

Speaker 1:

Okay. Thank you for meeting with me today. And I wanted to start just asking your name and where you live and if you wouldn't mind telling us your birth year.

Steve Darby:

Yeah. Steve Darby. I live in Boone, Iowa, and I was born January 27th, 1951.

Speaker 1:

And did you live anywhere else during your lifetime?

Steve Darby:

Yes, Clarksville, Iowa. That was where my dad was farming.

Speaker 1:

Awesome. Okay. Down to the actual questions, how did your family come to live on a farm in Iowa?

Steve Darby:

My grandparents moved there from England, I believe, and then my granddad farmed for a while, and then he went out in ministry, and so my dad took over the farm when he was 16.

Speaker 1:

And when would you say that was?

Steve Darby:

That was probably 1922, 1923, somewhere in there.

Speaker 1:

Gotcha. What was your favorite story growing up on the farm where you lived?

Steve Darby:

Probably because my dad farmed with horses for a number of years, actually just until I was three or four, which was early 50s, and so he would always talk about how much he liked horses. And he told the story of one time where a milk truck got stuck because the roads were more mud than gravel or they certainly weren't any blacktop roads then. Anyway, it got stuck and the guy came to the farm and asked if he could get help getting his truck pulled out, and dad said, "Well, I have these two horses." And the guy said, "Oh, they'll never be able to pull this truck out." And he took them out to where the truck was and hooked them onto the truck and pulled him right on out. And the guy that was the truck driver said, "I would've never believed it if I hadn't seen it."

Speaker 1:

Awesome.

Steve Darby:

So my dad loved the horses. So he was a little reluctant to give them up, but...

Speaker 1:

Oh, I bet.

Steve Darby:

That was part of farm progress.

Speaker 1:

Yeah I know. I knew some people who had horses around that same time, and they were always very reluctant to give them up. You really form an attachment to them.

Steve Darby:

Right. Yep.

Speaker 1:

What kind of crops did your family grow, if any?

Steve Darby:

Corn, beans, alfalfa, and oats. I think it was another part of your question, but my dad first had a dairy and then he gave up on the dairy cattle and got into beef cattle and hogs. So the farm, all the crops were rotated and he didn't have a lot of commercial fertilizer, but he did spread the manure and that was what generated the good soil. And of course then when the corn after it was picked, he would turn the cattle out into the corn fields and they would pick up some of the corn. And of course then they left fertilizer deposits. And so that was also part of the way of just getting fertilizer back into the fields.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. I like that, hearing about old farms, really creating all those materials for yourself, self-sustain.

Steve Darby:

And then because they rotated, I mean, beans had a lot of nitrogen, so when you put a corn crop on after a year before the beans, you had some extra nitrogen in the soil that you normally didn't have otherwise. So it was a good system.

Speaker 1:

I bet it was.

Steve Darby:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

And I suppose you sort of already answered this, but in case you had any others, what kind of animals did your family raise?

Steve Darby:

Yeah, there wasn't really any. My dad, because he was doing the dairy, I mean, that was a year-round, 24/7, and it was kind of clockwork. I mean, because the cows were on a regular schedule. If you milked them at five in the morning, then you milked them at five at night, and you didn't change that a lot because otherwise it threw off their milk production. So after a while, my dad just got tired of that kind of regularity. Plus, if they wanted to go somewhere, he had to get somebody else to do the milking, which not very many people around in their area did milking.

Speaker 1:

They didn't or didn't know how?

Steve Darby:

Well, there was a couple other guys in the area that milked cows. So yes, they could come in and do it, but that was kind of inconvenient because they had their own cows, so they were doing their cows, plus my dad's. So it didn't give them a lot of flexibility to get away. So after a while, he decided to switch to beef cattle and hogs. So yeah, there's some regularity, but not nearly like dairy. So he would be a lot more flexible in coming and going and that sort of thing.

Speaker 1:

And he did dairy cattle up until a little bit after you were born?

Steve Darby:

Yeah, I was probably six or seven, so that would've been late 50s.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. And he had started doing it as soon as he took over the farm or later on?

