

Speaker 1:

Alrighty, thanks for coming in and talking to us today. And if you'd say your name for the recording, please.

Keith Poling:

Keith Poling.

Speaker 1:

All right, Keith. And you currently live where?

Keith Poling:

I live in rural Marshall County, Vienna Township in the country.

Speaker 1:

All right. And is that also where you grew up on the farm or did you grow up elsewhere?

Keith Poling:

No. I grew up on a farm, two and a half miles north and west of Albion, Iowa.

Speaker 1:

All right. And if you don't mind me asking, tell me your birth year please.

Keith Poling:

I was born in 1948.

Speaker 1:

1948. So we've had some good reminiscences from around then. So prior to 1948, when you were born on that farm, how did your family come to live on a farm in Iowa?

Keith Poling:

They were living on a farm through their family. My grandfather was a farmer, his ancestors were farmers, and my dad was a farmer.

Speaker 1:

So your dad inherited the farm or did he buy the farm from someone else?

Keith Poling:

He bought the farm when I was... Well, before I was born he bought the farm.

Speaker 1:

And then he'd grown up in a farm in the area, or did he immigrate into the area?

Keith Poling:

The farm that he bought was less than a quarter of a mile from what we called the home farm where he was born and raised. And he still farmed the home farm and also the farm that he bought that I was raised on.

Speaker 1:

You've got quite the little collection of farmers there, especially for that time of year.

Keith Poling:

Yeah, because my uncle was another half mile on the other side of the home farm. So my uncle, would've been my grandma and the farm I was raised on were all intertwined together.

Speaker 1:

Okay, so kind of you were ahead on the big family farm corporations that we have now where they're so spread around.

Keith Poling:

All three of the farms were quite little by today's standards.

Speaker 1:

So do you have a favorite story about growing up on the farm?

Keith Poling:

I think my, I guess, favorite story would just simply be the fun I had playing in the haymow. From the time I was old enough or strong enough to move little square hay bales around, I would build hay forts, I would make tunnels from one hay fort to the other. I would spend a lot of time while dad was choring or whatever, and I would play in the haymow while he was still outside.

Speaker 1:

Built-in playground. So obviously your family raised hay if you had a haymow full of hay bales. Could you tell me about what other kinds of crops your family grew?

Keith Poling:

At that time, in that particular time, you had a four grained crop rotation that was followed very strictly from my dad. So we had oats one year and the next year that would be hay and then that would be corn, and then the corn would be soybeans. And then we'd start all over again.

Speaker 1:

And you'd rotate your fields around. So every year you're harvesting all those crops and planting all those crops.

Keith Poling:

Until I was old enough to somewhat start making some of the decisions, there was never any commercial fertilizer bought. It was all organic waste from our animals that we had.

Speaker 1:

Well, that takes us right down to the next question on my list, which is could you tell us about the if and what kind of animals your family raised on the farm?

Keith Poling:

We had, what would've been then, a fairly typical arrangement of farm animals. We had dairy cattle, we dairied, we raised hogs, we had chickens, and we always had a horse or a pony or two.

Speaker 1:

Not so much raising them, but for work or for fun?

Keith Poling:

For fun mainly. And then also we would use them to bring the cows in from the pasture if it was milking time and they wouldn't come, checking on the cattle that were out in the pasture. And then just plain pet animals.

Speaker 1:

Pet animals and dogs, cats, no llamas.

Keith Poling:

No llamas.

Speaker 1:

No llamas back in the day.

Keith Poling:

We had about 100 to 120 layer hens, and about every second year we'd get maybe 200 baby chickens and raise the baby chickens up to replace the older hens.

Speaker 1:

So on all those animals and crops, were any of those for you at home that you raised for your own personal consumption, or was all of it commercial being sold off the farm?

Keith Poling:

On a normal year, we would butcher our two hogs, which we would do with the neighbors. I can remember watching hogs being butchered in our machine shed, and then usually one steer. And then we also had a large garden every year with very little extra meat or vegetables was ever purchased.

Speaker 1:

And I take it, some of those chickens get retired to the pasture.

