

**University of Houston**  
**Oral History of Houston Project**  
*Elsie Strack*

Interviewee: Elsie Strack

Interview Date: April 1, 2009

Place: The Atrium, Spring, Texas

Interviewer: Ernesto Valdes

Transcriber: Michelle Kokes

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**Abstract:**

Elsie Strack married into the Strack family, known as some of the first settlers of the Cypress area. She traces the history of her grandfather Martin Frank, and his journey from Germany as a young boy, and how he was orphaned over the course of the trip and then adopted. Living her life on farms, Elsie remembers her father and husband's farms, what kind of crops they grew and where crops were sold. After her brother became ill following an accident at Spring Creek, Elsie stopped attending school and discusses Trinity Lutheran School and briefly, the emergence of Klein High School.. Elsie mentions how World War 2 affected her as a German, and her family's exemption from serving in the military. She does not remember any violence or considerable tension between white communities and black communities, although she mentions that there were strict boundaries. With Ernesto, she discusses present racial tensions, childhood memories, the effects of aging, and her present-day family, who have reunions regularly.

EV: Do you have any questions about any of this?

ES: Not really. I'll follow as we go.

EV: Okay that's fine. If you get a question while we are talking just call a time out, or go ahead.

ES: Because it's all recorded so to speak.

EV: Yes ma'am. When you sign this and we sign this, this stuff is going to go on the internet as well as the library, so you will kind of be a movie star.

2nd Woman: So if anybody Googles her name it will come up?

EV: They have to go into the Houston, University of Houston archives.

2nd Woman: So just a general Google is not going to bring it up?

EV: It might, I don't know. I don't know what those things do.

2nd Woman: Okay.

EV: I plead totally innocent.

2nd Woman: Okay.

EV: Would you give us your full name, please?

ES: Elsie Frank Strack.

EV: Frank, how do you spell it F-R-A-N-K?

ES: F-R-A-N-K.

EV: Okay like a guy, like a guy? A guy Frank?

ES: I normally don't use it, but that is my name.

EV: Okay well we are here at \_\_\_\_\_, The Atrium.

2nd Woman: The Atrium.

EV: The Atrium. Is it...?

2nd Woman: Assisted Living Center.

EV: Assisted living, okay in Houston, Texas. It is pretty nice out here, we're in Spring.

Can you tell me when you were born?

ES: I was born November 3, 1917.

EV: Here in Spring?

ES: Yes.

EV: Who were you, what were your parents' names?

ES: My dad was Phillip Frank and my mother was... I've got to think what her name was.

2nd Woman: Besides Mom.

ES: Yeah right. Augusta

EV: Augusta?

ES: Hildebrandt Frank.

EV: Hildebrandt.

ES: That was her maiden name.

EV: Augusta was her first name?

ES: Yes.

EV: So you are a Strack by marriage is that correct?

ES: Right.

EV: Do you know where your grandparents were from? Did you get to meet your grandparents?

ES: Yes, I did.

EV: What were their names?

ES: My dad's parents, which are my grandparents, he was Martin Frank. Martin Frank. He came across from Germany in the 1800s and I don't know the exact year. He and his wife and two little children.

EV: Were those children were your parents?

ES: No.

EV: Your uncles and your aunt?

ES: Yes. Actually the parents died on the way coming from Germany so the two little boys I think it was, it might have been three were orphans when they came.

EV: Wow, how old were they do you know?

ES: Real teeny tiny ones.

EV: Did somebody meet them and take them in?

ES: Well somebody adopted them when they landed in the United States and I don't have those names.

EV: Did they land in New York or in Galveston?

ES: New York I think. I'm not sure about that.

EV: The folks that adopted them are they the ones that moved to this part of Texas?

ES: Right. They were... One parent, and I'm not sure, I think the two little children were adopted by two different people. And one was from Rosehill. You know where Rosehill was right?

EV: Yes.

ES: I'm not sure, I think the other one was more this way. But they were pretty near local in Texas.

EV: So you got to visit them when you were a little girl. You got to know them?

ES: Well that was before my time, you know. Oh, after they got older, yes.

EV: Okay, so you got to know them?

ES: Yes.

EV: Alright. Where did you go to school?

ES: Right here at Trinity Lutheran School.

EV: Was that elementary only or did you?

ES: Yes.

EV: You didn't go to high school?

ES: No at that time. I probably would have...

Phone ringing.

EV: I'm sorry. Let me turn this off.

2nd Woman: I just want to clarify this. These two or three little orphans, was one of them your grandfather?

ES: They were my dad's brothers and sisters, oh no they weren't, they were his grandpa's children but after they landed here, then the grandpa didn't land here, see? My dad's grandpa because they died on the way. But then the family got started again.

How? I don't know that either. So the whole thing is really kind of weird.

EV: Did anyone in your family, has anyone in your family ever gone back and try to reconstruct this?

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ES: I have a cousin and she and I and another one, kind of went into some of that because we were having family reunions and things like that and she really was, she really would know a lot about it because she made that her business, sort of.

EV: Do you think we could talk to her too?

ES: Well, she's not local. She's from Montgomery County.

EV: Oh she's in Montgomery? That's fine.

ES: Yeah, I imagine she would. Now I've got a cousin that lives here in Houston she probably knows, you could call her.

EV: Yeah. Well, after we finish here, can you give me that information to where we can contact her?

ES: If I can find her number. I talked to her, she called me the other day. Her husband is a dentist and I don't get to see them very much anymore. They're not living but they still have my grandfather's home place for recreation, you know, weekends and so forth. So that's where we were going to have a family reunion this coming Saturday.

EV: When you finished school did you just go to work?

ES: I was in my, I would have graduated from elementary and I had a brother who got killed or died and my parents were taking care of him. He lived a while. They took care of him and I helped so I didn't get to go to school. But I did go back and get my certificate before I quit but I didn't go to high school. But high school wasn't in that area.