Steve Darby:

No, he probably did it as soon as he started farming. Yeah. Because that was a big thing for him. With the corn production that's how he fed the cattle, so yeah.

Speaker 1:

I see. Okay. Did you raise any of your own food?

Steve Darby:

Yeah, my mom had a big garden. Huge garden, and she was always out working in the garden. I mean, it took a lot of work with everything. So we had a lot of things that we put in in the spring, and then we were constantly picking it and either canning it or freezing it throughout the summer. But then you had all that for the wintertime. And of course part of that came from, I mean, my mom loved to garden, but they went through the Depression. So I think that was another big thing that kind of motivated, the, "Okay, we're going to be self-sufficient here." Because I mean, they weren't that far from town, but when they just had horses it wasn't as easy to get to town. So to buy a lot of groceries as handy as it is now. So they just raised a lot of food.

Speaker 1:

Was that garden reserved for your family and what you ate, or did you ever sell any of it?

Steve Darby:

No, it was all for us.

Speaker 1:

I see.

Steve Darby:

Yeah. I mean, back then, you did a lot of things more manually than they do now. So you burned a lot of calories and you could eat a lot and it would never show. So you needed a lot of food. I mean, that was just kind of the way it was.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. Did you have siblings that you worked with?

Steve Darby:

Well, yes and no. I had an older brother, but by the time I was five or six, he was gone. He went to the Navy, so he was on the farm before I was born. So my parents had him helping, but I didn't really see him a lot until a lot later after he was back. And I was still on the farm, but he was not around farming.

Speaker 1:

But he was quite a bit older than you if he left for the Navy that early?

Steve Darby:

Yeah. Right.

Speaker 1:

Gotcha. So who did what kind of work on the farm? Speaking of siblings and family members.

Steve Darby:

Right. Back then, again, they didn't have any machinery, so my dad would handpick the corn, and so sometimes my mom would go help him do that. My dad was a lot faster than she was, just because he did a lot more, but she would help with that. And then of course, my dad did all the milking. My mom really didn't help with that, and he helped a little bit with the garden, but she did most of that.

Speaker 1:

She had had a green thumb I bet if she was able to grow so much food.

Steve Darby:

She did. Yeah. And she really liked it. I mean, she really liked doing that kind of thing. So yeah. I'm trying to think what else. Really, my dad, as far as most everything else farm wise, he was kind of the one that

did most of the things. And my mom would help him out a little bit where she could, but most of it was him.

Speaker 1:

Did you ever have neighbors besides these people that helped milk cows come over and lend a hand?

Steve Darby:

Yes. Well, for a couple summers, because particularly when we switched to the beef cattle, you had to bail a lot of hay. And so we had another neighbor that had a lot of hay, and between them, my dad and this other neighbor, they thought it would be a good idea, because I was older there and that he had a son that was about my age that we would bail hay, we exchanged hay. Well, that was okay, except I never got paid anything and neither did this other guy. And we bailed hay all summer. I mean, we'd just get done bailing hay, and then it would be them cutting hay and baling hay, and that's all we did.

Speaker 1:

Just rinse and repeat.

Steve Darby:

Yeah. So, you learn to work hard and all that. But you didn't have a lot of free time.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, I doubt it.

Steve Darby:

Yeah. So that was probably the big thing of work exchange. Although the other thing that we did do was back then, because they had whole corn instead of now the combines and everything shell the corn and it's all done for you, but you had whole corn, so you had to have somebody come in with what they call a sheller, and you shelled the corn. So it went through this machine, took all the corn off the cob, and so that was something that the neighbors did. They went around when they needed corn for their cattle or whatever, they would call up this guy, he'd bring his equipment, and either they'd come to our place or we'd go to their place, and that's what we did for good part of the day is just shell the corn, and it would come out of a big mesh bin. So that was kind of fun because you got to eat a lot and after you did all that work and everything.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. I suppose I've never thought about the actual shelling process. All I know is at my own grandparents, we would get fresh corn on the cob and we would chuck it by hand. And that was always kind of a fun summer thing for us too.

