

Interviewer:

Hi, thanks for doing this interview with me. Could you please tell me your name and the year you were born?

Kate Poling:

All right, my name is Kate Poling and I was born in 1981.

Interviewer:

Where did you grow up?

Kate Poling:

I grew up on a farm that was in Marshall County, Iowa, located between the towns of Albion and Liscomb.

Interviewer:

Where do you currently live?

Kate Poling:

I currently live in rural Marshall County, not between the towns of Albion and Liscomb. I'm in the northeast corner of the county. I'm north of the unincorporated village of Green Mountain, so I'm actually closest to the town of Beaman in Grundy County or the town of Gladbrook in Tama County in the Tri-County area is my address now.

Interviewer:

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

Kate Poling:

Well, my family lived on the farm because dad lived on the farm and grandpa lived on the farm. So my father took over the farming operation from my grandfather and my grandfather had purchased that farm in the early... Oh gosh, it would've been the 20s or 30s because I think he was born in 1913. And he actually bought the farm, that neighbored the farm that he grew up on. So we had a whole little Poling family farm conclave there of the home place where grandpa had grown up, and then grandpa's farm, and then grandpa's brother's farm. And by the time we were there, my dad was farming all the farms, but he wasn't the owner of them all. And our family showed up there from somewhere farther east, at some point. We don't know when.

Interviewer:

What is your favorite story about growing up on the farm?

Kate Poling:

Oh golly. We did a lot of probably pretty ordinary things when I was a kid on the farm. So my favorite story would probably involve me and my brother and gosh, we got into all sorts of fun stuff. One summer we decided we were going to build a tree house, but we didn't really have any good trees to build a tree house. So we took some old fence posts that I think were sawed up telephone poles that we

found in a pile behind one of the buildings. And we dug holes to put those in and we set those. And this was out behind all the regular farm buildings, so nobody was seeing what we were doing or paying any attention. So we set those in the ground and we built this big platform and we didn't make a way to get up onto the platform.

So if my brother stood on my back and then climbed up the pole, then he could get up on it and then he could help pull me up onto it. And this kept us busy for a long time building this thing. And then we'd get up there and then my brother was five years older than me and he could swing his way down, but I just had to jump and drop and hope he would catch me and he always did. But one time we did that and I came down wrong and I don't know how I did it, but I managed to land and step on a nail. And so I had this nail that went in my shoe and it came out the top of my shoe. And my brother and I were both like, "We're going to be in so much trouble."

So he helped me hobble over into the machine shed and sit down on something and then he had to go get dad and dad was somewhere doing some chores or something in the barn. And I remember just sitting in there and waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting and getting myself more upset as it went. And finally John showed up with dad and dad was like hopping mad that we'd managed to get me hurt this bad.

So they carried me into the house and I remember sitting in the kitchen in a kitchen chair and my dad got the thing we wash the dishes in, that dish pan you put in the sink. And he got that he filled up with water and he told my brother to hold my hand and then he took my shoe off and when he took the shoe off the nail pulled out as he pried the whole thing out and I'm crying and my brother's looking like he's going to throw up, holding my hand and my dad's throwing this bloody shoe wherever and he puts my foot in this pan of water and soap and he's like cleans it out and puts a bandage on it. And he's like, "Okay, well I got to go finish this. So when your mother gets home, tell her to have a look at your foot." And he leaves.

And I just remember sitting there with my brother and he was such a good brother that he is like, "Okay, we're going to put your bloody shoe and the socks and the laundry so you don't have to look at it." And he carried me over and put me on the couch, put my foot up and got the cartoons for me to watch and it was so nice. And I think that's the nicest my brother has ever been to me in my entire life. And he just sat there and stared at me and I just remember looking at each other and be like, "We're going to have to tell mom. We're going to have to tell mom." And I was like, "Will you tell mom?" And I don't even remember, but I think mom came home, she worked in town and my brother's like, "So Kate hurt her foot, but it's okay. And it's all cleaned up and dad's out combining corn or whatever it is he was having to get done. And I just remember my mom was like, "What?"

But it turns out it was okay because I'd just been at the doctor and got my tetanus shot the day before, so they didn't figure I needed to go back to the doctor. But that story I think sums up my whole family dynamic of growing up on the farm. Like I say, it was the nicest my brother ever was to me in my whole life. And I don't think we got in trouble at all, which was good because my mom is like, "She fell off of a what?" And then she went back and saw this thing we built and she didn't even know we'd built it and I think my dad might've been in more trouble over that than we were. Yeah, that's growing up on the farm.

Interviewer:

So the nail went all the way through your foot?

Kate Poling:

All the way through my foot, was sticking out the top. I still got the scar on it.

Interviewer:

Oh well that's wonderful.

Kate Poling:

And I remember I was really sad. They were like little gray shoes with pink edging and they had the two Velcro closures. I was really excited to wear those shoes and they were ruined. And I was probably more upset over ruining my shoes than anything. But yeah, I still remember that was the nicest my brother ever was to me.

Interviewer:

What kind of crops did your family grow on your farm?

Kate Poling:

We did corn and soybeans and we had a hayfield and we also did oats and that's what we grew to sell and then we had a big garden. We didn't do farmer's market or anything, it was just all food for us. So the standard fare there, nothing too unusual.

Interviewer:

What kind of animals did your family raise?

Kate Poling:

We did a little bit of everything. We had a beef cattle herd and we did those mostly as cow and calf. So it was like pasture with the mama cows and the baby cows rather than really having stuff lauded] up. And we had pigs for a while and I did not like pigs. And we had horses and ponies and we didn't really raise those or sell them. I think we dad did the minimum on that so he could take them off on the taxes or something like that. But mostly they were just for us to enjoy. And we had dogs and cats and we tried to do rabbits.

