of fun things there and made money for the PTA. We held a carnival and had a fun house and a spook house and all sorts of booths.

Sam: What did you do to celebrate your children's birthdays?

Mrs. B.: We used to go skating a lot at LaPorte. They had a big skating rink out between LaPorte and Seabrook on Old 146. We'd have a skating party. Our kids rode horses. Most everybody here had a horse at that time. They did a lot of horseback riding and picnicing.

Sam: What were your favorite places to go?

Mrs. B.: Fishing. I fished all the time. Fishing and crabbing. I loved to fish - still do.

Sam: What did you do in your leisure time:

Mrs. B.: I worked in the yard, gardened, and I worked at school. I didn't work. I volunteered in school. I used to coach baseball teams for the girls when Miss Porter was a teacher. She was an elderly lady and she didn't like to play ball so I would go and teach them how to play ball. I taught kindergarten and just fun things at the school. I fished and I sewed. And I drove for a lot of people. In those days women didn't drive very much, so I took a lot of people to the doctor and to Houston. We had bar-be-ques in our back yard.

Sam: What was your favorite place to eat:

Mrs. B: My favorite place to eat was Robinson's in Kemah. They used to have a restaurant there. It was a very good place.

Sam: What did you do with your friends?

Mrs. B: We usually made ice cream every Sunday afternoon with an ice cream freezer. Did you ever do that? We had backyard bar-be-ques. We had a ladies auxiliary of the fire department. We always had social functions.

Sam: You mentioned earlier that you didn't have a movie theatre. Where was the closest one at that time?

Mrs. B: At LaPorte. LaPorte got one and we used to go up there all the time. And, of course, Pasadena.

Sam: Was it cheap to get in?

Mrs. B: Oh, yes. Adults were about 50 cents and children were a quarter. They would have a Saturday matinee and we'd take the kids - load up all the cars and go to the matinees on Saturdays.

Sam: Where was the Postoffice?

Mrs. B: When I came to Seabrook the Postoffice was in the store - you know where Frank's Shrimp Hut is?

Sam: No

Mrs. B: Across the railroad tracks where Frank's Shrimp Hut is on NASA Road 1 there was a great big two story grocery store there. And one little corner had divided off and that was the postoffice. In fact we were there the day Texas City blew up. We saw the mushroom cloud and felt the jar when Texas City blew up. We were all at the postoffice.

Sam: Was a stamp expensive?

Mrs. B: Three cents.

Sam: Three cents?

Mrs. B: Uh-hm - three cents to mail a letter.

Sam: What were summers like:

Mrs. B: Oh the summers were busy, very exciting because we had a lot of Houston people that never came during the winter, but they all had their homes here in the summertime. All sorts of famous people came to Seabrook. We had movie stars who had boats over at the shipyard. We had all sorts of rich people that came that had their homes here and would come down for the summer.

Kevin: You mentioned that stamps cost three cents. How much did a head of lettuce cost?

Mrs. B: I'd say about 10 to 15 cents.

Kevin: What do you remember about swimming, boating, and fishing in the bay?

Mrs. B: Well we did a lot of that. We swam in the bay because we had no swimming pools at that time. We went swimming in the bay, we went crabbing in the bay and the boating was like it is now. Sailing was the most sport. That's why most of the people from Houston had their homes down here. They were sailors. We've always had a little 12, 16, 14 foot boat that we fished in a lot. Mickeys used to have boats that they rented and they would pull you out into the bay. They rented skiffs and they'd leave you and they'd come back at a certain time and pick you up. You fished all day out there and did whatever you wanted.

Kevin: Did you play any sports or did you just coach them?

Mrs. B: No, I played. I was a catcher on the ladies softball team until my children were both old enough to play. Yes, I used to play all the time. So did my husband. Then my children played. I used to play that and I used to play tennis a lot.

Kevin: Do you remember any significant jokes or stories that somebody told you?

Mrs. B: I used to work for the Houston Chronicle and Houston Post. I ran hot news down here for the Post and Chronicle for about 25 years. Then I worked for for Bayshore Sun Paper. So I was real busy with knowing what was going on. One day the police department was called to Mickey's down in the flats. There used to be a big place down there where - I don't know if you knew where Mickey's was. It was right across from where Seabrook Hotel or Foreman's is now. It was kind of catty-corner on the bay side. They put out a alarm down there. They needed help and so the police and the firemen went down there. This lady was expecting a baby and when they got down there the baby was born in the back seat of the police car. And we were so excited about that. And all the police and firemen were there to assist because we had no hospitals, no doctors. We didn't even have a doctor in Seabrook. They wanted to name the baby Seabrook.

Kevin: When did you come to Seabrook?