EV: You didn't have a high school?

ES: Klein School was not established well enough yet. It was getting started but it was still...

EV: What did you do after school? Did you work on the farm?

ES: Oh, I lived on the farm. My dad was a farmer, a vegetable farmer.

EV: What did you all raise?

ES: Mostly at that time, potatoes and corn and things like that.

EV: Did you work?

ES: I married a farmer. We raised all types of vegetables.

EV: How old were you when you got married?

ES: Twenty-two.

EV: So between elementary school and twenty-two you worked with your father on the farm?

ES: Well, I helped take care of my sick brother. So, I stuck around home until...

EV: If you don't mind what was he sick from?

ES: He wasn't really sick. We lived close to Spring Creek and my brothers, I had four brothers, they all went swimming; they had a swimming pool in Spring Creek, you know? But he and a couple of boys went right before the Fourth of July and they went at a different spot. The swimming pool was real deep, that's why they called it a swimming pool. They ventured away a little bit and he dove in and hit a rock and ruptured his spinal cord. So he lived six months.

EV: That happens a lot back home because the Rio Grande, the bottom of the Rio Grande shifts a lot.

ES: Yes.

EV: Just because you can dive in one place one day doesn't mean it's going to be there the next.

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ES: And you know how boys are. Before the Fourth they were already... well when my brothers were at lunch they would go, "Hey lets go swimming."

EV: Did you all raise your products for market or for...?

ES: Oh, definitely.

EV: Did you use the market downtown in Houston?

ES: The one that's on... the first, not the first one, the Farmers Co-Op Market they took some there. Then there was one more east of there that was established later and my husband took a lot of vegetables there.

EV: Was that the one downtown by where the old police station is now, down in that area?

ES: Yes, somewhere around there.

EV: How did you all take it? Did you all have a truck or did you take wagons?

ES: No, truck.

EV: Truck. A lot of farmers, I interviewed the folks around Sixth Ward and a lot of the homes that are in the Sixth Ward, farmers purchased them, outlying farmers who came in and lived in them on the weekends so they could be close to the market.

ES: That's possible.

EV: Did you all do that?

ES: No.

EV: But you know that existed right?

ES: Well, I never really heard about it but I would think it could be.

EV: But it makes sense.

ES: Right.



EV: So this one, did you go down there every weekend to market?

ES: Sometimes more than that.

EV: Really?

ES: Yes. We sold a lot of vegetables. Henke and Pillot at that time.

EV: I'm sorry what?

ES: Henke and Pillot at that time.

EV: Mhm.

2nd Woman: Henke and Pillot is the grocery store right?

ES: Yeah well, but they have a vegetable, where they get all the vegetables and they disperse them to different stores and so forth. That's mostly what they did.

EV: Can you remember where the farmers market was downtown?

ES: Yes, I can remember I was there a million times! I don't know if I can explain to you, yet. It was...

EV: Well, do you know where the old M & M building is right?

ES: Yes. It was pretty close around in that territory.

EV: Okay, then you had the Buffalo Bayou going right in front of the M & M.

ES: It was real close to the Buffalo Bayou, that farmers market.

EV: Then you had the old courthouses there.

ES: Yeah, right.

EV: Was it just between the courthouses in the bayou; or was it off to where the old Coliseum and that stuff were?

ES: It was in that territory.

EV: Okay. Was it pretty big? How big was this place?

ES: Well, it was, at that time that I can remember that was the first really farmer's market at that time. There might have been little places before but I can remember and my husband was involved in it when they bought the property for that market.

EV: Is that like the co-op that you just mentioned?

ES: Sort of. The other was a co-op but this one was, they didn't call it a co-op, it might have been. It's still there I think.

EV: Well I interviewed a Mr. Winestein [Weinberg] do you know him, Marvin Winestein [Weinberg]?

ES: Yes.

EV: Well, I interviewed him the other day. He still works at the Farmers' Market.

ES: I figured he...

EV: Over there on Airline.

ES: On Airline that's going...

EV: But he said they used to go to the one downtown and then they got pushed out by the city and then they had to move up to Airline.

ES: Right.

EV: You were at the Airline also or did you have to make the move too?

ES: Airline.

EV: Airline, okay.

ES: I think that's when my husband, see Marvin was manager, I believe, of the market and my husband was a board member or whatever you call it.

EV: I see.

ES: That transaction is when they went and found the property where it is now.

EV: What was your husband's first name?

ES: Lonnie.

EV: Lonnie?

ES: Lonnie.

EV: Lonnie. L-O-N-N-I-E?

ES: Right.

EV: Did you all speak German at home?

ES: My parents did and I did too. As long as I was at home. But after we got married we didn't speak with it. Oh yeah sometimes we talked a little but we mostly talked English then.

ES: Were your classes at Trinity Lutheran, were any of them in German?

ES: Yes.

EV: Were they all in German?

ES: Well the whole school that I went to was two rooms. You know, first grades and second grades and they were all in different grades I think until the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I'm not real sure. After that they went into a bigger school. It's still, the Trinity School is still going but it's not the first one.

EV: In class were you taught in German, did you all speak German?

ES: Yeah they had German classes.

EV: Okay. But did you study, say mathematics in German, arithmetic in German or was it?

ES: Not particularly, I think it was mostly English.

EV: What did you all do for entertainment back then when you were children?

ES: Well, that's pretty hard.

EV: Besides toss cow patties around or something.

ES: Yeah right. Oh, we did you know, like baseball games and outdoor and that type but not in a big way like it is now.

EV: The sand lot? Did you ever have to get that baseball and wrap it up in black tape and all of that like we did?

ES: That I don't remember.

EV: When you got to be a teenager or something, I almost hate to ask this, you can throw something at me if this is irrelevant but radios were already here by that time right?