My father thought we would do rabbits for Four-H and have meat rabbits. And then when my brother went to pick out rabbits, we got these adorable little Dutch-Belted bunnies and it never did turn into a meat rabbit production. We had chickens. We had sheep. My brother and I did sheep for Four-H supposedly, but I don't think we ever really showed them or anything. They just were the sheep. I did not like them either and I think that's about it.

We probably had some weird things come by once in a while that didn't stay. I know we looked at getting emus once and that got nixed. We had some ducks for a little bit that a neighbor gave us, but they magically disappeared. So I don't know that those were really animals we were raising on the farm.

Interviewer:

So it sounds like you raised your own food for the most part.

Kate Poling:

Yeah, the garden was a lot of our own food and if we had a steer or a hog get butchered, most of that, it went to the sale barn. Where it went after that, we don't know. But if dad would occasionally have

something butchered and then we'd split the meat between us and my aunts and uncles and grandparents, if we had one that was going that way. And we did have eggs from our chickens when we had chickens. And we did when I was really little, raise meat bird chickens. And again, we'd have a few of those that we'd eat, but mostly they were to be sold. So yeah, we probably bought most of our food in the grocery store. But if there was something that we could produce on the farm, we tried to.

Interviewer:

Who did what kind of work on the farm?

Kate Poling:

My father did most of the work on the farm. He had quit his job in town and was to be a full-time farmer. And then I was not in school yet, so he was supposed to also be a full-time child care. So that might explain things like why I managed to have a nail all the way through my foot. My mom worked in town full time and then she did a lot of the garden work and canning. I can remember coming in and she was doing crabapple jelly. And I remember coming into the kitchen and seeing she had all this crabapple bits hung up in a dish towel from a cupboard straining to get the juice out of it. And I remember thinking it looked like it was dripping blood and it was all gruesome. And I wouldn't go in the kitchen because I thought she had a severed head in a bag hanging in the kitchen or something.

So what does that tell you? That that wouldn't have been an unusual thing in our house, that she was doing some sort of butchering. So she did a lot of around the house stuff. She didn't do a lot of the mechanical, driving tractors. She would help with the livestock.

My dad did a lot of the heavy dangerous work with the livestock. And then my brother and I did a lot of help for whatever kind of help we were. I remember having to feed the sheep and throw hay to the horses, pick up chickens' guck. I hated cleaning the chicken house. We did that once a year and that was a whole family deal. And my dad's job for that would be drive the tractor and the other three of us, me, my brother and my mom would be in there shoveling chicken poop with face masks on and goggles and all this stuff.

So yeah, I was little enough, I didn't have a whole lot of farm work to do, but my brother probably started driving the tractor when he was like eight or nine. And my ability to do farm work as a small child was not that helpful. Dad does the outside stuff, mom does the inside stuff, and I remember mom doing a lot with the livestock. She was pretty good and real patient with livestock husbandry, more than my dad was.

Interviewer:

What kind of farm machinery or technology was used.

Kate Poling:

We weren't very high tech. We had a lot of stuff that my dad had bought from his dad. So we did at one point in time get a tractor with a cab, which was really exciting because when we had one that didn't have a cab and dad was supposed to be doing farm work and watching me, I would have to sit on the back of the seat between the seat back and him so that he could keep track of me on a tractor with no seatbelt out in a field.

I'm like, "Oh my gosh, this is so unsafe." But then once we got a tractor that had a cab and a combine that had a cab, I could get in there and then I could run around in the cab and not have to be stuck in the seat between him and the seat back. We actually had one grain bin and that had a grain dryer. So I

remember a lot getting locked in the truck cab while he was augering corn or working on the bin because that's a dangerous thing. You don't want to have kids around and locking them in the truck is a good way to watch your children. We did have a mouse or something, get in there and eat the wiring once. I remember our whole farm smelled like caramel corn because the bin got too warm and the corn when it gets too hot, smells like caramel corn and burnt popcorn.

The absolute coolest piece of technology we had was a litter carrier in the bottom of our barn. It used to be a dairy barn when my dad was younger and it had this big rail that went down the aisle and out through the lot and down to where the manure spreader was to be parked. So you could lower this carrier down and you would muck into it. And then you would run the chain and crank it back up, and then you could knock the lever loose and it'd run with gravity all the way down this track that was elevated. Hit the end of it, dump and tip down the manure. So my brother and I would get in that and fling each other down this roller coaster rail and hit the end and tip and fall into the manure pile. And it was so much fun. So that was by far the coolest piece of technology.

And we had a hay elevator and a hay chute, so you could put the bales on at the bottom and the elevator would run the bale up to the top on a conveyor belt and then it would dump into the chute, which is like a giant wooden slide. So we would get at the top of that and go down the giant wooden slide and land into the hay pile. And we got in a whole lot of trouble when we decided we'd see if we could ride the hay elevator up to the top, sitting on a bale like it's a roller coaster. So yeah, we weren't allowed to do that anymore, but that's about all the cool farm technology I can remember.

Interviewer:

Are any of your family members still farming?

Kate Poling:

Nominally. So my brother and I both still live in the country, but we're not professional farmers. I have some chickens that I sell eggs from. And at one point in time I did do a really big market garden and sold fruits and vegetables at the farmer's market and to a couple of restaurants. But now that I have a full-time job, I don't do that anymore. And my brother works full-time as well, but he still has some farmland. So he doesn't really do any livestock or anything to sell, but he still owns farm ground and has it all set up in CRP and as wildlife management area. That's us.

Interviewer:

Thank you for doing the interview.

Kate Poling:

Well thank you very much. It was fun to reminisce.

Interviewer:

Is that the last one?

Kate Poling:

That's the-