

MARCELLA MECHLER YOUNG
MEMOIR

Alsatian Customs and Traditions

B4



MARCELLA MECHLER YOUNG - 1907

PREFACE

This manuscript is the product of a tape-recorded interview conducted by the Castroville Public Library Oral History Program Project B in October of 1980. Deanna Hoffman transcribed the tape and Faustina Sharp was the interviewer and the editor of this transcript. The interview took place in the home of the ^{interviewer} narrator in Castroville, Texas.

Marcella Young was born in 1907 in Castroville to August Mechler and Theresa Mann. She grew up here and lived here until she married. She is a lifelong homemaker. Faustina Sharp, her niece, interviewed her about her family life, Christmas customs, and Catholic Church customs in and around the early 1900's.

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Tape # B4
40min.
transcribed

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Today is October 1st, 1980. This is Faustina Sharp interviewing Marcella Young at my home in Castroville, Texas. I'm interviewing for the Castroville Public Library Oral History Project B.

Q Marcella, where were you born?

A I was born in Castroville, Texas.

Q And when?

A September 17, 1907.

Q Tell me something about your early childhood. What did you play when you were a little girl?

A Oh, we had dolls and we played house. We'd gather little pieces of glass and those were our dishes. And we made mud cakes and just --

Q Played what little girls played, huh?

A Same thing.

Q What language did you speak at home?

A We spoke just Alsatian.

Q When you went to school, did it make a difference?

A Yes, it did. Because in school we started out with the German language. And then later on during first World War, everything came out in English and we had to lay up our German books.

Q Did you have Sister Marcella?

A Yes. She was not my first teacher. Sister Maydella was my first teacher. And she was very good. And we had everything in German, even the numbers, you know, Arithmetic, Bible, reading, everything was in German.

Q Is that right?

A And we wrote in German, the German language.

Q Did you write the German script?

A We wrote the German script until the war, and then we wrote German in English letters, you know, the English alphabet.

Q What was your daily routine? Did you play? Did you have to do chores?

A You mean at home?

Q Um-um.

A Oh yes. We had to help with all the work.

Q What did you do?

A I washed dishes, we'd have to set the table and things like that. Sweep. We didn't have no polished floors or linoleum or anything like that. We had just wooden floors and they had to be swept everyday.

Q Did you have any outside chores?

A Just the yard, around the house. We had to keep it hoed and keep it clean and in the evening we had chickens to feed, and the cows, horses.

Q Did you have any other animals?

A Yeah, we had a pair of mules.

Q What did your daddy do?

A He was a carpenter and a rock mason, or whatever you call it. He built rock houses or houses out of lumber.

Q When he did this, did he have to go out in the country or did he have some place to do it?

A Yes, whenever they, the people that he worked for didn't come and get him, he would go to them. He would, you know, see if he could get to them with his tools.

Q Tell me about some of these trips.

A Well, one time when he worked way up at the Medina Lake, I think it was Seekatz place, he walked all the way up there. He must have had some of his tools up there already, because he just took a few tools along. And a few clothes in a little bundle. And he'd cross the river since we lived right next to the river, he'd cross the river and go straight up towards the Medina Lake.

Q How far do you think that was?

A It must have been about 18 miles.

Q And he walked straight through the --

A Straight through the pastures and ranches and whatever. And I remember him telling when he went through Geronimo Creek, you know, that was kind of wild country yet then.

Q How long would he stay gone then?

A He'd stay gone a month or six weeks or maybe sometimes two months. And until he'd have the house finished.

Q And then when he came back, how did you know he was there?

A Well, if he'd come back, come straight back like he went, he'd holler on the other side of the river and we would hear him. And my mother would holler back and let him know that we heard him and we'd go down, take the boat and go over there and get him.

Q What kind of boats did you have?

A We had a flat bottom, wooden boat that my father made.

Q What was it made of?

A It was made out of cypress wood.

Q And were they pretty large?

A No, they were not very large, maybe 12 feet long and about 4

feet wide or something like that.

Q Could you row these boats?

A Oh, yes, sure.