ES: Yeah but it was sort of in the beginning.

EV: In the beginning?

ES: Yeah, not everybody had one.

EV: What kind of music did you all listen to when you were kids or a young family?

ES: Actually we didn't listen to it as much as we do now. During the day there was outside entertainment or whatever they would do, boys and girls, whatever.

EV: Did any of your family go off to World War II in the military?

ES: My immediate family?

EV: Yes.

ES: No.

EV: Your husband or any of your brothers?

ES: Well my brothers I think were too young and dad because he was a farmer and a husband and children, so he was exempted.

EV: He got deferred?

ES: Exactly. That's the right word.

EV: So... culturally, you were raised in pretty heavily German right?

ES: Yes.

EV: This is what some of the women in the department always want me to ask: were you handed down any special recipes from your mother, your grandparents, your cooking or anything?

ES: I'm sure we were.

EV: You didn't...

ES: My mother would just put this together and it would make a cake you know. We didn't have recipes like we do now.

EV: You did except it was a "handful of this" a "pinch of that"

ES: Yeah, it's in their mind almost.

EV: Did you learn to do that?

ES: No, not really.

EV: By the time you got there Betty Crocker was around and the bakers? Okay. Was there any kind of problems you all got? Some German families have told me that during the Second World War ran into some problems, discrimination stuff. Did you all ever have that out here?

ES: Well we probably did but it never did get really serious or so. It kind of stayed... I remember when the schools were, before, I'm referring now to Klein School District, that was taking the whole location and putting it in one big school. But I remember when I was going to school we had, this is public schools or whatever you call it. In this area

they had a little school and they had one in that territory because there was no bus transportation and stuff like that, it's kind of like a community school.

EV: Were you within walking distance of your school or did you have to ride?

ES: See, I went to Trinity so I walked by that to go to my grandmother's and there somebody would come pick us up and take us to school. We rode horses to school.

EV: You all did have, I assume, raise animals? Did you have animals for transportation or did you raise animals for market also?

ES: My dad didn't but others did.

EV: Your husband didn't either?

ES: Yeah, he did before we were married but he did a little after we were married but that was not his specialty his dad was...

EV: Did you have your own horse?

ES: I'm sorry?

EV: Did you have your own horse? You said,

ES: Well, before I was married, yes. My brother and I rode a horse to school. Totally that was our transportation. It wasn't really much fun either because when it got real cold you know, it wasn't really funny.

EV: Yeah I know. It was colder here back in those days too, wasn't it? There's a lot of reports did you know that?

ES: No.

EV: Ice, the bayou used to ice over.

ES: Yeah.

EV: Galveston Bay used to ice over.

2nd Woman: Woah, I had no idea.

EV: Let me ask you a couple of other questions. I'm sure you probably know some of the Wunsches?

2nd Woman: Like the Wunsches Brothers Café.

EV: Did you know of the existence of the folks that lived in the black community.

Was it Cossey?

ES: Yeah, that's right.

EV: Is that right?

ES: I think they called it Cossey?

EV: Cossey. Did you know any of them?

ES: Well personally, I knew of them but at that time it was kind of kept separate.

They went to school at their place and they didn't come by not like they do now.

EV: They had their own land too didn't they? Their own farm land and stuff.

ES: I think so.

EV: They are the ones that got forty acres and a mule, a piece of property.

2nd Woman: Oh is that right?

EV: Yeah. The Coreman family did you know the Coreman family?

ES: I knew of them but that was a little bit out of where my parents lived not much but at that time, it was. So I knew of them and I could still show you where the area was.

But it was really kind of out of my territory.

EV: What hellacious things did your husband have to do to court you back in those days?

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ES: Well at that time that was getting, you know, we would get together at community recreations. We'd have parties outside at night, Saturday or Sunday nights and we met that way. I guess we met at church too.

EV: But at some point he had to come up and talk to your father, didn't he?

ES: Yeah I don't know that, I've always said this and it's kind of strange, but I always said it, I think he liked my dad better than me!

EV: Oh really?

ES: Because they were both farmers. I mean he was a little boy, I say a little boy, but anyway a young and my dad was mature and had been a farmer all his life. So they kind of really worked together a lot.

EV: So you just happened to be in between, you were caught in the middle?

ES: That is what I said sometimes.

EV: Where did you get married?

ES: Where?

EV: What church?

ES: Trinity.

EV: At Trinity also?

ES: Actually we didn't get married in church we just got married privately because at that time that was when my brother was in trouble. My husband didn't really want to do, so that suited him fine.

EV: I'm sorry what?

ES: He didn't really want a big church and get ready for all of that. That wasn't his dish so we didn't do that we just had a private ceremony at a minister's house.



EV: Did you have any kind of a reception, did you have a big party afterwards or was it all kind of modest?

ES: Nothing much.

EV: Really? You know, I went out to New Ulm several years ago and I said, "Is there any place around here where they have really good German food?" They said no but we've got a couple of great Mexican restaurants and I said, "I cook Mexican at home. I don't need to come out here." Finally there was some little place way off in the boonies and it was called, of all things, \_\_\_\_\_ House. But around here I don't see a lot of German, a lot of German cooking anymore. In Houston I can't think of one German restaurant. There's Rudolph's or Randall's off of Voss.

2nd Woman: There used to be the \_\_\_\_\_ Gardens in the Heights it's all gone.

ES: We're talking about more now right?

EV: We're talking about right now I can't find any.

ES: Well surely you've been at the Strack Restaurant.

2nd Woman: Is that German food?

EV: I look through your menu and its American food right?

ES: Yes.

EV: You don't get Wiener schnitzel?

ES: No, not too much. You might have it some places but I don't know of any.

EV: No and I'm surprised with the heavy influence of the Germans in this area?

ES: I don't know it just kind of slowly faded away.

EV: Exactly, became Texan I guess.

