

Interviewer:

All right, so Marge, would you, for our little recording here, please tell us your name and the year that you were born?

Marjory Johnston:

Marjory. My maiden name was McKibbin and my married name is Johnston, and I was born in 1944.

Interviewer:

You grew up on a farm in Iowa, and where was that farm located?

Marjory Johnston:

The farm was on the Marshall and Grundy County line just south and west of Conrad.

Interviewer:

Do you still live in the country or could you tell me where you reside now?

Marjory Johnston:

We live in Conrad, in a condo in Conrad.

Interviewer:

So same area, just a little-

Marjory Johnston:

Yeah, not far.

Interviewer:

... Tiny bit more urban.

Marjory Johnston:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

So, how did your family come to live on a farm in Iowa?

Marjory Johnston:

Both my parents' family were farmers. And in fact, my dad was working for my mother's father as a farmhand just before they were married, and that was all right here in Marshall County, close by.

Interviewer:

So, basically they met at work?

Marjory Johnston:

Mm-hmm. Basically, yes.

Interviewer:

Do you have a favorite story about growing up on the farm you'd share with us?

Marjory Johnston:

That's kind of hard to pick just one thing. I remember as a child playing in the haymow, that was a big deal in the barn, and with the cats, and we always had a dog. My younger sister, Maxine and I, when we came home from school, about the first thing we did was to go down in the pasture and bring the cows up for dad to milk, and bring them to the barn. We just had a lot of fun. We played outside, climbed in the trees and all that sort of thing.

Interviewer:

You said you had the cows and that you milked them. And then did your family also grow crops or was the dairy the main business?

Marjory Johnston:

No, the cows, I think dad had four or five. And he sold the cream, but we used the milk. Mother made cottage cheese from the milk and had fresh milk. That part is not a favorite story, the separator, because that was my job as I got just a little bit older, probably all of 10, to clean all those discs of the separator.

Interviewer:

Oh, and you know if you miss some in there too.

Marjory Johnston:

Icky.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Marjory Johnston:

I was always cutting my fingers on the discs, and then the steel wool that you clean them with too was always a nasty thing. But getting back to the crops, we had corn, and soybeans, and hay of course for the animals. Dad rotated the crops as you did back then, even more so than they do today.

Interviewer:

And the three crop rotation obviously.

Marjory Johnston:

Yes, yes. Then we also had hogs. And then Maxine and I were given, with dad's permission, from a neighbor, two little lambs. Their mother did not accept them, so we bottle-fed them and raised them, and then the next thing you know we had a flock of sheep.

Interviewer:

So for animals on your farm, you had dogs and cats?

Marjory Johnston:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Dairy cows?

Marjory Johnston:

Uh-huh.

Interviewer:

The sheep?

Marjory Johnston:

Uh-huh.

Interviewer:

Hogs?

Marjory Johnston:

Angus. Angus steers.

Interviewer:

The steers. So you did beef cattle also?

Marjory Johnston:

Uh-huh.

Interviewer:

And did you just do feeding of them, or did you have cow and calf and actually raise the babies up to market? Or how'd that work?

Marjory Johnston:

I think the calves... That's a good question. I think the calves were more to keep the cows fresh of milk. Yeah, I don't think we had too many-

Interviewer:

So not like big ranchers?

Marjory Johnston:

No, no. Absolutely not.

Interviewer:

Or doing a feedlot or anything like that?

Marjory Johnston:

No, no.

Interviewer:

No chickens or ducks? I mean, I know you had chickens.

Marjory Johnston:

Oh gotcha. I forgot the chickens.

Interviewer:

There's a chicken story in here somewhere.

Marjory Johnston:

I forgot.... How could I forget? The chickens. The chickens. I disliked the chickens intensely. And Maxine again, my younger sister and I would be sent out to gather the eggs. And she had a basket. I say she had it because she went inside. I did not. I stayed outside. I guess I had the basket because I stayed outside, and she'd bring me the eggs and put them in the basket. I would not go in the chicken house. I did it once and the chicken plucked at me and fluttered its wings and I was out of there.

Interviewer:

So this one might go right in hand in hand. You were picking up the eggs. Were those that you were raising your own food on the farm-

Marjory Johnston:

Yes.

Interviewer:

... Or were you selling them? So what did you guys raise for yourselves versus what you sold?

