

Heather:

Okay, that went easy. Okay. So, hello, I am Heather Libby with the Knoxville Public Library, and here today with...

Nancy:

Nancy Johansen.

Heather:

And-

Bob:

Bob Loynachan.

Heather:

All right, well I guess, so I already... You've told me your names. To begin, if you are able to both tell me, actually your relationship, so that might help listeners understand why we're interviewing two people at once, where you currently live, and what your memories that you're sharing with us today, if they're not from Knoxville, where they're from.

Nancy:

I live here in the country, 10 miles from Knoxville, and I live on the farm that I was raised on, that Bob and I were both raised on.

Heather:

And where was that? Oh wait, no, that was here. Sorry. Here in...

Bob:

I'm Bob Loynachan, Nancy's my sister. I live in Pella, Iowa now, but I farmed the land around the farm that I grew up on.

Heather:

Okay. All right. So are you able to tell me how your family came to live on a farm in Iowa?

Bob:

My great-great-grandfather came from Scotland to Ohio, and then his son, who was my great-grandfather, came to Knoxville, out by Harvey, Iowa, and bought land in 1850s. His brother came with him, and I have a farm today that was bought by my ancestors in 1852.

Heather:

Wow, okay. That's a long history.

Nancy:

Yep.

Heather:

That's great. And so you both grew up on the farm.

Nancy:

Yep.

Heather:

Did you have other siblings?

Nancy:

We did. We had a brother that... Bob and I are like one family, we're just two years apart. And then five years we had, older, was my brother David, and then about 18 months older than David was Barb. They were kind of like a family of their own, or a family of us.

Heather:

Okay. So that leads us into our next question, if you have a favorite story about growing up on the farm. I'm curious to know if you have the same story, different stories.

Bob:

I have a lot of stories.

Heather:

Yes. Let's hear.

Bob:

My favorite story, growing up on the farm, probably happened in 1958 when my sister... I guess '57 she graduated from high school, because David graduated in '58.

Nancy:

'58, yes.

Bob:

She had a job working at the Oscaloosa Hospital and she'd spent many hours cleaning up a 1949 Plymouth to drive back and forth. It was a second car. And we also used that car on the farm. And one of the things we had, we milked cows, and we'd separate the cream from the milk, and then we'd feed the milk to the hogs. And we had hogs about, it was a mile away from the house, had to go down the road and down the lane. And so my brother and I were supposed to go slop the hogs, they called it, and we put two five-gallon cans in the slop in the back of that Plymouth that my sister had spent many hours cleaning up. And we were going down the lane and I'm five years, four years, younger than my brother. And he said, "I'm going to show you how to slide a corner in the alfalfa field."

And so he took off, and I suppose we were going about 40 mile an hour, and we came through the corner into this nice alfalfa field and he cranked, and he slid that car sideways and we heard clunk, clunk. And all of a sudden, the '49 Plymouth had a well. The doors didn't open, you stepped down in it about six inches. The slop came up underneath the seat, filled up the side. And I'm yelling, "Flood". We

opened the doors and the slop kind of runs out. We go on down the hill and feed the hogs, and go back to the house, and shut the car, and never say a word. The next morning, my sister gets up to go to work early. All of a sudden we hear, "Mom!" So that's one of my favorite stories.

Nancy:

We have to explain that the slop buckets were always in the basement. And then if we had leftover food or anything, peelings or anything like that, that went in the slop bucket. Because the hogs would eat anything, and it wasn't bad for them to eat that, it's leftover food and stuff. And so it was not the greatest thing to have in the bottom of your car.

Bob:

I think you should tell the doll story.

Heather:

Well, I was going to say, real quick, who had to clean that up?

Bob:

Well, I didn't.

Nancy:

Maybe David.

Bob:

I think he kind of, maybe a little bit, but I don't know how it got cleaned up.

Nancy:

She did it, I think. Barb probably did it, our sister probably did it. Yeah.

Bob:

But that was, yeah, I learned how to slide corners though.

Heather:

Is that a useful skill on the farm?

Bob:

Absolutely.

Heather:

Okay.