ES: I guess.

EV: I just don't see them around that much. Do you remember what was, explain to me about how you finally got movie theaters and restaurants and all that out here. Did you use to have to go into town to see a movie?

ES: Oh absolutely.

EV: Did you go all the way to Houston?

ES: Yes all the way, I mean all the way.

EV: An all-day affair?

ES: Well not really. We didn't go to that much, to movies. Then after it started it was more or less Tomball that was my first movie in that area. That wasn't that far to travel.

EV: Did you see the, what were the theaters downtown Houston had, The Majestic did you ever go to those and the Lowes?

ES: Occasionally.

EV: Beautiful, beautiful theaters.

ES: Yeah.

EV: So Tomball was you all's place to go to the movies, right?

ES: More or less.

EV: Okay. Let me see...

2nd Woman: I'm going to do activities, I'll see you later. Let him know when you get tired.

EV: Thank you. Will I see you downstairs?

2nd Woman: Well I'll be out on the porch talking to some folks.

EV: Well if not, thank you very much.

2nd Woman: I'll see you online.

EV: I'll talk to you too, now.

2nd Woman: Yeah that will be fun I'd like to do that.

EV: What was the road or highway that you would use to go down, downtown?

ES: Well, I guess it was actually like Steubner Airline.

EV: Steubner?

ES: But I'm not sure that was the name it was called; but that was our main from Spring area to there.

EV: What was the route here between, was it just all between here and downtown was it all farms or was there any forest left or?

ES: Yeah there was a lot of forest. It was like Klein Community, do you know where that is?

EV: Where?

ES: Klein Community they called it and that was sort of, it wasn't a city, it wasn't a city or such but it was more people there and there was an open space where it was mostly timber and that sort of thing, not much. You'd have to drive a long way to find a little Stop-N-Go or something like that.

EV: Was Atascocita Road come out this far back then?

ES: I remember the name but I couldn't really tell you exactly where it was at.

EV: When I was coming up here I saw Strack Road and there's two Stracks right, there's one... Cypress turns into Strack doesn't it?

ES: I think so.

EV: Were those the roads to you all's farms?

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ES: See there was two Strack families. They were originally, still from the same, but that was completely different and that's why you've got two Strack.

EV: I don't understand what do you mean it was completely different?

ES: Well, like my husband's family or dad and so forth was not like brothers to those they were distant cousins or distant this. Originally, way back it started from the same family I suppose and each one went their way and it was two families because the one that is off of Steubner Airline, that was a different Strack family then where I married into.

EV: I see so they were different.

ES: If I'm making it clear.

EV: Yeah, were they difference in the sense they were old cousins way back somewhere?

ES: Yeah.

EV: Okay. Did they ever meet or get together?

ES: Well you know I guess they maybe did and then saw each other but like now they have family reunions and thinks like that I don't remember that they were there. Of course maybe I wasn't in that at that stage. It wasn't, they didn't visit much between themselves. They knew they were each there and there but they each went their way.

EV: What about your, you and your, Frank.....Your maiden name was Frank right?

ES: Right.

EV: What about your brother did you set out on your own in terms of the farms and stuff? Did they continue?

ES: No.

EV: When did they kind of stop?

ES: Well one or two tried to do a little of it but let's see I got married in '39 and they were both all in city work, work, city jobs. None of them were farmers anymore.

EV: Your children, what did they do?

ES: My children?

EV: Yes.

ES: Well I only had two daughters.

EV: Did they go to the university; did they go to college and educated, high school and stuff?

ES: They didn't want to and at that time it wasn't pushed.

EV: Right. Yeah it wasn't.

ES: My oldest daughter now is married and has a business; they have a business in boat sales.

EV: What's the business?

ES: Boat sales.

EV: Oh really? Boat sales?

ES: Mount \_\_\_\_\_ Marines.

EV: Yeah. You mean they sell sails for the boat or they sell as in selling boats?

ES: They call it Mount \_\_\_\_\_ Marines is what they call it and they sell boats. They go to those boat meetings on how to sell them and do it and that's their job.

EV: You said that when your grandfather came over there were at least two or three of them?

ES: Two.

EV: Two.

ES: I don't think it was three, I think it was only two, two little boys.

EV: You said that they were adopted by a different....okay. Your uncle's family do you keep in touch with them? Are you close to them in any way?

ES: Some of them.

EV: Really?

ES: Yes. For a while it was sort of not so close. It was, my dad's family was 10 or 12 children.

EV: My goodness.

ES: So you know each, after they got older. went their way. It wasn't that close. But then as time goes by they had reunions and things like that. In fact we are going to have a reunion this coming Saturday.

EV: Right. Who is the oldest one in the family?

ES: That family?

EV: Yes.

ES: You mean my grandpa's family?

EV: No, when you go to this reunion who is going to be the grand old dame?

ES: They say I am the oldest.

EV: Really?

EV: That's what they tell me. I don't know if it is fact.

EV: Here is the \$64,000 question. Who is the youngest?

ES: Yeah, well I guess that's hard to tell because some already got children of their own. See I'm the oldest of course. That's what they keep telling me. But then I have

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great-grandchildren but some of that, some that used to be older than I was. I wasn't the oldest to begin with.

EV: So... you had the black communities living out in one part right? Were there any Indian communities out there, yet, still?

ES: Not that I knew of.

EV: Okay were there any Mexican-American communities out there that you were aware of out here?

ES: Well yes I guess so but not really in exactly my area but there were some of them.

EV: I mean around Klein and all this or?

ES: A little bit more like westward. Well maybe I'm confused with my west and east here.

EV: Okay let's say would it be further toward Humble?

ES: No, opposite.

EV: So it would be west?

ES: Yes, right.

EV: Okay. Tomball is east, west of here right?

ES: You know what I live off of Steubner Airline. That's my residence. When I sit in my living room that is east and that is west and when I come here now that's just the opposite.