Marjory Johnston:

We sold eggs of course. You're getting a lot of eggs because you had a lot of chickens. And the chickens we used ourselves. Sunday morning or Saturday, dad would kill a chicken. And I would help him pluck it. And so that, the chickens were definitely for our own consumption. The sheep, we sold the wool. We did butcher one sheep, had it butchered, but that was not successful. We did not... I think it was a case that mother didn't know how to prepare or cook the sheep. Lamb.

Anyway, let's see, the cattle we sold and butchered as well for own consumption. And the pigs of course the same.

Interviewer:

And you said a little bit there, mom's job was to cook the lamb. Dad had to do in the chicken, but you had to pluck it?

Marjory Johnston:

Yeah, we usually did it together. He and I did it together. We had a stainless steel bucket of boiling water that we would dunk the dead chicken in and that would get the feathers all wet. And they weren't fluttering at me, so it was okay. Then we'd pull them off. It just made them easier to pull off.

Interviewer:

So how else did you divide up the labor on the farm? As in who did what to keep your farm going? It sounds like everybody had a role to play.

Marjory Johnston:

Everybody did have a role to play. Yes. I had an older sister, six years older, and a brother three years older. And then my younger sister was two years younger than I. So I never learned how to drive the tractor, and the truck, and all that sort of thing. The only time I drove the tractor, I raked hay for dad one time. Now, whether that was enough for him, I don't know, but it was enough for me. With my older siblings, they were out in the tractor and doing... And of course my brother was out there all the time with dad. So they took care of that extra work that dad didn't, that needed help. And anytime you had corn shellers, or hay bale, hay baling crews in, I would stay in the house and help mother, and my brother and sister were out helping with the other stuff.

And then Maxine came along and she liked to be out there. So I still stayed inside and helped mother, and she drove the tractor for dad. I remember one thing, one thing just always sticks in my mind, was my grandpa, my mother's father, Grandpa Stuart. When they were baling hay, I would wake up and right out my window, grandpa would be on the tractor running the tractor back and forth to run the hay fork up in the barn for loads of hay on the hay rack. So we always had a big group of people for lunch that day for dinner.

I mowed the lawn a few times, not very often. But there again, my older brother and sister did that. And then Maxine liked to do it. And then mom liked to do it because we got a riding lawn mower, so it got her out of the house for a bit.

Interviewer:

So you had the, oldest had first choice of the chores they wanted, and then they picked the mechanical, helping dad kind of stuff?

Marjory Johnston:

Which was just fine by me because I didn't really care. I just as soon stay inside and help cook.

Interviewer:

Other than holding the egg basket and cleaning that milk separator?

Marjory Johnston:

And feeding calves, bottle feed. And that was always fun. And bottle feed, the little lambs that weren't, their mothers wouldn't take care of them. So it was always a lot of fun.

Interviewer:

So obviously you finally got the riding lawn mower, and you had the tractor, the cream separator. Do you remember any other farm machinery and technology that you guys used on the farm?

Marjory Johnston:

Dad had a combine and it was one that you drove the tractor in. It attached to the front with those-

Interviewer:

Oh, like those two row ones that went on the front?

Marjory Johnston:

It was two or four, I don't remember. It wasn't more than four, that's for sure. But it was just attached to the front of the tractor. I have a picture of him with one of his brothers. And Paul when he was about three or four, which would make it... Let's see, '41, would've made it about '44 or '45. Dad had built a cab, a wooden cab on his John Deere tractor, and had windows on it, and the windows would flip out so you could get fresh air through it and what have you. And I have a picture of dad, and his brother, and my brother standing there beside it. He was really proud of that.

Interviewer:

Yeah, that's definitely before its time.

Marjory Johnston:

Before its time, exactly. But most of the time he had the John Deere when I was really young. And then he got into Massey Ferguson because Dillman Daggett had a Massey Ferguson dealership out here. So he had Massey's. And he had a Massey, a small with a wide front tire, Massey Ferguson that... And it's the only tractor that would fit going through the cattle shed that was on the barn to clean that out. And that was the only... So the young man that still lives out there on the farm has kept that tractor so that they can do that now. They don't have any cattle anymore, but that's-

Interviewer:

They still got the tractor.

Marjory Johnston:

But they still have the tractor.

Interviewer:

It can go in there. And then you said there's a young man who still lives out there?

Marjory Johnston:

Yes.