Nancy:

I will tell the one story. Our cousins lived right across the road from us, and our grandparents lived in another house over right across the same farm. And so it was kind of a close neighborhood. And there

were two boys that were cousins. And the one, the youngest boy, is almost Bob's age. He was in a different class, but you're very close to the same age. And so they played together all the time. And that's all I had to play with, was the two boys. We played football together, and things like that. They'd give me 20 yards first, and then of course it was a short game. But anyway, I had my doll outside, and it was a big doll. It was, I don't know, three feet tall or something. And I was playing with it. And I think Tom was in the tree, is that correct? Bob was in the tree. My brother was in the tree, and my cousin was down on the ground.

Bob:

You left out, we planned this really great thing. We planned this.

Nancy:

They wanted to put the doll up in the tree. They really didn't mean to hurt the doll. They really didn't. So Bob got the doll, and then he was going to throw it up to Tom, and Tom reached down and pulled. And Bob still had a hold of it.

Bob:

No, no. You didn't let go of the doll. The head came off in your hand.

Nancy:

The doll's head came off.

Bob:

And he threw the body. I told him to go home.

Nancy:

That was another, "Mom!"

Heather:

Uh-huh. For sure.

Bob:

That was worse than that.

Nancy:

That's enough stories, I think.

Heather:

Did she make a recovery?

Nancy:

No.

Bob:

When you turned 50-

Nancy:

Thank you. When I turned 50, he got me a new doll. And I still have it.

Heather:

Okay.

Nancy:

Yeah.

Heather:

Well, that's great. Thank you. Okay, well that's great. Can you tell us a little bit about what your family grew? Did you grow crops?

Bob:

We did. We grew mostly corn, hay, and oats. We didn't sell corn, we fed it. And the oats were fed also. And the hay. We fed about everything we raised, and we had quite a few animals.

Heather:

Okay. I don't recall if you told us at the beginning, how large of an operation was this?

Bob:

It had 200 acres.

Heather:

200 acres. Okay.

And was it just your family who farmed?

Bob:

Yeah.

Heather:

Yeah. Okay. And animals. You've mentioned a little bit about that.

Nancy:

We had beef cattle, dairy cattle. When we were children.

Heather:

Right.

Nancy:

Beef cattle, dairy cattle, chickens, and sheep, hogs.

Bob:

And hogs.

Heather:

Do you remember how many of each, in the neighborhood or-

Bob:

Yeah, we'd farrow twice a year, and raised 300 hogs, fat hogs, a year. We had 14 dairy cows we had to milk by hand.

Nancy:

At the most. Sometimes-

Bob:

And their calves and went into the feedlot. And then we had a couple, about four or five other cows, that have calves. So we fed out about 10 pack cattle a year. Had 30 sheep, and every year we'd get 300 chickens.

Nancy:

Baby chickens.

Bob:

And baby chickens. And they weren't sexed. And then the ones that were pullets went into the chicken house, and the roosters went into our stomachs.

Nancy:

After a few other things happened to them.

Heather:

Well, yeah.

Bob:

Well, in the summertime about this... Well earlier than this, we had to catch all the roosters and mom would cut them, fix them, put them in the freezer.

Nancy:

Yep.

Heather:

Uh-huh.

Nancy:

Yes. That was one of the chores that I got to do. I didn't get to drive tractors very much, or anything, but the guys really did the work on the farm. But I tell the story of when we butchered chickens, we would, I don't know, kill 10 of them, probably, or something.

Bob:

Or more than that.

Nancy:

I thought it was 20 at some time, but cut their heads off, and then you have to -

Bob:

Well, you had boiling water.

Nancy:

Boiling water to dip them in, so then you could pull the feathers out easier.

Bob:

And get the feathers out.

Nancy:

And then you had a fire you'd put them over to get all the pin feathers off of them. And then we would take them to the... We had the outside and the picnic table, and I would just cut the wings off, and the legs and the thighs. And then I'd pass it to mom, and she would gut that chicken, and cut it all up, and I was still cutting the next one. And she'd do it much faster than I could just cut the wings and the legs off of it. But we'd do about 20 or so at a time.

Heather:

At a time.

Nancy:

And they would go in the freezer.

Heather:

Okay. Okay. About how old were you when you started?

Nancy:

Probably 10.

Bob:

I started driving the tractor when I was seven.