Mrs. B: I came in the late thirties.

Kevin: What kind of music was popular in Seabrook back then?

Mrs. B: There was a lot of country western and the old songs like "Stardust". There were a lot of country and western songs that we enjoyed. Ballroom dancing was pretty popular at that time - the jitterbug and things like that.

Kevin: Did you have any stores close?

Mrs. B: Stores?

Kevin: Yes.

Mrs. B: Yes. In fact I think we had more stores then than we have now. We had about 5 or 6 grocery stores, and 3 or 4 cafes, and we had Chapman's dry goods store which had everything from clothing to hardware, to groceries, to anything that you really wanted. We used to call it the Neiman Marcus of Seabrook. If there was anything you wanted, you could go there and buy it. They had boots, furniture. Chapman's had everything.

Kevin: Where was the center of town located?

Mrs. B: Well the center of town, I think, always revolved around



the Methodist Church and the Fire Department because they were the 2 things that most people went to. If you needed anything you either went to the Fire Department or to the Seabrook Methodist Church. In fact the Methodist Church held clinics in order to give polio shots and typhoid after storms. We would get a doctor to come down and everybody would go get their shots.

Kevin: How much did typical clothes cost back then?

Mrs. B: I think you bought a pair of jeans for about 3 or 4 dollars. You bought levi's.

Kevin: How much did enough food for about a week cost?

Mrs. B: At that time it was real strange. The grocery stores charged your groceries. A lot of people charged their groceries. You went in and they would write it down on this bill and you would pay your bill once a month or once every two weeks. Some people got paid on the first and 15th. I imagine you could live, say a family of four, for about 25 dollars.

Kevin: What were the fashions like back then?

Mrs. B: Well they wore jeans - a lot of people wore jeans. We wore a lot of cotton. They wore keds or shoes like you wear now, but they were called tennis shoes in those days. The kids wore mostly that to school - cotton dresses and shirts and jeans and shorts.

Kevin: About how much food or clothes or other supplies did you produce yourself?

Mrs. B: We always had a garden and Sidney's father always had a big garden and we farmed with him a lot. We had a cow once, but that's hard work. But we've always had a vegetable garden.

Kevin: Did you have a bus or anything like that in Seabrook?

Mrs. B: Yes, there was a bus that came through Seabrook going to Houston every day.

Kevin: About what was the bus fare?

Mrs. B: I think it cost about a dollar and a half to ride the bus round trip to Houston.

Kevin: How much did cars cost back then?

Mrs. B: You could buy a car in those days for - a brand new car for about 3 thousand dollars.

Kevin: And how much was gas?

Mrs. B: Nineteen and 20 cents a gallon.

Kevin: What kind of car did your family have?

Mrs. B: We always drove Fords. We had a Fairland Ford when they came out and then I had a Chevrolet one time, but we mostly drove Fords.

Sam: What was the most popular car:

Mrs. B: Here in Seabrook? I would think a Ford or a Chevrolet.

Sam: What was the most popular candy?

Mrs. B: Babe Ruth, Butterfingers.

Sam: Oh, I like some of them. How much did a candy bar or a soda cost?

Mrs. B: A candy bar cost a nickel. A drink would be five or a dime.

Sam: You mentioned there was a bus to Houston, but was there one to Galveston?

Mrs. B: Yes, I think this one that came from Galveston. It went from Houston to Galveston. It came down 146.

Sam: Did you go to Houston or Galveston often?

Mrs. B: Christmas shopping. We used to go a lot for plays or theatre. And yes, we went to Galveston a lot. We used to go to Galveston about once a week to go on the beach and go swim. That's something I forgot as far as recreation. We used to go down there. We used to go and camp out on the beach. We'd just put up a tent in Galveston a lot.

Sam: You mentioned that there was a train, but did you ever ride on it?

Mrs. B: Uh-hm.

Sam: And where did that train go?

Mrs. B: It went to Houston and Galveston.

Sam: Where did your parents work?

Mrs. B: My parents? My parents lived in LaPorte. My dad worked on construction work.

Sam: Did you work:

Mrs. B: No. Except I was a newspaper reporter, but I had no certain hours and I did not work in an office. I ran hot news



for the Bay Area.

Sam: Did you belong to any clubs or organizations?

Mrs. B: The PTA and the Home Demonstration Club and the Ladies Auxiliary of the Fire Department and the church, UMW group.

Sam: Were there any fairs, festivals or celebrations?

Mrs. B: I think the May Fete at the end of school was usually the best one. We used to hold little rodeos every once in a while for the children.

Sam: What do you remember about the bridge to Kemah?

