

Speaker 1:

Okay. Thank you for being able to meet today. I'm going to start by asking your name, where you live, your birth year, and if you lived anywhere different when you grew up on a farm.

Kathy Van Maanen:

My name is Kathy Van Maanen. I grew up in Butler County, Iowa, just a mile north of Appleton. Currently I reside in Huxley, Iowa.

Speaker 1:

Okay. First question on the official list, how did your family come to live on a farm in Iowa?

Kathy Van Maanen:

My father grew up on a farm in Northeast Iowa, and when he was discharged from the Army after World War II, he came back and wanted to farm, and rented land in Butler County from a cousin. He did not have the same land that he grew up on, but in a similar area.

Speaker 1:

Okay, but it was not inherited from his parents?

Kathy Van Maanen:

No, he did not inherit it. He started out renting land and that would've been in 1947, and he did not own it outright until probably about 1970, and then he owned 360 acres.

Speaker 1:

It was the same area of land, he just bought it?

Kathy Van Maanen:

Yes. Same section of land, yes.

Speaker 1:

360 acres, wow. What was your favorite story of growing up on the farm?

Kathy Van Maanen:

I think for me, the best part, I don't know if there is a story, but the freedom of growing up on a farm, having all that land to play, do whatever I wanted. I was the youngest of five children, and one of my brothers, he's 12 years older than I am, but he was all about adventure, so we had all kinds of games and forts and imaginative play. I feel like that was a really good way to grow up.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, just so much access to the outside.

Kathy Van Maanen:

I was never inside in good weather, ever. Lived out in the grove, yeah.

Speaker 1:

What crops did your family grow?

Kathy Van Maanen:

Primarily corn. It was definitely primarily corn.

Speaker 1:

The Iowa special?

Kathy Van Maanen:

Yeah. There were a few soybeans and definitely hay ground, because we did have livestock as well and so we had to have feed. It was primarily corn and hay. Oats also, for straw, sorry. There were always the oat field, and the straw then was used for bedding for the animals.

Speaker 1:

Okay. The straw and the hay were different crops?

Kathy Van Maanen:

Yes.

Speaker 1:

Oh. Correct me if I'm wrong. The hay, it's called alfalfa, isn't it?

Kathy Van Maanen:

Correct.

Speaker 1:

Okay. I've heard that word thrown around a lot, and I wasn't quite sure.

Kathy Van Maanen:

Good alfalfa hay is extremely full of nutrients, extremely good feed for cattle. Oat straw has virtually no nutrient value in the straw. The oats themselves, the grain, yes.

Speaker 1:

Not the grass of it?

Kathy Van Maanen:

The stem, the grass of it, is straw. That was used for bedding.

Speaker 1:

I see. You're making use of all of it. That's good.

Kathy Van Maanen:

Yes, absolutely.

Speaker 1:

Speaking of livestock, what kind of animals did your family raise?

Kathy Van Maanen:

We always had cattle, beef cattle, and hogs. That was it. Then the fourth child, my older sister, did have horses, but they were purely recreational. I was born in 1959. Through the early '60s, we still had a few milk cows so we did milk twice a day, but that was only for our own use. We never had enough to sell. My dad got rid of those milk cows when I was pretty little. I'd say mid-'60s, they were gone, and then it was strictly beef cattle and hogs.

Speaker 1:

Okay. No chickens ever?

Kathy Van Maanen:

Yes, but I barely remember them. That was before my time.

Speaker 1:

Long-gone siblings. Did you raise any of your own food?

Kathy Van Maanen:

Yes.

Speaker 1:

I know a lot of the people I interview, they talk about having a huge garden that they would get stuff from.

Kathy Van Maanen:

Very large garden, yes. Always had a lot of sweet corn, and we froze all of that. Just a huge vegetable garden. We also had pumpkins and gourds, Indian corn, which was not necessarily practical, but always had those in the fall. A huge strawberry bed, so we'd have strawberries, and my mom was not a canner. Most farm wives canned a lot of produce but we had a big freezer, and so anything that was left from the garden, we put in the freezer.