Heather:

See, that's interesting. Yeah. I interviewed another gentleman who was in the neighborhood of five, he thought, when he started driving the tractor-

Bob:

No, I remember. It was a hot time in the summer, and had to rake hay, and there wasn't any dew or anything. So he wanted to rake hay at five o'clock in the morning. So my dad got me up at five o'clock in the morning, and then I had to follow him. Wherever he went, I had to follow. He was on a tractor and I was on a tractor, went out, and we raked hay.

Nancy:

You were like this going around.

Bob:

Well, I went over his one row, and just raked the other one into it. And then that afternoon, I drove the tractor, pulled the hay into the barn. So I was on the tractor from about five o'clock, 5:30, 6 o'clock in the morning, till about five o'clock at night.

Heather:

Ooh, ouch. Sounds like a sunburn to me.

Bob:

Well.

Heather:

All right, well that actually leads into the question, when you were speaking about butchering the chickens, about whether or not you raised any of your own food, all of your own food?

Nancy:

Raised most of our food. Butchering. You can tell that story. When we were kids, not-

Bob:

Well, that goes farther back than that. My dad and my uncle built a butcher house to butcher. And during the depression, they butchered hogs for everybody. They had two rooms in this building. It had a big scalding tank for a hog with rails on it. And so whenever we ate, we'd butcher a cow every year and we'd butcher hogs when we needed to. And the only thing I think we really bought at the grocery store was flour and sugar and salt.

Nancy:

We had our own milk. We got butter in exchange for the cream that we sold. And they would leave butter for us. We didn't even have to buy butter.

Bob:

Well, they deducted it from our check.

Nancy:

It was part of our pay, yes. But I mean, we didn't go to the grocery store and get that. Yeah.

Bob:

But we never really went to the grocery store too often.

Nancy:

And we had a big garden.

Bob:

Coffee. We had to buy coffee.

Nancy:

Yeah.

Bob:

Mom had have coffee.

Heather:

Waking up at five. Did you get coffee when you were up at five at seven?

Bob:

No.

Heather:

No. So Nancy, you mentioned that you froze chickens, so you had a freezer. Did you do much canning, or anything like that too?

Nancy:

A lot of canning. Tomatoes. A lot of tomatoes. I'm sorry to this day, but I can't can tomatoes. The smell of canning tomatoes is not... Grapes are good. We used to have grapes, and we still have grapes, which produce not as well as it used to, but I would can grape juice even now, if we had enough. And then we would just have that all winter long. You know?

Heather:

Right.

Nancy:

But we canned a lot of things. We froze a lot of things, because we did have a big freezer. And we would freeze the vegetables and things, but canned a lot of tomatoes, and grape juice, and other things I'm sure mom did earlier, that I don't remember.

Heather:

Right.

Nancy:

I was the youngest.

Bob:

Spoiled.

Heather:

I've got stories about the youngest. Yep. So what kind of work did you do on the farm? I know we've got into that a little bit, but you said there was kind of a division of labor based on age, gender. How did that work?

Bob:

Mostly it was the females of the family who did the house and the chickens.

Nancy:

That's right.

Bob:

And we did everything else. I mean, out on the farm, as far as Saturday was clean the barn day.

Nancy:

Or the chicken house.

Bob:

And the chicken house, mostly. And then when the springtime came, we'd get ready to plow. I did a lot of plowing when I was a kid, a ball tractor.

Nancy:

I did get to do one thing. When we had a hay crew that we would... You would put up hay every afternoon in the summer, because there were how many families? Four or five.

Bob:

It was more than that.

Nancy:

So somebody's hay was ready to go all the time. But when it was at our house, my dad did let me, what we call, pull up the hay. We had a great big pulley that went through the barn, and then came down. And it was square bales, the small square bales on the hay rack, and they put these big forks on it, and then they'd yell at me to pull it up, and it would go through the barn, and it was tied to the little Ford tractor.

Bob:

Yeah. You were on the other side of the barn from the hay.

Nancy:

Right. Right. Hay was over here. And so I'd pull up, and then they'd yell at for me to stop, and you hit the brakes. And then that's when they pulled the rope over on this side, and that would drop those bales where they wanted them in there. So I did get to do that. That was the one thing I got to, as far as driving tractors.

Heather:

How did chores work around school? I mean, were you doing chores before or after school?