EV: (laughter).

ES: If you can understand what I'm saying.

EV: Yeah, I understand perfectly. Yeah.

ES: So if you see me point one way or the other.

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EV: Now you're all turned around.

ES: I know it. I know that's west and that's east but it's just opposite in my mind.

EV: You mentioned that somebody in your family kept kind of a family tree. What is her name?

ES: Sandra Scheffield.

EV: Sandra what?

ES: Sandra Sheffield.

EV: Okay.

ES: She used to live real close around here but she moved towards Magnolia and that area. She is younger than, I mean she is as old as my children but I don't know how she got involved in it, actually. She is an only child and she doesn't have parents living no more but she kind of took up with that to keep up with the Frank families.

EV: Well...My mother was born in 1918 which is the year after you? After you right?

ES: Right.

EV: She always bragged now I can't remember what the first movie was that she saw the first "talkie" that she saw, because they used to go out and they used to put these screens out in the parks for the silent movies. Did you all have that?

ES: Yeah, but it wasn't too much. Well, it was sometimes but it was a little before I was in the teenage years. Then I probably would have... I think they sat in their cars and watched it.

EV: Sat in the car or out we picnicked out in front.

ES: Yeah right.



EV: There is an old drive-in I saw over here somewhere. It looks like it is still the old drive-in movie with the movie screen and everything.

ES: It could be.

EV: It's up here on 2429 or 2924, it goes into Tomball.

ES: Yeah.

EV: It's still sitting out there. It looks like it is still being used.

ES: Yeah, it's possible.

EV: Yeah. Of course when I was in high school nobody ever watched the movies because we were...

ES: Yeah, right.

EV: Okay is there anything that you think that you'd like to add that I haven't asked you about?

ES: Probably there are a lot of things but nothing that I can think about.

EV: Well if you think of them because I don't live far from here. I live over here just off of I-45 and 1960 and I do my shopping up here at the HEB.

ES: Well before you keep on then, we are having our family reunion, we call it family reunion but it is an outdoor get together and it's not far from my residence but it is on the opposite side and it's on my grandfather's home place.

EV: Really?

ES: And that's this Saturday. And I called my cousin that they are the ones that own the property and I said in case they would ask that they would want to come or visit or anything like that, this next Saturday should I let them and she said, "Sure." So that...but also probably you could call her and talk to her.

EV: Yeah, I would like to do that. My personal problem is that my wife has a son who is epileptic and she doesn't ever want to get very far away. But if we could work that out I'd love to meet her.

ES: Oh is that right?

EV: But if we could work it out.

ES: That's just...

EV: If I don't can I give you my card and you can give it to her?

ES: Yes.

EV: Then she could maybe give me a call.

ES: Yeah, I could do that and if she wants to...

EV: Yes. Now the question is did I bring my right stuff?

ES: That looks like me. If I want something I have to look around here.

EV: Then sometimes I have to bring more stuff so I have to switch bags. Now I have some sympathy for women when you say, "Oh I must have left it in my other bag."

Because I go from, I have two cases see? I didn't... maybe I have one left in here. But those are the... I would love to talk to her some more about that. I'm going to go talk to the gentleman who runs the museum in Spring. Here it is, right here.

ES: What is the name?

EV: Ernesto.

ES: You've got to tell me.

EV: My name?

ES: No this?

EV: I have to do what?

ES: My eyes are not that good.

EV: What do you want me to tell you?

ES: The name.

EV: That's my name.

ES: Oh that's your name.

EV: Ernesto... In German it's Ernst.

ES: Right.

EV: So you are German? Well, yeah.

ES: You know, probably never spoke it.

EV: You know northern, well I spoke it a little bit. When I was in the army I used to date a woman from Nierenberg but in my family history the northern Spain was invaded by the Goths who were German tribes and my last name is son of Valdo and Valdo is actually W-A-L-D-O which you know in German would be "Valdo" and "ES" on the end of the name in Spain means "son" so I was "Son of Valdo."

ES: Right.

EV: But now it's all Spanish.

ES: So, I can have this?

EV: Oh, yes please. If you think of anything else you can note it down or give me a call and I can come by and do it again or just add to it.

ES: Okay, maybe after Saturday I might know more.

EV: That's right and then if you are anything like me I'll wake up in the middle of the night and say "Why didn't I ask her this?"

**Interviewee: Elsie Strack**

**Interview: April 1, 2009**

ES: I don't go to bed, I don't go to sleep. If I think about something like that I have to watch that I don't think about it at bedtime.

EV: Well sometimes some of my, they come to me just when I want to go to sleep and then all this stuff comes rushing in so then I get up and start writing it or read.

ES: Right, I've gotten up already and write down notes, especially since I'm here.

EV: Do you still have a house around here? Close by?

ES: Oh yeah I still live where we farmed.

EV: Oh, you live where you farmed? Do you just come by here?

ES: Oh, I'm here because... this is stupid. I was on a medication that caused dizziness and I didn't want to fall. You know you kind of lose your balance. So I called my daughter and we went to the doctor and he put me in a hospital and tested all kind of things and it was from the medicine.

EV: The medicine was making you fall?

ES: I never did fall but I wanted to avoid so went to the doctor and I told him and yeah it's from the medicine because you get that directions when you buy medicine. I had a minor blood pressure but not bad so then my daughters got this idea, "We don't want to take you home to live by yourself" which I did since my husband died. For nineteen years I lived by myself where we lived all our lives. So she said, "Now we'll take you here." So I'm here but I'm hoping to go home.

EV: I know what you are saying. I'm not, I'm, I'm only seventy one but already the kids are starting to say stuff like... you know. I say, "Damn it leave me alone."

