

TEXAS STORY PROJECT INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWEE: **Joyce Bise**, Executive Director, Texas Wendish Heritage Museum

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Now, by far, my most vivid memory at Christmas was Rumpliche. Rumpliche was a fierce character and he instilled good behavior in the children.

The young men in the community would look forward to being able to portray Rumpliche, and each year, a week or two before Christmas, they would get together— a group of eight or ten— and they prepared very wild-looking, fierce-looking costumes and they would travel the countryside, going to each of the houses, to visit. Now, the masks were so fierce that when they started announcing their arrival— for instance, in our household, we could hear them coming down the country road and they would be stomping and throwing things. They threw a rock up on our tin roof, they would look in through the window panes with the fierce, fierce masks and then they would demand entry into the home.

Of course, by this time, I would be so glued to my daddy's lap that I just sat there. The Rumpliches would come in and they would stomp around, all around the family, and then go up to my father and demand to know, "Was this young lady good during this year?" and I silently just prayed, *Oh Daddy, please, please say yes I was good!* And I had hoped that there wasn't anything that I had done that would cause him to say otherwise because I knew that the Rumpliches all had a sack. It was empty. There were no gifts in it. That empty sack was to place children in if their parents said they had not been good.

Well, although I was never put into the sack, I had friends who did get placed in the sack, but thankfully they were allowed to get out rather quickly. But the way they were allowed to get out was by reciting a prayer and a good friend of mine who ended up in the sack pretty much every year always told me that no matter what she tried, she was so frightened she would always forget how to say her prayer until she finally was able to get out.

The Rumpliches, after everything calmed down, would leave after offering the children an apple and they would go on their merry way to the next household to frighten good behavior into the children. So that was our first Santa Claus, so to speak, but thank goodness, the Rumpliche has been replaced by our modern day Ho-Ho-Ho Santa.