Q And how old were you when you started?

A You mean when I --

Q When you started rowing the boats?

A Rowing the boats, oh, about 10 years.

Q They must have been easy to handle.

A Oh, it was pretty easy, it was pretty easy to handle.

Q What did you do when the river came up?

A Well, then we'd have to get the boat and drag it up the side of the cliff there and tie it higher up. And at one time the river came up. It came over the bank in back of our barn and it went all the way through the Marty's place, that lot there. It came plum up to the Marty's house.

Q Was that before the damn was built?

A Must have been afterwards, because I remember -- no, it was before I was born, in 1900, the 1900. I think that was before the damn was built.

Q Tell me about taking your daddy out to Quihi on a job.

A Well, he had that job out there and the people couldn't get him for some reason, so we had -- my brother had a gravel truck and two mules and we put pappa's work tool box on the truck, I mean on the wagon, and we started out. And we went up the hill through Bader's settlement and there were ranches and I had to get out and open the gate. And I was about 10 years old then only.

Q Were you frightened?

A Yes, we were. My mother was too. We had a gun, it was a

saddle gun that we carried along. In case of snakes and there were wild animals yet around at that time. Bobcats, panthers, but we didn't see any. But, we saw tracks and there was no road, no gravel road, it was -- the trail was just -- had a few wagon trails where we could see where a wagon went before. And in some places it vanished and my father would get out and look around to see, you know, where they -- we had to go. And it's just brush and mesquite, brush and wild plums or something and alot of aganitas and cactus. We finally got there. We were kind of lost because we had never gone that way. We finally got there late in the afternoon and pappa knew that mother and I had to get back, you know, before dark. So, the people there that were there waiting for us, told us to go back another way. And it was a little better road where it was more traveled where we went. And we came out somewhere above Rio Medina, I think. And we go to Huegele's place. We stopped over there, mother and I and finally from there, the mules knew where to go. (Laughter) The mules knew how to get back home.

Q You were frightened back then?

A Yes, we were, uh-huh, we were.

Q What did you take to eat? That was a long trip.

A We -- dried sausage and homemade bread. But we didn't intend to stay that long. We figured on a short trip, but we were kind of lost.

Q Did you have to carry water with you?

A I guess we did.

Q Did ya'll ever have parties at home?

A Not very many. Most of them were -- parties were held at the Garden down there, Wernette's Garden. We never had many parties at our house.

Q Do you remember any funerals at -- did you have funerals from your house?

A Yes, my grandfather was buried from -- he died at our house and he was buried from our house. But, at that time I was only a few months old, you know. But, my father was buried from my house. He was laid out at our house.

Q In San Antonio?

A No, here.

Q Here. Did they have undertakers in those days?

A Not, not here, they didn't have any here. My father was fixed up by Riebe in San Antonio and then he was brought here. And they had the wake at my house, at our home.

Q When they had a wake, tell me about that? Did someone sit up with them?

A Yes, the whole family usually stayed up.

Q Did they ^{prayer} pary?

A Well, they did some praying and --

Q Played cards? (Laughter)

A (Laughter) Yes.

Q Nipped a little?

A That's right, yeah. And they didn't have a big ambulance, they had the ambulance out here and just the pallbearers. They would tend to the ambulance and everything.

Q So they didn't have a funeral director as such?

A No.

Q You had to take care of everything.

A After that.

Q Do you remember baptisms? Do you remember any particular baptisms?

A Well, I remember one real well. That's when I became godmother. (Laughter) To a little girl. Father Hackman performed the baptism and of course, I was, I guess, only about 12 years old then. I had to recite the Our Father and I Believe, you know. The whole thing and if I'd stop in between, the priest would look at me and give me an eye, you know, Father Hackman. (Laughter)

Q Did the baby wear a long dress?

A Very long, crotchet cap with alot of ribbons on the side.

Q Did you go to any dances?

A Not very many. I had nobody to take me.

Q Did ya'll have any music at home?

A Just french harp. My father played the french harp and my mother had some kind of an instrument that she laid on her lap. But I don't know what it's called. If it was a melodian.