Bob:

Not so much before school. Sometimes they had to get up and do that, but mostly every night after school.

Nancy:

Yeah, and I think it was mom that said, "Their work is to get ready for school."

Bob:

The one thing we learned early on was, that you never wanted to do anything extra. Because if you did, it became your job. My dad would say, "Can you help me out tonight and go feed those sows?" And sure. Next night it'd be, "You got those sows fed yet?" So we were very careful about that.

Heather:

But could you hardly even say, could you say no? I mean to the first request?

Nancy:

Depends on the day, maybe.

Heather:

How it was asked.

Bob:

No was not a good word.

Nancy:

Yeah.

Heather:

Yeah, that's tricky. You mentioned some of the tractors, but can you say anything more about the kind of technology, or farm equipment that was used?

Bob:

We had-

Heather:

Maybe how it changed.

Bob:

Right. We had new tractors, and we had the equipment. Dad got a picker in '40... It was during the war, and so it was early forties. He bought his first tractor in about '41 or '42, and he got a picker, corn picker, to go with it. And one of the deals for him to have that was, he had to pick corn for everybody. And so he wore that out. And then he got a John Deere two-row picker. That was just one row. And he wore that out, and he got another corn picker. And then we bought a combine.

Nancy:

But that was much later. When we were kids, it was always dad opening fields for people because he had a mounted picker.

Bob:

Yeah. He's go around the... Fit on John Deere 226 first, and the 227 second.

Nancy:

Yep.

Bob:

I could tell you another story about that, I guess.

Heather:

Yeah, let's hear it.

Bob:

I asked my uncle one time how he could go out with horses, and go out and plow a field with a horse, and then disk it with a horse, and have to disk it again, and then harrow it with a horse, and then go out with a planter and put wires across the field and check it, so you'd have rows going every which way, and then wait until it got cold, and go out and pick it by hand. And he said, "You know, it never bothered me until I saw a corn picker."

Heather:

That's a good story. Did he switch?

Bob:

Oh, yeah.

Nancy:

Yeah, yeah.

Bob:

Oh, yeah.

Heather:

Mm-hmm. And Bob, did you say that you're still farming today?

Bob:

Yes.

Heather:

So how has that changed?

Bob:

How's farming changed?

Heather:

I know that's a big question, right? Or maybe even just-

Bob:

Well, if I go to a farm show, there's nothing there I want. It's all based on large fields, and large farms. And the small farm, it's going away. I got 400 acres, and I'm a small farm. And so you look at, what was it? My son, Todd... I do a lot of hay. And I've been having trouble with the tractor and the baler. And he said, "Why don't you just go buy a new one?" And so we went to the state fair this year, and he said, "Well, it'll only cost you 150,000". And I said, "Well, I don't think...." So we go over and look. The tractor was 170,000, and the baler was 90.

Heather:

Oh, my.

Bob:

And so, you can't-

Nancy:

And that was a smaller tractor.

Bob:

Yeah. You can't afford that today with a small farm. I mean, it's all big time.

Heather:

Right.

Bob:

So the small farms are going to-

Nancy:

He's a very successful farmer, though. He is.

Heather:

Are there very many other small farms around you, or are you surrounded by the -

Bob:

Well, a lot of people have... Yeah. Yeah. I don't understand how they sell the equipment.

Nancy:

But they do.

Bob:

Yeah. But they do.

Nancy:

But we have large farms around us, too.

Bob:

Oh, yeah. The fences are all gone. The neighbor's cattle got out the other day, and they ran four places and they ended up putting them in my pasture at night. I rent my pasture now, and they put cows in there, because there's no fences any place. And they ran through, about... They had probably about 800 acres of corn and beans they ran through.

Heather:

Oh my.

Bob:

And they were trying to find them, and the guy that has them, he's older, too. I talked to him, and he said, "I think I'm done with livestock."

Nancy:

That's what we said. We were done with livestock. Dad, you took care of him for 13, 14 years, I don't know. And then when we moved back here, Dennis took care of him for 13 years or so, and Bob came to us once and said, "You know, we haven't had any major accidents with the cattle." Which can happen sometimes, with bulls and things, and cattle getting out, and he would always have the trailer and everything, to take them into the sale barn and stuff. And he said, "I think we should be done." And so we sold the cattle that came from our dad's cattle.