ES: You've got it. So they've got me here now and I told my daughter, I said, "I'm not staying here any longer I'm going to leave here and go back home." I've got a good

woman that wants, will work for me and stay with me day and night and be available any time I need her but I've got to work on it slowly in order to get it to work out.

EV: Yeah you just have to... its true there's nothing like home.

ES: Then you hear all these wild stories you know, what happens to these old people when they live by themselves.

EV: Well all that stuff happens to you when you have people all around you.

ES: Well exactly so what? It could happen to them.

EV: That's right it could happen to all of them. They, they have. This one I've got to turn over.

ES: That's going to sound kind of pretty weird.

EV: What?

ES: What we're doing?

EV: Why, you mean our conversation?

ES: Yeah.

EV: Oh not at all. The kids who are going to transcribe this need to know that they've got to stay out of folks business. My grandfather wouldn't... well back in those days folks just stayed in the house they all lived together. Both my grandparents passed away in the home, in our house. As a matter of fact my grandfather's brother went to Mexico and set up an English newspaper and when he passed away when he came up when he was like, in his mid-nineties, he came back to El Paso and that's where he passed away. He was getting very, very senile but his last year or so of living he spoke in Spanish. He just wouldn't speak in English anymore.

ES: Some of those old things come back.

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EV: Yeah, and his brother was a missionary in China and when he passed away, the last two years he was speaking in Chinese. So but it doesn't make any difference. That's their life. So I guess my grandfather built the house we lived in and we didn't even think about moving him anywhere.

ES: I never did, as a child I never did notice that they said, "Oh you're black you're this and you're that." We had neighbors, to my dad and mom, that were French, and I'm sure they talked French and everything and we were good friends but we never, you know, there was no difference. Now that's black and that's white and that's this and that's that.

EV: Well, I think folks who migrated directly from Europe to here...

ES: It must have been awful.

EV: Yeah but that social thing you are talking about I think happened because much of Texas was populated by southerners from South Carolina and so they brought all their prejudices with them when they moved over here. But most of the immigrants who came in pretty much came in free of all that as far as I can tell.

ES: I would think so.

EV: Yeah, because I know this friend of mine who bought ninety or a hundred acres outside of Bellview and it was the homestead of an old Czech family but when he bought it, the Comanche's were roaming around out there. He befriended the Comanches and they would come by and if he wasn't at the cabin they'd just flip an arrow and he'd have an arrow stuck there which was just their greeting that they passed by and wanted to say hello. So you look at that house and underneath the house, the cabin of course was built up on pine, there's arrow heads all over the place from them having to do over the years.

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He came here to get away from the wars in Europe and they came over here and they drafted two of his sons into the Confederate Army and they got killed. But much of his land went as far as to New Ulm from Nelsonville, in that area, all of that was his. It must have been a land grant of some kind.

ES: Well I can actually remember because my dad was a farmer and then he hired black people and we'd feed them but we didn't exactly sit at the same table but the blacks didn't think nothing of it. They were well-behaved and they did their job and was glad to have a job out in the field. But now it's so different. It doesn't matter to me. What's the difference? We know the skin is a different color but so what?

EV: That's right.

ES: We actually got a president now that kind of brought it back. They are black and we'll sure we can see they're black. They are people.

EV: Yeah and many of them are very, very good people.

ES: Sure.

EV: That's silly to say because there's good in black and there's good in everybody. There are a lot of my people that I wouldn't walk across the street for.

ES: That's right, exactly. Why always mention black or white? It's disgusting.

EV: Yes. It's very interesting the lines of the farming families out in east Texas out here. That lady that I told you about that I interviewed from Nacogdoches was pretty much the same way. You made your own entertainment as little kids. You didn't ever go to, once in a while, she didn't want to go to high school because they were very poor and she knew she didn't have the right clothes.

ES: Nobody made them.

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EV: Yeah and I asked her did you ever make your clothes out of your feed sacks and she said, "Yeah." I said, well, "We did too when I was a little kid."

ES: Sure.

EV: I understood because when my family came back out of Mexico and settled back into the United States. In the meantime, the rich and the white folks moved all the way around us so I went to school with these guys. Sometimes they would send me off to school with these shirts made out of a sack and I just didn't want to go. But you get used to it. They never made fun of me. I don't know why no one ever made... I can't ever remember anyone making fun of me for that. I didn't have electricity and water in the house.

ES: Oh no. I can remember..

EV: Did you all have the old pump; did you all have a water pump?

ES: Yes.

EV: See, we had some water that we had to tap into it somehow. In El Paso you just don't go down fifteen feet and get water like you do here.

ES: Yeah, right.

EV: You've got to go just to the corner of hell to get any water.

ES: Sometimes I can remember way back when I was a child, young child my dad actually bought home, I think the house got destroyed by a hurricane when they were young, married.

EV: Really?

ES: So the house was totally destroyed and they built, they had a, my dad had a cousin or something that was a builder and they built just a plain wood frame house. Plain as it



could be but it was sturdy and it was well built but it was simple. That's where I was born and raised. It is still there. My nephew lives in it now.

EV: Same house?

ES: Same house. He had it refurnished somewhat but he chose to move there and live there.

EV: Did he add any rooms to it or anything?

ES: Any what?

EV: Did he add any rooms?

ES: Well I never did see when he moved in. I never did, I should have asked him to come and see it once because I was born and raised in that house.

EV: Where was that? Is that around here?

ES: It is right off of... its not Spring Steubner... oh its simple.

EV: Well why in the world don't you go out there and take a look at it? My gosh!

ES: I should have done it already a long time ago but I know how it was. I was born and raised in it, five children; four boys and I was the only girl.

EV: Five boys and you were the only girl.

ES: Yep.

EV: I guess they didn't pick on you very much did they?

ES: It wasn't exactly fun to be the only girl.

EV: My, my! I don't guess that's where your husband didn't carved your initials in then?

ES: No.