Q I believe that's what they called it.

A It was kind of three cornered like that.

Q Shaped like a harp, was it?

A Something. And she'd lay it on her lap and she'd play it. And it had real teeny sound.

Q Did you sing to that then or --

A My father use to sing. I think my father use to sing in the choir, when they had the men's -- had the choir here, you know, first. Then later on the ladies took over and the men didn't sing anymore.

Q Was it exclusively a man's choir? Only men?

A I really don't know. They -- it might have been. They use to

sing at the Hermanson's too, the men, German songs.

Q Do you remember very much about St. Louis Day?

A No, not too much.

A Did you go down to the --

A Yeah, we always went down to Wernette's Garden on St. Louis Day. But, I don't think they had ~~it~~ every year in those days.

Q Did they have church?

A Yes, it always was a big church day, and everybody always went to church. I think more than they do now. Sometimes the Bishop would come.

Q Did the men kind of have meetings in the afternoon or --?

A Yes, they had meetings in the afternoon, on Sundays.

Q What did they do there?

A I don't know.

Q You don't know. (Laughter) Okay. In those days, can you tell me about preparing for Easter? Like Lent, can you tell me what went on in Lent? during Lent?

A During Lent? We were not allowed to eat any candy and we had to do alot of praying during Lent. And we had the fast days they were very strict.

Q What days did you fast?

A On Wednesdays and Fridays and Saturdays.

Q And Saturdays?

A Um-um.

Q What did you eat then when you couldn't eat meat?

A Well, we'd have -- you mean for dinner?

Q Um-um.

A For the dinners? Beans, homemade dumplings or homemade noodles,

prunes. We always had dried fruits. Dried prunes, and dried apples, dried peaches, that was one of the main things always in the house. We always had a big garden. We had alot of vegetables, always had vegetables in the garden. We never really starved, (Laughter) we always had cream cheese and eggs, those things.

Q What did you do on Good Friday? Did you serve the three hours?

A Oh, yes, the whole afternoon.

Q Do you remember anything about Holy Saturday?

A Well, we'd have to fast until dinnertime, then after 12:00 o'clock well, we could eat whatever we wanted to.

Q Did you wait until after 12:00 to have --

A We really did.

Q So you could have a good meal?

A Um-um.

Q What did you usually have for Easter?

A Well, they usually made Easter eggs. And they made them different than they do now. My mother would take the white of an egg and dip leaves of parsley leaves or coriander leaves and that white of the egg and stick it on to the eggs, you know. And let them dry real good overnight, then the next day she would boil the red onion peelings and make a real red brew and drop those eggs in it, and it just came out so pretty with that -- leave didn't color you see then.

Q How pretty.

A Where the leaf was, it didn't color. And you'd have eggs with those little leaves on it and some people made different color eggs out of beet juice. You know, that would make real red eggs.

And there was another kind of a bark that some people used when they -- real, almost black eggs, and I don't know what kind of bark it was.

Q What color were the red onion peels?

A Kind of a maroon, kind of maroon color.

Q Did you use the yellow onions?

A They were red leaf onions. I don't know if the yellow wouldn't be quite that dark. It would probably make a nice yellow. But, we use to have real dark red onions. You saved those leaves the whole year and then on Easter time you have a whole bag full of those red leaves.

Q You mean they were dry?

A Oh yes, you'd dry them. Yeah, you let them -- it's just the outside leaves, you know. And you'd dry them.

Q Oh, I see. Did you make Easter nests?

A Yes, we made Easter nests. And get the green leaves off of the mesquite trees and make a nice green nest, then pick flowers and lay them in there, lined with flowers. So the Easter bunny had a nice place to put the Easter eggs. (Laughter)

Q Did you have a new dress for Easter?

A Sometimes. Not every year.

Q And then you went to church -- did you go to church on Easter Sunday?

A Yes, we always went to church on Easter Sunday.

Q Tell me some more about Easter.

A Well, the boys use to make the Easter eggs from guinea eggs, and they were so hard. They'd go and take them to school the day after Easter. They had some games that they played where

they boxed the Easter eggs together. And the one that broke had to give up his eggs. (Laughter).