Mrs. B: We used to share a preacher with Kemah in our church here. That was when we had a little bitty church down on Hardesty Street. He would preach in Kemah. We would have Sunday School in Seabrook. Then he would come to Seabrook to preach. And we did this in reverse several times. And at times he would get hung on the other side of the bridge when the bridge was up and they couldn't get it down. He would get stuck and we'd all have to sit in and wait. We'd sing and sing and sing all the songs and everybody was real worried because they'd left a roast cooking or something on the stove. He would be about 10 or 15 minutes late because he'd be on the other side of the bridge. The other thing I remember about the bridge is one time it got stuck and it stayed for hours and hours in the air. No one could get it down so they finally got a wrecker. They got it halfway down and they hooked the wrecker on to the bridge and were going to pull it down. Instead it pulled the wrecker up. It dangled the wrecker hanging in the air and everybody sat there watching the wrecker. It was real amusing. The bridge has been a fun thing.

Sam: You said there wasn't a doctor in Seabrook, but where did you go for a doctor?

Mrs. B: We either had to go to LaPorte or Pasadena.

Sam: What do you remember about going to the doctor or the dentist?

Mrs. B: We had to make an appointment. It took a long time because there were so many people in LaPorte and so few doctors in the area. There was no hospital. I think Baytown at that time had the closest hospital except Pasadena had one I think up there - Southmore and then they built the Bayshore complex now.

Sam: What do you remember about the Fire Department?

Mrs. B: Well we've been in the Fire Department for years and years. One thing the Fire Department used to have was an old Army vehicle. It had a separate motor on the tank. It was a

tank truck. And every day my husband went over and started the tank truck up and let it run so the battery would stay charged in the truck. It would run for hours and hours. It was across the street from our home. One night the cafe down the street caught on fire and they couldn't get the truck started so they had to go and push the truck - just bodily everybody pushed the truck to the fire. We had such a hard time trying to get some proper fire fighting equipment around here, but we've always had one of the best fire departments in the county.

Sam: You said that there was a baby delivered in the back of a police car. Was that the Seabrook Police?

Mrs. B: Yes. That was after we incorporated. We used to be taken care of by the state and Harris County. We didn't have a police department of our own before we incorporated in '61.

Kevin: What do you remember about the years of World War II?

Mrs. B: At that time my children were small. My husband had been called to go to report to the army. He was working for Exxon in Baytown. At that time they were so busy making gasoline for the war efforts they wouldn't let him go, so he was exempt from the war. He didn't go. He stayed at Baytown and worked. I wasn't too involved. I knew a lot of the boys at Ellington. They came to Seabrook for recreation. They used to play on our ball team. They would come to our house a lot. We a lot of entertaining for the soldiers. They would go skating with all of our children because they were very young men at that time when they were drafting them.

Kevin: Do you remember anything about the Vietnam or Korean Wars?

Mrs. B: Well just the little bit I would read. I had a nephew who was in that.

Kevin: Did you ever have a Victory Garden?

Mrs. B: Oh, yes.

Kevin: What exactly was a Victory Garden?

Mrs. B: We were trying to grow some food. They had food stamps which they gave you for sugar and coffee and things like that. You tried to grow your own foods so you would have enough to eat. You saved so everybody would have something because there was so little being done at that time.

Kevin: In what ways did your family help the war effort?

Mrs. B: We picked up our ration coupons and lived religiously by them. We had gasoline coupons. We didn't dare use anything that we weren't supposed to. We tried to save. We bought U.S. War

Stamps and bonds and things like that. We did a lot of volunteer work. We did whatever we could do.

Kevin: Do you remember rationing?

Mrs. B: Yes, very well.

Kevin: How did it affect you?

Mrs. B: Well it didn't. You could be very careful. You could do without cakes and sugars and things like that. That was what affected everybody - coffee and sugar. Now cigarettes affected some people, but it didn't me because I never smoked.

Kevin: What hurricanes do you remember?

Mrs. B: Oh, boy! You're in my territory now. I remember all the storms that came to Seabrook, but, of course since we came here we've had Alicia and Carla. We moved out here in '58. While we were building our house I think one came named Debbie, but it didn't hurt the house or anything except it broke out a few windows. That was in September before we moved it. But now in Carla we got quite a bit of water. The beacon from the ship channel beat our front door down and washed into our living room and beat all the walls out. In fact I've got the beacon out there. I made a lamp out of it. It's heavy as it can be. It came out of the ship channel. We were at the fire station helping get the people out and helping take care of all the people that were there at the school. We came back home. We didn't realize our house at that time would get water because we were supposed to be one of the high points. We had almost 2 feet of water in our house. We had some dead cows from Anahuac in our backyard. They had washed across the bay. At the time we were at the fire station they were getting people out of the flats and bringing them to the schools. We stayed there all during Carla. We fed everybody that was working. We had the National Guard, the Texas State Guard, I think it was called, all the police and everybody - news media and whoever. We had an open line to Houston at that time. I was reporting. We had an open line to Houston. The phone company was so great to us. They kept plugging us in and plugging us in so we would have an outside line out of Seabrook because at that time water was creeping in everywhere - coming in from every direction. The guys would come walking out of the flats up to their necks. You could just see their heads sticking out. The nutria and the snakes would swim behind the trucks and maybe get onto the trucks when they went down trying to get people out. I could tell you a lot about storms. We were here till the water started coming in during Alicia and then we went into Seabrook.