Keith Poling:

Usually when you bought so many pullets, the hatchery would throw in so many roosters. So there were always some roosters there. The big treat when I was growing up was to have hot dogs, because hot dogs was the one thing we didn't raise. Otherwise, a steak was no big deal, a roast was no big deal. Pork chops were pork chops. That wasn't anything new. Bacon. Before we actually had our own freezer, we would have a locker in the town of Albion and we'd go in there every so often and bring home fruits and vegetables and meat out of the locker. And then when we got our own freezer, it was all downstairs in the freezer.

Speaker 1:

So you talked a little bit about what you were raising and doing before you were old enough to start making farm decisions. So what kind of work did you do on the farm growing up and what did your other family members do for farm work?

Keith Poling:

Dad and I did most of the, from the time I can remember old enough to help, I guess you'd say general farm labor. Probably at the age of like eight, I started driving the tractor on a baler. I wasn't even strong enough to push in on the clutch, but I could guide it. So dad would jump off the hay rack and run up and jump on the tractor, really safety. And he would-

Speaker 1:

We're glad you've made it here to tell us about it.

Keith Poling:

He would push in on the clutch. So it was a Massey Harris 33, and I'd get both my hands on the steering wheel and pull myself forward as hard as I could and then stick my leg on the clutch. And sometimes I could push it in and sometimes I couldn't. But it did have a lever, and if I pulled the lever back far enough, it would stop the forward motion, but it wouldn't stop any of the machinery.

And then I would of course shovel manure and help throw hay, weed the garden. Thing I hated the worst was cleaning the chicken house. I would clean the chicken house. And I was extremely proud when I could finally back up a two wheel manure spreader with the tractor where I wanted it. The four wheel hay wagon was still a very big challenge, but the two wheels, anything with two wheels, I could pretty well put it where I wanted to be. And I probably really started driving tractors by myself when I was about 10 or 11. If there was something that needed to be done and I thought I could help with it, I would try to.

Speaker 1:

So what did your other family members do for their jobs on the farm?

Keith Poling:

I had three older sisters, and the oldest one was the tractor driver before I took over. And the other two would do the chicken chores, keep them watered and gathered the eggs. My second sister was really the horse person. And my next to me sister really didn't do a whole lot to be quite truthful. She was supposed to be at 4H and have a dairy cow, but I took care of it most of the time because I was down in the barn helping with the milking anyway.

Speaker 1:

Did they have more household chores than you did?

Keith Poling:

Yeah, they had to take turns washing the dishes. I never had to do that unless I felt like it. I guess they both must've turned out all right because I did learn how to bake and I'm not lost in the kitchen.

Speaker 1:

You were allowed into the kitchen.

Keith Poling:

I was allowed into the kitchen.

Speaker 1:

But that wasn't your primary job.

Keith Poling:

No, that was like, this is a cold winter day and there's nothing else to do, so I'll make some cookies or something like that.

Speaker 1:

Was that the same division of labor between your parents? Was your mom ever out helping with farm chores or your dad ever helping with housework?

Keith Poling:

I don't think dad ever helped with housework. Mom might've gathered the chickens or fed or watered them. When I got into 4H and I was raising hogs, raising pigs for my 4H project, she would come out and help me sometimes if I needed. Like we'd shovel snow for the old sows to walk around so they weren't dragging in the snow, things like that. But basically the household was her job and dad and I were the outside people.

Speaker 1:

So you said you got to use tractors and manure spreaders and all that fun stuff. What other kinds of memories do you have of farm machinery and technology that was used? I'm taking it there wasn't satellite guided planting and field sampling. What kind of machinery and tech did you guys have?

Keith Poling:

When I was really little, I can remember this, that dad used a two row corn planter. And when he first started, would still use the wire, and you'd stake a wire on either end of the field and you'd actually let that wire guide you so you could plant straight rows. And then he was also one of the very first ones in fact, the year I was born, to buy a combine.

Speaker 1:

Wow.

Keith Poling:

So there wasn't any need to thrash or anything like that anymore. He had one of the very first combines in the neighborhood and he would combine his oats and that's when he started raising soybeans. And he would also hire that machine out.

He was also one of the ones to first get a baler. And when I was old enough, when he would go bale for other people, if he just baled, he got 10 cents a bale. If he furnished me as a loader or a driver, either one, then we'd get 12 cents a bale.

Speaker 1:

You were literally worth 2 cents.