Q Were the guinea eggs as big as --

A No, they were smaller than the chicken eggs.

Q That's sounds like a fun game. Do you remember anything about May Day?

A May Day?

Q May Day processions.

A May Day processions, yes. That was always the day that we looked forward to, because we'd get our hair curled and let our hair down, hanging. Wear a little wreath. We just looked like little queens. That's when they had the little parade with the little flags. We'd have the little flag -- the little banners at the school, at the school house. And Sister would line us up and give each one one of those little banners. Then we'd walk from the school to the church. And we'd go all around in the church, down the middle aisle and around the outside. (Laughter)

Q Describe the little banners.

A Well, they were just like the big banners that they have in church. It had a --

Q Little stick?

A It had a little stick up in the center and a bar across the top, and the little banner was fastened to that little bar. And it swung on there, you know from side to side.

Q What were they made of?

A They were made out of silk. They were beautiful. They had a picture of saints on it.

Q Oh, it did?

A And there were a few banners that had metallic threads on it. And they were, I guess for the specials, special students. (Laughter).

Q Did you ever get to carry one?

A Yes, I did. Yes, Sister Marcella use to save me one.

Q What colors were they?

A Well, the metallic ones were mostly in silver, kind of silvery looking. And the other ones were in pink, or blue and white, different beautiful colors. And we had pictures printed on with fringes around, you know, gold fringe around. They were beautiful.

Q That must have been a colorful event.

A Yes it was.

Q Did you crown the Blessed Mother then?

A Yes, they were always two of the girls were selected to crown the Blessed Mother.

Q And what did they use for a crown?

A They usually had the crowns made out of flowers.

Q Fresh?

A Fresh flowers.

Q Tell me something about Corpus Christi?

A Well, that was the day when everybody had to help make altars in front of several houses, you know. One was usually in front of the place where the hospital is now. That was at that time a hat store, a mellinary, you know. And one would be in front of Fitzsimon's, the -- where the -- that was the drug store. They had one there. There was another one I think it was over at --

Q Mrs. Jungman's?

A Mrs. Jungman's place, yes. Usually had three. And we would walk from church around first to the first one over there by the hat store. And they'd have a service there, you know and sing and everything. Then to the next one and so on. And they had the little flower girls, that would wear like a little basket -- on a little ribbon around the neck, hold the little basket and the basket would be filled full of flower petals. And we would throw those flower petals in front of the priest when he was coming with the --

Q The monstrance?

A The monstrance, um-um.

Q Describe that little basket to me.

A That little basket? It was an egg basket. It was a little egg basket and it was about 6 inches long and about 3 inches wide, and about 2 inches high. And my sister lined it with net. It just looked so pretty. Put a white ribbon on the sides, fasten it on the side to go around the neck.

Q Tell me how you walked in procession and threw the petals.

A Well, we would -- there would probably be about eight of us and always in pairs. Two of us would turn around and throw the petals and then we would go to the back again and the next two would take turn around and throw the petals.

Q And you'd walk backward then?

A Yes. We walked backwards while we were throwing the petals. (Laughter). There were no paved streets either.

Q You had to be quite --

A Careful.

Q Careful,

A Yes, we did.

Q We were talking about May Day and do you -- what do you remember about All Soul's and All Saint's Day?

A All Soul's Day, we usually went in a procession to the cemetery.

Q Did they ring the bells or anything at that time?

A No, they never -- I don't know, I don't remember.

Q Did you decorate the graves?

A Yes, the graves were always decorated with fresh flowers.

Q Did your mother raise the flowers or --?

A Yes, we always raised the flowers at that time. You couldn't buy any flowers, everybody raised their own. And they'd work at it, probably for months ahead of time, so that they'd have flowers.

Q Um-um. How did you take them to the cemetery then?

A We usually walked.

Q At that was about --

A About a mile, I guess.

Q About a mile at least.

A Yes. And the procession, it was a pretty long walk. And in that time, the funerals when you had a funeral, you walked from the church to the cemetery.