Kevin: What other disasters do you remember? Do you remember any tornados coming?

Mrs. B: Not really. I don't think we've ever had one except

maybe after a hurricane. But one of the disasters that happened in the ship channel is when the ship collided right off of El Jardin. They could not speak English. They were Chinese, I think. We went down and helped take care of those men. That was one of the worst things too. It was as bad as Texas City. They were so badly burned. They brought them in to El Jardin and we took to Bayshore Hospital in Pasadena. We had a station wagon at that time and my son drove the station wagon and we would take them in to LaPorte to the doctor and to Pasadena. They couldn't speak English and oh, they were very frightened because there were a lot of policemen in uniform with guns on. When they would life the men out of the boat and they would see the police they were very frightened. And I was down wrapping them in white sheets because they were burned so badly with that oil. It was very cold - it was in the winter - and I was down over one man and the hood of my coat blew off and they saw that I was a lady and they all tried to get in behind me because they were so frightened of the policemen. I tried to tell them they weren't going to hurt them. That was a terrible time because it was very sad for those poor people.

Kevin: Did you get any newspapers?

Mrs. B: We got the Houston Post and the Houston Chronicle. The Houston Press at that time was another Houston paper. Later on we had a small paper in LaPorte that covered this area. Then of course when space came the News Citizen came in.

Kevin: You said you came in the thirties. Did you come during the depression?

Mrs. B: No, not really during the depression. The depression came before I was married. It was not a great time. The salaries that they paid then were so much less than now. You couldn't believe in those days that someone could make 50 thousand dollars a year like people make 160 thousand and things like that now. Well I guess it was in the depression time. We didn't feel like it was depression because we had everything we needed.

Kevin: Back then how much did a typical person make per year?

Mrs. B: I'd say the average refinery worker would make from 4 to 5 thousand dollars.

Kevin: What type of telephone service did you have?

Mrs. B: We didn't for years and years. Then when they came in they put one on the wall and it rang in four homes every time and it was a long and a short or 2 shorts and a long or 2 longs. There were 8-party lines. When we first moved to Seabrook there was one telephone here and it was in a home down in the middle of Seabrook. And then several other people got phones in their homes and offices. Then later the phone company came in. Oh, we

were so excited!

Kevin: I've heard about one person who was on a party line who wrote a newspaper column. Did you have anything like that?

Mrs. B: No, but it was quite interesting. We had some teenagers on our line who wouldn't talk much. They would just sigh and breathe into the phone, but very seldom talked. We'd say please quit breathing and get off so we can use the phone. People were very nice. If you had an emergency you's say please would you get off so I can use the telephone.

Kevin: How many party lines were there.

Mrs. B: There weren't too many because Seabrook wasn't too big at that time. I think there must have been about 1500 total in Seabrook. One night the fire phone rang about one o'clock and I got up and answered it. This lady who lived about 3 or 4 blocks from us answered it too. This man said, "This is the weather department telling you that a tornado has hit down in San Leon and it's moving towards Seabrook. I thought you all might be alerted." So by the time he told us that was a lapse of about 5 minutes. She said, "What do we do?" I said, "I don't know what we do." What do you do, wake up everybody and say, "Hey, get up there's a tornado coming!" By the time we'd called even one person it would have been here. So we just sat there and held the phone to see if the tornado was coming this way. We didn't know what else to do.

Sam: Did you have close neighbors?

Mrs. B: I had closer neighbors when I lived up in the middle of Seabrook.

Sam: What do you remember about them?

Mrs. B: I went to school with Joe Hester, my neighbor across the street. He and I graduated together. We went to school together in LaPorte. We celebrated our fiftieth class reunion about 2 years ago and had a ball. I had a very dear friend, Frances Ballantine. She was a dear friend, still is. Her children grew up with mine.

Kevin: About how close was your closest neighbor?

Mrs. B: Sidney's aunt lived next door to us. I think about 15 feet separated our houses.