EV: Okay if you would ask your cousin or something to give me a call I would really appreciate it.

ES: I sure will.

EV: If you think of anything I am very serious whether if it is here or at your home I would love to get together and let's go over some other things. What are you thinking about now? You look like you are contemplating.

ES: I'm not thinking about anything in particular but you know I can think back pretty good since we kind of got together a lot of times. We sometimes the ones that live closer here would have lunch together and discuss things. Well that's kind of fallen apart too so we just kind of have this big deal to get invited from other countries almost. Not that but this one is more or less is our immediate family, my grandfather's families.

EV: Did you all, did you ever go to Germany to visit?

ES: I've never been out of the United States

EV: Have you ever been out of the state of Texas?

ES: Out of Texas yes but not out of the United States. My husband kind of liked to travel to take some vacations when we were farming and we went as far as the Canada border but we never did...

EV: Which border? Canada?

ES: Just before it. We stayed in the United States we didn't cross the border but we did go that far. We did different things and now here sometimes we should have gone to Washington D.C. more. We got close and did a lot of that but not like they do now, they go.... When you are a farmer there's things waiting at home.

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EV: That's the bad thing about farming you can't ever stay away very long. Because we had, when I was, chickens, goats, a lot of poultry turkeys and ducks and my grandfather couldn't ever go with us and he may go, he would go with us because he used to be a prospector. So he would take us out to Arizona and New Mexico and just look at some of the old land claims he used to have and all of that kind of fun stuff. He would show us these things but when my grandmother would be there, my mom would be there to take care of the animals. But we would only be gone, it seemed to me like two or three weeks but I'm sure we were only gone two or three days.

ES: Then you have to rush to go and go and rush to get back.

EV: We had an old '38 Chevy you know it had one of the great big old stick shifts...

ES: Yeah right.

EV: Cruising speed on those things was around thirty five, forty miles an hour and they had little narrow roads, two lane highways, if you had a road at all. So it seemed a long drive 150 miles, 200 miles you would think it was just to the ends of the earth, especially when you were a kid but it wasn't that bad at all. But I know what you mean about that farming thing, you just couldn't stay away for very long. It's constant.

ES: There's always something to do.

EV: You'd think the animals could take care of themselves but they can't.

ES: Nope.

EV: We used to have a lot of hawks that would come down and you'd have to... a lot of times you could hear them and you could go outside and if you are standing in the chicken pen they aren't going to mess with your stuff, but if you hear them and you aren't careful one is going to grab one, one of your chickens.

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ES: That's right. I walked by a door here in this building and they had the door open.

Well one day I asked them, I said, "Do you all want that door open?" "Oh yeah that's okay." Well you know I was used to living out in the farm and animals can come in that door, dogs can come in that door, you know, strange dogs but I seen today it is open again.

EV: Don't think they wouldn't come in either.

ES: Absolutely I had a snake come in my house that's since I've been living by myself. That wasn't exactly a comfortable feeling because I don't like snakes. That's one thing I don't like.

EV: We used to bring in, because it gets pretty cold in El Paso in the winter time. We'd bring all the young chicks and the baby goats and bring them into the house where it is warm.

ES: Right by the stove heater. Wood heater we always had.

EV: Exactly and then take them out in the morning. But that was it. Thank you very much I really enjoyed this. I'm very serious please if you think of some stuff write it down and we'll put it down on tape.

ES: I will.

End of first recording.

ES: This recorder must be recording us because some of those kids hear that.

EV: Well it will do them good! It wasn't until I got in the army and we had to, we were out there during training...my military training, basic training I did in California right out in Fort Ord right outside of San Francisco and I was so hungry I was just constantly hungry. You know you are kids anyway. Then finally I just had to get over it.

I had to eat chicken or eggs and all of that stuff. The other thing was oysters I had never eaten oysters before.

ES: I didn't like them, my dad loved them.

EV: I like them now.

ES: Every time he'd go to town he'd bring oysters home. "Oh no!" He thought that was the best thing to eat.

EV: Well these bayous had all kinds of fish in them didn't they, at the time?

ES: Oh yeah.

EV: I don't know if they...

ES: Like my home place, Spring Creek was a couple of feet away, a mile. Not even a mile and that was, we'd go there once a week or so and fish and different things and enjoyed it.

EV: Did you get pretty good at fishing?

ES: Yeah.

EV: See I can fish but I have trouble gutting them.

ES: I didn't do none of that either. You know like my brothers they didn't have to get in the car and go somewhere else to go to a movie or whatever they'd go fishing to pass time.

EV: That was all the entertainment they needed.

ES: It was good enough, they really wanted it.

EV: I'm sorry?

ES: They enjoyed it.

EV: Yeah, oh yeah.

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ES: When they were through working with whatever they were supposed to do that day and gone they were.

EV: What a strange life and I am as guilty as anyone else I find myself just watching that damn thing all night, you know television.

ES: Oh right what would we do without them? This is a new one at that but it ain't doing so pretty good with that switching over. I watch, I like to watch Channel 8 in the evening.

EV: Oh I love Channel 8.

ES: I do too. But you know sometimes it comes up black and finally it tells on the bottom that the thing isn't working right, not strong enough yet and that's the new one. The old one and all you had to do was buy the box to change it over.

EV: They don't have cable in here?

ES: Yeah they do have it but I don't have it. Particularly didn't care for it. It does pretty good but occasionally it does badly. A lot of times it is just perfect but occasionally it isn't but it's the company that's what they say, what they tell us.

EV: I was watching that series they had on planet earth, that Channel 8 had, I thought was very good. I watch more of Channel 8 then I do of anything else. Except during football season.

ES: I'm amazed that at here, here all different. The bad part in the place like this is there are so many you don't know what they are doing and their minds just don't work. Then how are you going to communicate with them they don't even know where their room is and they don't know this and they don't know that but other than that I guess it could be worse.