Q You didn't drive in a car?

A No, no, you didn't see any cars. Very few people had cars in those days. But the hearse would go and then the people would walk behind the hearse all the way up. And the children had to go -- the school children had to go all the time.

Q They had to go to every funeral?

A Yes, we did.

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Q They had to go to every funeral?

A We had to go to every funeral and we said the rosary all the way up. And one time when there was a funeral, it was one of the boys that went to school with us died, and it was -- it had rained. And it was -- (End of side one)

Q What did you do for Christmas?

A That was something to look forward to. Because we always had a large Christmas tree. They usually closed the doors while they were trimming the tree. And the children had to stay outside, until night time. When Santa Claus would come. And when they'd open the doors we'd be so surprised to see such a beautiful tree.

Q What kind of a tree was it?

A Always a cedar tree, a live cedar tree.

Q How did you get the tree?

A There was a man that use to go out to get a load of trees. And he'd -- you'd give him the order ahead of time, about what size tree you wanted and that's what he would bring. We usually had a big one. And I remember when I was 4 years old, we had such a big tree and that year must have been a good year, because I got a baby doll buggy, you know. A little doll buggy and a little doll and a little iron. The little iron I still have it. And alot of little things. My brother got a little express wagon. It was a really good year.

Q Where did they put the tree?

A In the room.

Q In the living room?

A In one of the rooms, uh-huh. Well, it was our -- it was my mother's bedroom. We moved the bed way in the corner and the

other half of the room took up -- the tree took up the other half of the room. Because they were big.

Q What did your mother do to prepare for Christmas? What kind of baking?

A She baked cookies. She always made the white sugar cookies and all different kind of designs. Frosted them and put little beads on it and colored the icing. And she'd make molasses cookies, made the little men and the little girls. Put a string -- then they'd string it, you know, put a string through it and hang it on the tree. We'd have little oranges and little apples, they were all hung on the tree. And the little candies with the little fringe on it.

Q Describe that little candy.

A It was a hard candy. The candy wasn't too good, but it was so cute. It was so pretty, it had the little fringe. It was in different colors and you'd take two or three of those little candies and tie the top -- tie them together on the top and they would just stick out and make a pretty little ornament.

Q Was it kind of a -- was it a paper?

A Yeah, it was tissue paper, like tissue paper.

Q Was it colored?

A Yes. Just the fringe was colored. The other stayed white.

Q And your tree must have been very pretty. Did you have a lot of ornaments on it too?

A We didn't have no glass ornaments like they have now. We had the paper ornaments. And they were bought. It was glossy, glossy pictures with tinsel around, you know on them.

Q What were the pictures of?

- A Santa Claus. And we had angels and we had one that was like a fish and it had an angel on it riding the fish. (Laughter). But, most of the pretty ones were of Santa Claus carrying a bag of toys on his back. And then we had one that went on the top. That was the Christ Child, and it was dressed in cloth kind of a paper, you know, little dress. It looked so pretty and that went --
- Q Way on top.
- A Way on top, uh-huh. That was the top.
- Q Did your mother make any other kind of cookies, besides molasses and sugar cookies?
- A Pecan cookies, you know, with pecans in and spice. Spice cookies.
- Q Tell me where she kept your cookies.
- A Most of the time she'd put them in a huge dish pan and when she'd make cookies, it was such a large amount that it would fill up a dish pan. Then she'd take the dish pan and stick it in a thick, heavy flour sack and tie it shut on the end. And that would just keep them so nice. If you'd want them soft, well they'd get soft. If you want them crisp, they were crisp.
- Q That's great. Did you dunk them?
- A Oh, we usually dunked them in milk, yeah.
- Q What did you -- did you have any special things that you ate at Christmas time? For Christmas dinner?
- A Not really. Just --
- Q Whatever.
- A Regular Sunday dinner. Like a Sunday dinner
- Q Um-um. Did you go to midnight Mass?