Speaker 1:

Okay. Yeah. Most that I've talked to, they grew up before freezers were commonplace, so they would not say the same.

Kathy Van Maanen:

I think it was a big deal that my mom had this deep freeze, and she bought it the year my sister was born in 1954, and that freezer lasted into ... let's see ... she passed away in 1990, and that freezer died not long before she died, and so it was a good thing. It was a big deal.

Speaker 1:

That's sturdy. Oh, my goodness.

Kathy Van Maanen:

Food, because we had beef cattle and hogs, we always had our own meat, and I thought everybody grew up on T-bone steaks and roast beef and pork chops. It really wasn't until I went away to college and even after, married and on my own, that I realized, no, not everyone had T-bone steaks regularly.

Speaker 1:

College campus food is a little bit of a downgrade from fresh Iowa cattle.

Kathy Van Maanen:

No kidding.

Speaker 1:

Who did what kind of work on the farm? Did you have specific chores, split up between your parents and separate siblings?

Kathy Van Maanen:

My mom and dad were very traditional in that my dad took care of outside, my mom took care of inside. There were things that she helped with like seeding oats, and I remember sitting in the back of the wagon and she'd be dumping the seed into a hopper ... yeah, I guess that's what you'd call it ... as it spread. She didn't do a lot outside. My dad did, and I don't remember having a ton of outside chores. My brothers and sisters did, but I was a real tagalong, and so I helped with baling very minimally in the summer. Worked in the garden with my mom, but I was kind of a spoiled rotten child, I guess.

Speaker 1:

You got to stay inside a lot?

Kathy Van Maanen:

I don't remember having hardcore chores that I had to go do every day.

Speaker 1:

Even indoor stuff, like what your mom did?

Kathy Van Maanen:

With my mom, yeah. We dusted on Saturday and things like that. By the time I was in middle school, high school age, my brother had graduated from Iowa State in agriculture. He was back in partnership with my dad, so it was the two of them outside. They could do everything

Speaker 1:

They were grown up, could step a lot farther?

Kathy Van Maanen:

Yeah, so I didn't have to take on those chores that my brothers and sisters probably did as kids, because there were two of them outside doing the work then.

Speaker 1:

You didn't have to pick weeds or anything?

Kathy Van Maanen:

It was getting more efficient all the time. When you consider my dad started farming in 1947, he had horses, and he didn't have his first tractor. He bought his first tractor that he paid for himself in 1954. By the time I rolled around to graduating from high school in 1978, everything was thoroughly modern for the times.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. That's something I've really learned.

Kathy Van Maanen:

It was a very different setting for me, versus my oldest brothers.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, like up through the '60 and '70s. All that tech just skyrocketed, yeah.

Kathy Van Maanen:

All of it changed.

Speaker 1:

That'd be cool, to hear from your older siblings about that transition.

Kathy Van Maanen:

They grew up very differently than I did, and they would say it.

Speaker 1:

Oldest and youngest child.

Kathy Van Maanen:

There's 13 years between us.

Speaker 1:

It's two completely different upbringings.

Kathy Van Maanen:

It is. He still tells me that.

Speaker 1:

Like you said, your parents were tired at that point.

Kathy Van Maanen:

Yep.

Speaker 1:

We're just segueing into the next question with this conversation. What kind of farm machinery or technology was used?

Kathy Van Maanen:

Like I said, my dad had his first tractor in 1954, and then everything just kept going from there. I do remember his old binder machine. It was called a binder, and that was a precursor to baling, really. I saw not all of that equipment used, but I saw it around the farm as things were replaced. When my brother graduated from college and came back ... and this would've been 1970 ... they built Harvestore silos, which were cutting-edge technology for the time for storing grain, storing hay, and feeding it out to the cattle. It made all their chores much simpler.

Speaker 1:

I bet it did.

Kathy Van Maanen:

It did away with a lot of the baling. You were just chopping hay and throwing it in the Harvestore, and it was an automatic feeding system. The biggest thing ... and it's not necessarily machinery or technology ... but we had a hilly farm, and my dad contoured those hills. That was a lot of work, and I did help with that. I remember being out there, because contouring, he was planting around the hills versus up and down, so erosion control. He got a better yield out of the crop doing it that way.