Interviewer:

And your tractor still lives out there. Are any members of your family still farming?

Marjory Johnston:

No. I have a niece that married a farmer that lives down around Colfax, and that's the only farmer that we have in our family. And that's sad to me, very sad.

Interviewer:

Well, there's always the backyard garden.

Marjory Johnston:

Yes. Oh, mother had a huge garden. Huge. Well, it's in this picture, this whole thing. That was garden.

Interviewer:

Oh my goodness.

Marjory Johnston:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

So that's a whole separate job other than the commercial farm.

Marjory Johnston:

So that was another thing that I helped with a lot.

Interviewer:

And anybody in your family still garden?

Marjory Johnston:

I have a niece that does in South Dakota.

Interviewer:

Okay, so not the same one who farms?

Marjory Johnston:

No. No, no.

Interviewer:

But there's still a gardener going on.

Marjory Johnston:

Uh-huh. She has a big garden and lots of flowers.

Interviewer:

Wonderful. Well, Marge, do you have any other good stories you'd like to share with us today? Or bad ones?

Marjory Johnston:

Or bad ones.

Interviewer:

Any other memories?

Marjory Johnston:

Well, I just remember games that we played outside. We played croquet and we played bat and ball. It wasn't really baseball or softball, either one.

Interviewer:

So it wasn't all chores. You did get to have some-

Marjory Johnston:

No. We did a lot of fun things too. And neighbors, helping neighbors, working together. And dad had a brother that lived near Albion and it was on a grandparent's farm. And he and dad farmed a lot together. And what equipment dad didn't have, Bob had. So they did a lot of work together. But anytime anybody needed help, it was always available. Neighbors were always real good about being good friends and good people.

Interviewer:

Yeah. You said you had a big hay crew?

Marjory Johnston:

Yes. Yes, we did.

Interviewer:

Not a small job?

Marjory Johnston:

No, no one wasn't.

Interviewer:

Then when you had hay crew, did you get extra kitchen help?

Marjory Johnston:

Yes. No. Just mom and I, just mom and I. We handled it. She had a big oak pedestal table in the dining room. And we had all the leaves in it, of course, and fed them all up. The worst thing I think that happened was dad was running his elevator, putting corn in the corn crib, corn on the cob, the whole deal, running it up the elevator. And he was always very, very careful, and telling us never go near it and all that sort of thing, and be sure it's all shut off, and before you ever try to unstick something. And corn did get stuck in it now then.

And one day he had it all shut off. Everything was just like he always said he wanted it. And he grabbed a, ear of corn in there and it did one more revolution, and took the end of his middle finger off. That was probably the worst thing, and I was older by then. And he drove himself into Conrad to get that taken care of. I think that's probably the worst thing that happened.

Interviewer:

Oh my goodness. Yeah. There's not a question on here for farm safety, but that's definitely one of those stories you remember.

Marjory Johnston:

Yes, exactly.

Interviewer:

It's not a favorite one.

Marjory Johnston:

No, it certainly isn't. It's one you do remember.

Interviewer:

Absolutely. All righty, well, thank you so much Marge for sharing with us today.

Marjory Johnston:

Yes, this has been fun.

Interviewer:

And so you did bring in your farm picture, so we'll get a copy of that to attach to the file.

Marjory Johnston:

Okay. And on that picture, the only building that is still standing is the barn and the house.

Interviewer:

And the house.

Marjory Johnston:

And the house looks nothing like that. It's been added on to, and it looks beautiful.

Interviewer:

Yeah, well those probably were about the two most important buildings, weren't they?

Marjory Johnston:

Uh-huh. Exactly.

Interviewer:

What lasts. That's amazing what lasts.

Marjory Johnston:

I'm just glad it's still there because from Highway 14 on Marshall and Grundy County Line Road to the black top that goes either to Liscomb or Whitten, I don't know how many miles that is, maybe three or four, there are nine houses or farms that are not there anymore.

Interviewer:

Yeah, that's another good point of this project is how things have changed.

Marjory Johnston:

Yep. It's kind of sad.

Interviewer:

It's really amazing when you listen to some more of them how things have stayed the same too.

Marjory Johnston:

Yes, exactly. Yep. It is fun. I was glad I lived on a farm.

Interviewer:

All right.

Marjory Johnston:

Thank you.

Interviewer:

Thank you, Marge.

Marjory Johnston:

Uh-huh.