

Speaker 1:

Okay. So we're going to start and just tell us your name and where you live.

Larry Neppl:

I'm Larry Neppl, and I'm live in Marion, Iowa.

Speaker 1:

And your birth year, if you're willing to share?

Larry Neppl:

1944.

Speaker 1:

And then if you lived on a farm that wasn't in Marion, can you talk about that a little bit?

Larry Neppl:

Yes. I grew up in Emmet County, Estherville, Iowa. And my parents farmed there for a number of years. And then after I left high school, I went to Iowa State University, studied farm operations. And my career was as a professional farm manager, so I've been involved with farms most all my life.

Speaker 1:

Awesome. How did your family come to live on a farm in Iowa?

Larry Neppl:

My family were all farmers on both sides coming from Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Ireland, yeah. And so they were all farmers. And so I guess that's how it happened. My father was in World War II. I was born while he was gone. At the day that I was born, he got on a ship headed from California to the South Pacific. He was on Saipan. And my grandparents sent a telegram that I had been born and he said it was 38 days before he got that telegram. My grandkids would probably say, "Well, why didn't they email them or send them a text?" But that's what we had in those days.

Speaker 1:

Yep, yep. What's your favorite story about growing up on the farm?

Larry Neppl:

I don't know what my one favorite story. I guess just in general it was a great way of life. We all worked together as a family. My dad shared machinery and work with brothers and his father-in-law. We used to do a lot of family picnics. We raised livestock. That was always good. It's just so many things about growing up on a farm that I remember.

Speaker 1:

What kind of crops did your family grow?

Larry Neppl:

My dad was a diversified farmer. He had a dairy herd, he had hogs, in the beginning, sheep, chickens. So we raised corn, oats, hay mainly. And then along about in the forties, I think, soybeans came into being grown on Iowa farms, and so we raised those also.

Speaker 1:

You touched on it a little bit, but what kind of animals did your family raise?

Larry Neppi:

Well, as I said, my dad had a dairy herd. He came back and started farming in 1946 on a half section farm. My grandfather had rented it for him knowing that he was going to get out of the service and not too far from his dad. Milk cows, he had hogs, we had chickens, we had sheep. That's similar to what a lot of farm families had back then. We were sort of self-sufficient.

Speaker 1:

Did you raise any of your own food?

Larry Neppi:

Oh, lots of it. Mom always had a huge garden, as families did. And she planted a huge garden, so my aunts would come out during the summer when the peas were ready and got peas and beans and always raised a lot of sweet corn. So they came out to get sweet corn and tomatoes. As I said, we had chickens, and so we had plenty of eggs. We had milk from the cows, and that was before the time of pasteurization. And of course, meat. We didn't actually slaughter it on the farm, we had it done at a local butcher shop. But I remember going into town because we didn't have family freezers back then, but we rented a freezer at the locker. So we'd always take our heavy coat when we went into the locker to get meat when we were in town to bring it home.

Speaker 1:

Who did what kind of work on the farm?

Larry Neppi:

Well, we all pretty much did it. I grew up one of the oldest of seven boys, so dad had a good labor supply. And my uncles who didn't have boys borrowed us. So we all pitched in. We were at a young age, we're doing chores, making sure the livestock was all fed and cared for and cleaning out. I remember one of the things in the spring, one of the jobs they didn't care for that much was with a pitchfork cleaning all the manure out of where the calves had been all winter. Another thing we did is walk soybeans, which was not necessarily a favorite chore of mine. It was in the summertime, it was hot. We had to pull or hoe these weeds out of the beans because we didn't have something called Roundup to spray on them to kill them then.

But we all pitched in, we all worked, even my mother. She grew up working with her dad. Her dad was sort of an entrepreneur. He had the thrashing machine for all the community. And so she was helping him running the steam engine, and later the tractor that ran the thrashing machine. He had the first baler, and so he baled for everybody. He had the corn sheller, so he shelled corn for everybody. He kept diaries. The insurance companies in those days used to give a book that was sort of a loose-leaf book, and it had two days on a page. Well, he kept all of his records in there, like I shelled corn for Jess Rosberg today and how many bushels. And then when Jess paid him, he wrote that down that he got

paid, and that was his sort of record keeping, and so that's very interesting, and about the weather that day.

Mom told how she drove the tractor on the baler. He also bought a mounted corn picker, so most of the farmers had a pull type that he would go in and open up the fields and the lands so that they could come in and pick. He had a loader, so he could scoop a lot of snow for the people. He also had a truck, so he did a lot of trucking, livestock, grain, fertilizer, lumber, you name it. When the telephones came in, my grandmother was the operator and on their porch, and I remember the switchboard. And so when people would call up, she would answer, "Who do you want to talk to?" Plug into them.

And my grandpa used to do the repairs and he'd write in his book, "I went out to so-and-so's today and fixed the telephone line," how many hours that was. Then after the telephones became where you didn't have to have the big phone on the wall and you had dial phones. He'd taken out all those old phones that became collector's items. We didn't know that. Us kids took them all apart to get the magnets out to play with them. And so mom worked hard too. I mean, she was right there and she could help milk the cows, mowed hay. I remember one time we had a little cocker spaniel dog and got in the way of the mower and she cut the one back leg off, but the vet fixed it up and we still had the dog. And of course she did a lot of the gardening, dad helped. Us boys learned how to wash dishes and do things like that because she helped outside a lot. So everybody pitched in, we shared work with the neighbors to help each other. And so it was a good time in my life.

Speaker 1:

What kind of farm machinery and technology was used?

Larry Neppi:

Well, there certainly wasn't the technology today. I went up to the 40-acre farm we have in up in Emmetsburg, where my wife grew up, and rode in the combine. And the farm operator didn't have to steer the combine. It's got RTK, which is similar to GPS, take you down through the field. Got a monitor sitting in there that's telling you what the moisture of the beans were when you're harvesting them, what the yield is. Now we're going over a hill, the yield is only 45 bushels an acre. Now we're down in the low ground, it's 85 bushels an acre. I mean, it's just the things they have in the machinery today, we didn't have that. We had to steer it. There really wasn't a lot of technology, but of course we had to have tractors.

Dad and one of his brothers shared the corn planter and the corn picker. Dad and his other brother shared a combine together, all three of them, because they all three milked cows. They had the hay baler together. And that's one of my things I remember most. It seems like all summer long we mowed, raked, and baled hay and straw because the cows had to have that. And I was reminded yesterday I belong to the local hog chapter here, the Harley Owners Group, and we went on a ride up northeast Iowa. And when I saw those fields that had been mowed and that grass is there now and the alfalfa, I could smell that. And it brought back a lot of good memories.

Of course, we had to have manure spreaders. A lot of the work was by hand. I remember eventually dad bought what's called a grinder mixer so that he could mix the protein and the corn and so forth together to feed the cows. Hay racks, wagons. At harvest time, we had a hoist that would raise the wagon up, so that would help dump the grain out to put it up in the grain bins. And so every farmer probably had an old pickup to help haul things. And so those were the kind of machines we had back then. My time was before working with the horses, but of course dad started when he was a kid. And my grandparents all of course farmed with horses.

Speaker 1:

How many members of your family are still farming?

Larry Neppi:

Actually, none. All of us seven boys, I think all of us ended up in occupations related to farming of some kind or another. And my two uncles that were farmers, the one had just two girls, the one had a boy and a girl, but that boy didn't farm. So we really have nobody. My wife and I, as I said, now I have the 40 acres up at Emmetsburg where she grew up, so I can kind of keep my feet in that a little bit.