A lot of farmers didn't understand what he was doing. They thought he was crazy, spending all that time. You had to survey and to lay out those contours, how your tractor was going to go around the hill, but it saved his land and it gave him a better crop yield.

Speaker 1:

Remind me. Contour, it's like a step function, or I'm thinking of something else?

Kathy Van Maanen:

No, you're thinking of ... and I can't think of the word. Contouring is simply planting around the hill so your rows go around the hill, versus going up and down. You don't have to re-landscape anything. You're using the hill to its advantage.

Speaker 1:

I think I know what you're talking about. I just had a picture of it.

Kathy Van Maanen:

You're literally just driving around the hill in a circle.

Speaker 1:

It's almost like spiraling down?

Kathy Van Maanen:

Yep, yep.

Speaker 1:

Okay. I haven't heard of that before. That's interesting. Are there any members of your family still farming?

Kathy Van Maanen:

My oldest brother still lives on the family farm. He inherited that. He expanded it to 420 acres, but in the '80s during the farm crisis of Iowa, he pretty well survived that, but then around 1990, investments that he had made, land that he had bought, caught up with him financially. He went to farming part-time, rented out some of his ground, worked for Monsanto, and then later on worked for a soil testing company. He was still definitely involved in agriculture, and still owned the land. My other siblings and I had inherited some of the land from my parents, and just in the last five years we have sold that.

Speaker 1:

All of it?

Kathy Van Maanen:

All of it.

Speaker 1:

Wow.

Kathy Van Maanen:

My brother owns his acreage and our homeplace acreage, but he is no longer actively farming. He had two daughters. Neither of his sons-in-law wanted to farm, so that was the end of our family farm really.

Speaker 1:

Those sons, they never helped out when they were younger, when he still had more control over that land? He was actually still farming it before the '80s?

Kathy Van Maanen:

Oh, yes. Yeah.

Speaker 1:

His kids were working?

Kathy Van Maanen:

Grew up there, and my brother farmed up until the '80s, '90s. He is 75, 76.

Speaker 1:

He's still working?

Kathy Van Maanen:

No. He worked parts of the land, kept some back for himself just until the last couple of years, and now he's really done and it has been sold.

Speaker 1:

It's all over?

Kathy Van Maanen:

It's well over a hundred-year farm. It was probably 150 years in the family.

Speaker 1:

It's two generations, basically. That's still a pretty long time.

Kathy Van Maanen:

Yeah, because it was considered a century farm because he had purchased the land from a cousin. It had stayed in that family name, so it was considered a century farm, but I don't remember when that actually happened.

Speaker 1:

He bought it after World War II was over, correct? If I'm remembering right.

Kathy Van Maanen:

Yep.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, '40s, '50s, and you don't know how long that cousin had had it previously?

Kathy Van Maanen:

I don't. I don't have any idea.

Speaker 1:

Gosh, it could go either way. It could be all the way back to 1850s and '60s, like some people are telling me about.

Kathy Van Maanen:

Oh, yeah, some definitely do. The thing is, farming changed so drastically in the '90s and early 2000s. My dad raised five kids on 360 acres. We were all college-educated, that he paid for. My brother put his kids through school on that 420 acres. You could not do that today. It takes thousands of acres to make it work.

Speaker 1:

To make a profit at all.

Kathy Van Maanen:

Yeah, so it's very different, but it was a very good life.

Speaker 1:

It's so much more industrialized. Even just driving by, you can tell that.

Kathy Van Maanen:

Government programs changed farming too. It was done with the best of intentions, but I don't know that that was a good thing, when the government started subsidizing farmers as much as they did.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. All part of the process.

Kathy Van Maanen:

Yes.

Speaker 1:

What the process is, I don't know. I'm sure we'll find out eventually. Yeah, that's all of the questions that we have. Thank you for taking the time to meet. We appreciate it.