- A Yes, yes, they had midnight Mass. Always. When we go bigger, we were allowed to go to midnight Mass with father and mother. But when we were little, we had to stay at home, and they went.
- Q Did you have a supper then when you came home or breakfast or anything?
- A No. Just --
- Q Just straight to bed.
- A Straight to bed.
- Q Did you have a new dress for Christmas?
- A No. I don't remember.
- Q The tree and all that --
- A That was it. That was it.
- Q Uh-huh. And it was a big tree.
- A Yeah, when I was 6 years old I got a big doll for Christmas. And still have it. (Laughter) -- Hansman from Germany.
- Q So you got some pretty things at Christmas time?
- A Only I wasn't allowed to play with it for a couple of years. It had to stay in the box just sit up in the box and look at it. Feel the toes. (Laughter).
- Q Did you get -- was it out all year or did they put it away and just bring it out right at Christmas time?
- A No, it was out all year. Sat up in the box on a table.
- Q You were a good little girl to leave it alone. (Laughter).
- A It wasn't looking, (laughter) -- only when looking.
- Q Do you remember your solemn communion?
- A Yes, sure do. I was 11 years old and it was -- we were a big group that made solemn communion. I think there were about 36. And the children from the farms would come in and stay with

people here in Castroville, you know to go to instructions.

They were suppose to go to instruction for a year before they made their solemn communion.

Q Did you have a pretty dress?

A Yes, I sure did. I had a nice communion dress. Ordered from Sears and Roebuck. (Laughter).

Q What color was it?

A White.

Q White, --

A Yeah, white. And the veil.

Q Describe your veil.

A My veil was made from nice white net. My sister put a nice lace around it, and it was kind of gathered in the front like a little bonnet, you know. Kind of gathered and then it had a -- wore a little wreath. And we had carried a candle. The candle holder was glass, candle holder and it had like a cross on it. And we carried that. We had flowers on the candle.

Q Did it have anything else on it like ribbon or anything?

A Oh, yeah. It had white ribbon hanging down on it.

Q Did you have your picture made?

A Yes. Yes, after I made my communion my mother let me go to San Antonio to visit my aunt and she had pictures made. And of course, it was always that rolling the hair up on rags, you know. And tying it up and then you'd let your hair down. You might have a curl and you might not. (Laughter).

Q Tell me how you did the rag curls.

A Well, you'd hold the rag close to the head and they just wrap the hair around and around and around, until it, you know, got

to the end. Then you just take the ends and tie it in knots.

Q And that made sausage curls?

A Yes, suppose to. But my hair were so long I think the weight just pulled them out. I had real long hair.

Q I'll bet it was pretty. Now, you talked about dried fruit while ago. Did you dry your own fruit?

A No.

Q No, you bought the fruit.

A Always bought it.

Q Did your mother ever make pastata pie?

A Not that I remember. No, that was new to me when you told me about it.

Q Did she make pickled turnips?

A Yes, yes, pickled turnips, sauerkraut.

Q Describe that. How did she make the turnips?

A The turnips? We always peeled our turnips. Some people don't peel them. But, we peeled them and cut the tops off and the root part and then grated them on special graters. Some were homemade graters to grate the turnips and they came out like little spaghetti. They were put in a jug and kind of ferment, don't they? I don't know, it's salt.

Q Salt and sugar.

A Salt and sugar. They put a weight on top. Let them set for about two weeks until they were good and sour and then they put them in jars.

Q Did your father make the graters?

A No, but my uncle did. Uncle Eugene.

Q How were the graters? How did they look?

A It was a board with a -- those little teeth on it, you know. And you'd just would grate the turnip against those little teeth.

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I, Young Louisa Anna Marcella, voluntarily
interviewee's full name - last First (Mother)
give Castroville Public Library the full use of the information re-
corded on tape on the 1 day of Oct, 1980, in return
for which I will receive a tape of the interview.

Marcella Young
Interviewee's signature

I, Jaustina Sharp, the interviewer
of Marcella Young hereby release all rights,
title, literary or copyright interest in the interview conducted on
Oct. 1 day(s) of _____, 1980, to the Castroville Public
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Jaustina Sharp
Interviewer's signature