Keith Poling:

I was worth 2 cents a bale. And it was nice because normally we'd trade off where I'd load a load and then I'd drive the tractor while he loaded a load. And that way we could go almost all afternoon or even sometimes longer. And it was pretty good. If I put a hundred bales on that hay rack, why, I had \$2.

Speaker 1:

That's a good deal. How old were you when this was happening?

Keith Poling:

This was probably in the late '50s to early '60s. I was probably 10, 12.

Speaker 1:

Not quite a teenager yet, already making \$2 a day.

Keith Poling:

Well, on a good hay field, I could probably do five to six loads in a day of what I did. That'd be like 12 loads or whatever. I usually got the 2 cents even if I was the driver. So basically I was getting 2 cents a bale for whatever we did. And the farmers around us were happy.

And one thing that's gone, talking about technology and the use now of modern machinery, is the corn sheller. And the corn sheller help was one of the ways I made extra money in the spring, and again, through the fall as farmers around us would shell out their corn cribs. And you needed a lot of help. So I was in demand for doing that, especially when I got old enough that I could drive myself to get to wherever we were shelling.

Speaker 1:

And then did you have any technology that helped with your livestock? You said you were out shoveling for your sows. No snowblowers or platted tractors or anything to make handling the livestock easier.

Keith Poling:

We always had a loader tractor. A lot of times it didn't have a very big bucket, but we had one, it was an H Farmall, which we made sure that we always had a loader on it. Otherwise, I guess you had, as far as really technology, if you needed to run a moisture check on your grain, you went down to the local

elevator, you took a sample and went down there and they would moisture test it for you free to see if it was ready to harvest.

Speaker 1:

Did you milk your cows by hand or did you have a milking machine?

Keith Poling:

We did have a milking machine and you could milk two cows at a time, and you'd have to then empty the milkers into a bucket or a can. And when I first can remember, we separated all the milk into cream and then skim milk, and we would feed the skim milk to our hogs. And then the cream is what we would actually sell.

Speaker 1:

Kind of different of how the demand is now, isn't it?

Keith Poling:

Yeah, it was work. There's no doubt about it, it was work. You were handling that milk from the cow to the bucket to the bucket to the separator, out of the separator to the pigs. And it was work.

Speaker 1:

It was work. So with all that work, do you still have any family members who are still farming?

Keith Poling:

I don't know if you can call an acreage with equine animals and buying and handling hay as farming, but that's me. That's what we still do. As far as actual row crops or anything like that, we don't.

Speaker 1:

I heard you still had some chickens.

Keith Poling:

That's my daughter's.

Speaker 1:

You don't have to clean the chicken house?

Keith Poling:

No, she takes care of that. I do emergency feeding and watering and shutting in at night when she's working.

Speaker 1:

And she thanks you for it. So that's all we have, unless you have any other stories you'd like to share with us.

Keith Poling:

I can't really... Oh, I do have what I want to say.

Speaker 1:

Okay. You got to tell me this one.

Keith Poling:

I guess I want to say how enterprising I was. When I was nine, my mom gave me 10 ducks for Easter, 10 little ducklings. And they were white Pekins. And I turned those 10 ducks into a pretty lucrative poultry business. One year I hatched out and raised over 150 ducks.

And sometime during the summer I went to a poultry house in Marshalltown and I contracted so many pounds of live duck at a quarter a pound. And that was ducks. Then turned into a Poland China hog herd and then to a shorthorn cattle herd. And I really did enjoy raising those ducks.

Speaker 1:

Rolling the investment, you scaled up from ducks to larger animals.

Keith Poling:

To larger animals.

Speaker 1:

Did you quit with the ducks when you got the bigger animals?

Keith Poling:

Yeah. I got the bigger animals, I quit with the ducks. And those animals, so you could say you started with the ducks, those animals paid for my college. So when I was graduated from college, I owed a whopping \$300 total.

Speaker 1:

All because your mom got your 10 ducks.

Keith Poling:

All because of a 10 duck Easter gift.

Speaker 1:

And a lot of hard work.

Keith Poling:

And a lot of hard work.

Speaker 1:

All right. Well, thank you so much for coming in and sharing with us today. And these will be posted on the Earth's Bounty in Iowa Then and Now website through the Iowa Oral History Foundation. So look to

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have those up and go listen to some of what your friends and neighbors have told us and see how you compare. So thank you so much for your time today.

Keith Poling:

Thank you.