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EV: Do you do any reading up here? While you have the time?

ES: Yes. I can always make myself pass time. They have, they've got games and stuff like that for pastime but I'm not that type of a person. I can do anything. If I had my sewing machine here I'd sew because I've always liked to sew. But, what can you do? My grandson, one of my grandsons he's asked me several times, "How do you like it there?" I said, "Well come and live in a room, just one room and have one little closet and you've got a lot of boxes under the bed, stored under the bed."

EV: Yeah how would you like it?

ES: He doesn't ever ask me no more.

EV: Yeah I think the closer I get to that gate the more I understand. Although, my mother always loved to live in an apartment, for some crazy reason.

ES: Is that right? Well you know I believe that people that lived in an apartment don't mind these places. Well, you know, like myself? Well they'd say "Walk is the best exercise." That's what they tell you here. Well if I'd be at my house I've got 400 feet to go to my mailbox and back what more and it wouldn't cost me a penny. Since I live on the farm, on that farm since 1939, well you know I'm used to that. That would be just perfect for me. Yeah I'll walk here to go to eat and so forth. I get some of that but as far as getting out in the open.

EV: Yeah I don't think I could get used to this at all.

ES: It's pretty tough.

EV: As I said my grandfather he wouldn't have stood for it. When he was in his 80s, he loved to drive. So when he was in his 80s he went back home to Iowa and then he

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came back very disappointed because all of his friends were so old. They couldn't talk, they couldn't move around.

ES: Well you know they make such an issue of a sudden death? Yeah a sudden death is terrible but my husband had a sudden death. He had heart trouble but he was out on his farm and of course I was out there too but he told me to go on in and we'd have a sandwich for lunch. I should get that ready and he'd be there. Well, when he walked in the door he said he felt so good. And would you believe thirty minutes later he was gone?

EV: Really?

ES: It got him that fast.

EV: You know my wife's grandparents, my wife is half -Polish and half-Irish, figure that one out! But I think it was her Irish grandparents. The grandfather, her grandmother was visiting her daughter across the street and she got ill just that quick and died. The father, the grandfather was so distraught that he walked back across the street to their house and he died. They died within fifteen minutes of each other.

ES: That can happen; because right here when I see there's nearly every evening, "Well they took so and so to the hospital today " and that sort of thing. It will bother you. I don't care how much you don't want it to bother you but it will.

EV: Oh I know, yeah I know.

ES: There's no way to get out of it and I disagree with this assisted living. There is a difference in more care and less care. If this is assisted living that means you can live by yourself but you're looked after and you get the goodies out of it. But they've got too many, right here that needs more help than they are getting.



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EV: I think I'd rather...I've always thought... First of all I don't want to go to a hospital I don't want to go there.

ES: That's true that's exactly right.

EV: I want to be out somewhere on the edge of the Grand Canyon and looking across.

ES: Since I'm my age you know and I see what all is going on I know how it operates here too. Then there was, in the dining area, this is when I was real new here. A woman she was kind of weird already and then one day we heard that "Yeah she's really sick." The wanted to give her a blood transfusion but she said, "No. If I'm going to die let me die." You know it worked. You can tell them you don't want it. But then again one of them fell down the stairs, not here exactly but she lived here but she had a home. She fell down the stairs and she was brain dead. They put her on life support. Who wants to be on life support if you are brain dead? There are a lot of laws that are kind of peculiar too.

EV: Yeah. They weren't written by older folks.

ES: No absolutely not.

EV: I told my children. I said, "When I get ready to go I want twenty five nubile naked women, crying for me, casting roses, other than that I don't want anything fancy." But yeah you start...when your friends start going.... Part of my thing, one of the reasons that I quit practicing law is because the life of a sole practitioner in the law has gotten very, very stressful.

ES: Oh I bet it is.

EV: By yourself. And it's just a lot of paperwork, a lot of hard work, a lot of deadlines. You can do it in a big firm because they have secretaries and paralegals to help him but one guy by himself with a secretary? That type of profession is dead. But

two friends of mine that had the same kind of practice I did died of heart attacks. Two here and I had another one in El Paso. They were in their 50s I guess.

ES: That does happen a lot.

EV: I said, "I can't do this. It's time to do something different."

ES: Yes.

EV: So that's when I went back to the university, I guess I was 68.

ES: Is that right?

EV: I was just taking classes for fun. Then they said, "You've got to major in something." I mean I already had two degrees. I said, "I don't know." They said, "Write this paper for us." So I wrote a paper for them and I got the degree and then they asked me to take over this oral history project. So, it pays okay but at this point I don't have any kids, I don't need the money and I probably make better money doing this than I ever did practicing law because it's so hard.

ES: But don't worry about it the government is going to take plenty of your money if you don't need it.

EV: I need it. The government has always been after our money you know that.

ES: Yeah that's right you said it.

EV: I don't care who steps into office.

ES: I'll swear, I'm telling you.

EV: You thought Reagan was going to lower your taxes, he didn't lower your taxes.

ES: You know I'm getting worried about the younger generation. They are going to be loaded with taxes.

EV: They sure are and it's just a whole different world. It is a totally different world.

ES: You need to help people when they are in need of help but the way it is going now they buy these big homes and can't pay for them and "Oh well, we'll pay for it. We'll help you out."

EV: It's a different world. It's a very, very different world. Alright Madam.

ES: What's up?

EV: That's it. Until I hear from you. I'll be happy to give you a copy of this when we get it done, if you want one.

ES: Okay.

EV: You can do what you want. You can burn it or put it away. Shred it.

ES: Oh no, I'll tell you I have a grandson that will be thrilled to death to watch it or hear it or whatever. He loves that kind of stuff.

EV: Does he really?

ES: Oh, yes.

EV: Well maybe we'll have to give him a recording if I interview the rest of the family for you.

End of Transcript