Steve Darby:

Yeah. Yeah, and in this machine that he had, it would take off the husks and then it would be able to take the kernels of corn off the cob, and then it would all come out. The husk would blow out in one pile, and the corn would go into an elevator and up into a bin that my dad stored it. And that would be the same for all the other neighbors too.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. Did you do anything with the husks at all?

Steve Darby:

I don't think so. I think my dad might have used it for bedding, but it wasn't very good bedding because it was, yeah.

Speaker 1:

Yeah.

Steve Darby:

So most times I think he just piled it up and burned it.

Speaker 1:

Oh, okay. No composting or anything?

Steve Darby:

No. Now the corn cobs, that he could use for bedding. I mean, because those were more solid and they would give you a good basis for bedding for cows and stuff.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, I bet. Okay. What kind of farm machinery or technology was used, if any, no matter how simple or complicated?

Steve Darby:

Well, when my dad was using horses, it was just two row planters. And like I said, he didn't have anything to pick the corn. He just did it by hand. And it was a wagon that was hooked to either one or two of the horses. And he would just tell them, "Get up," and they would just move forward a little ways. And then he would tell them to stop and they would stop, and then he'd pick up to them, and then he'd tell them to get up, and they would just go forward a little ways, and then he'd tell them to stop. So that was the only mechanical thing. I mean, that wasn't mechanical. And then he would come back a little bit later when we did have a tractor, an elevator, that we could put it up in that bin that they would come back and shell it then later.

What else did we have for machinery? Eventually we had tractors, but they were no power steering, and there was no cabs on the tractors or anything. So if the weather was bad, you just sat out in the cold. You were just bundled up and you were cold, and you had to hang on really tight to the steering wheel because if you hit a rock in the field, because it wasn't power steering, that tire would just take the wheel.

Speaker 1:

And totally throw you off.

Steve Darby:

Yeah. And so you wanted to be holding onto that tighter, or you could break your arm. I mean, fast enough, it could just jerk it right on out. So eventually then, as time went on, my dad got a picker that was a two row picker that went on the tractor. And so then it would pick two rows and put everything back in the wagon. And then he'd bring that wagon up in the elevator and put it up in the bin.

Speaker 1:

Gotcha.

Steve Darby:

But that was still whole corn, he didn't have anything that would shell the corn yet. And then later on, he never got a combine, but he got a neighbor that came in and combined the corn for him.

Speaker 1:

Oh, okay. Did that neighbor go around all the surrounding parts to help?

Steve Darby:

Well, he went around to a few neighbors. I mean, he had his own corn fields that he had to-

Speaker 1:

Had to deal with.

Steve Darby:

So he didn't want to get too spread out and not be able to get his work done too. But he did it for my dad because he was right next to us. This was when my dad was getting a little bit older, so he didn't really want to invest in a combine, because those were kind of expensive. I mean, particularly if you weren't going to be using it for a bunch of years.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, it's a big investment.

Steve Darby:

It wouldn't pay for itself. Yes. So because his neighbor was close, it was easy for him to just come over and combine the corn for him.

Speaker 1:

Was he paid or is it more just kind of a favor?

Steve Darby:

No, I think my dad paid him.

Speaker 1:

Okay.

Steve Darby:

Because I mean, my dad didn't have a big farm. He only had 180 acres, but that was still work, gas, wear and tear on the machinery so my dad paid him for it.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. I mean, it's small relatively, but that's still a big stretch of land.

Steve Darby:

Well, and back at the time when my dad was first starting, if you're doing everything by hand, that's still a lot of work. So there's a limit to how much you can do and how many hours in the day.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. And speaking of family and time going on, are members of your family still farming? If any, how many?

Steve Darby:

No.

Speaker 1:

No?

Steve Darby:

My brother went into teaching and we moved down here. I mean, we have a big acreage and horses, but I wouldn't call that technically farming. So yeah, there's nobody that's farming. And the neighbor bought dad's farm.

Speaker 1:

Okay. So he did end up selling it?

Steve Darby:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Eventually?

Steve Darby:

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1:

Okay. Well, that's really all we have. Thank you for coming in. We really appreciate it.

Steve Darby:

Yeah, you're welcome.