

Interviewer:

Well, hello, would you please state your name?

Bill Eilers:

Bill Eilers.

Interviewer:

Okay, Bill. And would you mind telling us your birth year?

Bill Eilers:

September 5th, 1956.

Interviewer:

'56. Thank you. And thank you for agreeing to interview and publish this interview on the State Library's website. This is their oral history project. And we are going to talk about life on a farm in Iowa for the Earth's Bounty in Iowa: Then and Now. How did your family come to live on a farm in Iowa?

Bill Eilers:

Just moving around a lot. We lived in farmhouse in Batavia, Iowa.

Interviewer:

Batavia.

Bill Eilers:

Batavia, Iowa.

Interviewer:

And where is that?

Bill Eilers:

By Fairfield and Ottumwa.

Interviewer:

Thank you. So a small town, a little rural farmhouse.

Bill Eilers:

It was a two-story-old farmhouse.

Interviewer:

And you were renting?

Bill Eilers:

Renting, yes.

Interviewer:

What line of work were your parents in?

Bill Eilers:

Well, see, my stepfather was a landscape architect.

Interviewer:

Oh wow, okay.

Bill Eilers:

And my mother, she just stayed home.

Interviewer:

So you just happened to rent out on a farm?

Bill Eilers:

Right. And I went to Pekin High School.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Bill Eilers:

Took the city school bus.

Interviewer:

How was the school bus?

Bill Eilers:

It was all right.

Interviewer:

How many years did you live on that farm?

Bill Eilers:

Not very long.

Interviewer:

What do you remember about farm life? What's your favorite memory of growing up on the farm?

Bill Eilers:

Having the apple trees in the back of the porch.

Interviewer:

So there was an orchard?

Bill Eilers:

Just a couple of apple trees.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Bill Eilers:

And my mom would use them and she would bake like a homemade apple strudel with sourdough bread.

Interviewer:

Nice. So that's your favorite recipe?

Bill Eilers:

That's my favorite thing.

Interviewer:

Did you have a garden or raise any crops while you lived there?

Bill Eilers:

No.

Interviewer:

No. Okay. Did you have any animals that you raised or took care of?

Bill Eilers:

No.

Interviewer:

No.

Bill Eilers:

No.

Interviewer:

No pets.

Bill Eilers:

No, nothing.

Interviewer:

But you were far enough from town you had to ride the bus to school?

Bill Eilers:

School bus, yes.

Interviewer:

Did you raise any of your own food?

Bill Eilers:

No.

Interviewer:

No. Okay. And did you do any kind of chores or farm work there associated with the acreage?

Bill Eilers:

Just helping clean out an old... What do you call it? Just empty building.

Interviewer:

Machine shed or barn kind of structure?

Bill Eilers:

No, not really. But it had rats in it.

Interviewer:

Rats.

Bill Eilers:

Yes. I hated that part.

Interviewer:

I would imagine.

Bill Eilers:

But I learned how to use a scythe. I remember that.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Bill Eilers:

And a post hole digger.

Interviewer:

Those are major farm tools.

Bill Eilers:

Which I never knew about and actually learned how to use it until we moved there.

Interviewer:

So it was a new discovery?

Bill Eilers:

Right.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Bill Eilers:

Hard work.

Interviewer:

Yes. Yeah, most of the farm work, at least at that point in time really was hard work. What were you doing the post holes for? Did you put up a fence?

Bill Eilers:

Must have.

Interviewer:

Must have. Okay. Okay. Okay. And was there any farm machinery?

Bill Eilers:

No.

Interviewer:

No. Okay.

Bill Eilers:

No.

Interviewer:

So there weren't people coming in and farming the ground around you.

Bill Eilers:

No.

Interviewer:

You were just on a little acreage with a couple of apple trees and the building you cleaned out, and evidently a fence you put in.

Bill Eilers:

Evidently.

Interviewer:

So is it just you and your mom or do you have other family members?

Bill Eilers:

My brother and I.

Interviewer:

Your brother. And then you had your stepfather?

Bill Eilers:

Right.

Interviewer:

And then any of them in farming now, or any family in farming?

Bill Eilers:

No, they're all passed away.

Interviewer:

Well, I really appreciate your willingness to share. How did you deal with the rats? I've been wondering that.

Bill Eilers:

I hated it.

Interviewer:

What did you have to do with them? Did you trap them or kill them somehow?

Bill Eilers:

I don't know.

Interviewer:

You don't remember?

Bill Eilers:

But I saw them.

Interviewer:

You saw them, okay. Yeah, I remember seeing them on our farm too anyway. Wasn't my favorite memory either.

This transcript was exported on Aug 03, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

Bill Eilers:

No.

Interviewer:

Okay. Well thank you so much, Bill. This is my first interview and I appreciate your answering these questions and being my guinea pig. Thank you.