Bob:

Came from grandpa.

Nancy:

I mean, we didn't ever buy-

Heather:

Generations of-

Nancy:

We bought bulls, but we didn't buy any cattle, calves or anything. And then we both rent out our pasture land, too. We have a younger farmer that we rent ours out to.

Heather:

Okay. Yeah, because you mentioned that you live on the family farm now, and so that had scaled down over the years? Or when did you return?

Nancy:

Well, I moved right after high school, and then went to college, and met my husband, and then we got married, and lived all over the United States. And we came back after he was retired, 2003 we came back. We've been back 20 years now. But we rented that. Bob farmed the farm for quite a while, but he got more land, and he said it's hard for him to do that, so we got a renter to do the crops also.

Heather:

Gotcha.

Nancy:

So it's about the same as when dad was doing it, and you were doing it, about how many acres of corn we got, and how many acres of beans, I think. And hay.

Heather:

So the land still being worked, it's just-

Bob:

Well, yeah, you don't rotate crops like you used to.

Nancy:

No, it's beans, and beets, and corn.

Bob:

But that's how farming's changed.

Nancy:

Yeah.

Bob:

Then we didn't raise soybeans when we were kids.

Nancy:

No, not when we were kids.

Bob:

We needed-

Nancy:

I guess when we were teenagers, we might've had them, didn't we?

Bob:

No, it was later when he started doing beans.

Nancy:

I can't remember. He's got a better memory than I do, as far as farming years and things.

Heather:

I know this isn't one of the listed questions, but it's come up before in a couple of my conversations, but how did your family manage through the eighties farm crisis?

Bob:

Well, in the '80, I had a business also, besides farming. And I had started that in '77. And so when interest-

Nancy:

Farming with dad.

Bob:

And then my dad... My mom had passed away not too long before we came back. We were gone for about 10 years also, and he asked me to help him farm in '78. Because he was having trouble after mom had passed.

Nancy:

Yeah. Right.

Bob:

So I started helping him. It wouldn't take very long. He's got a little bit, you know, it's not a big deal. Turned into a pretty big deal. He was financially secure before the eighties happened. And I worked hard. I had a business. I sold pottery to garden centers, and to different... Ivy, I did a lot of ivy. And I had a guy I met in St. Louis, and he would sell me product at a discounted rate. And I had a truck, and I would go down every Sunday night. I would leave and go to St. Louis and get pottery, come back, sell it Tuesday through Friday for cash, and didn't use the bank. And then go back on Monday again. I did that for about two years.

Heather:

Wow.

Nancy:

You had your own semi, you had your own straight truck and a pickup and -

Bob:

Well, that was later years. I ended up with a couple semis and stuff.

Heather:

That is hard work.

Nancy:

Yeah. And his own warehouse.

Heather:

Yeah. Wow. Busy guy. So actually, I guess I was jumping ahead. How many members of your family are still farming? You are, you're renting out your family's lands. Bob, did you say that your son farms, too, or no? No. Okay.

Bob:

He wants to, but I don't know how he's going to do it. He lives in Arkansas. And the other one lives in Tennessee.

Nancy:

Never know, right?

Heather:

Right. Well, yes. You came back after a long time, right?

Nancy:

Yeah, but we didn't farm, farm, we did -

Bob:

I came back because I got a job. We were in southern Illinois, and the company I worked for went bankrupt. And I started doing stuff, and it was doing quite well, and my wife said, "Well, you need to get a job". I said, "We're doing fine". And she said, "Well, what do I tell people?" I said, "I don't care". But anyway, I got a job running the dime store in Pella, and that's why I live in Pella. They were supposed to... I was going to buy it, but it didn't work out. So I started my own business.

Heather:

There you go.

Nancy:

Yep.

Heather:

Okay. Well, is there anything that we haven't touched upon, that you were hoping to be able to speak about, or any memories?

Bob:

You don't want any more stories.

Heather:

I could listen to your stories all day, but we do close at eight. Okay. Well, I wanted to thank you both so much for being willing to share your experiences about farm life in Iowa. These are precious memories, and I'm so glad that we could record them. So thank you.

Bob:

Thank you.

Nancy:

You're welcome. Thank you.