

Speaker 1:

Okay. Thank you for meeting with me today. If you could just start by telling me your name, where you live, your birth year, and if you lived somewhere different when you grew up on a farm.

Vivian Carter:

Okay. My name's Vivian Carter and I live at Northridge Village, which is a senior living facility.

Speaker 1:

In Ames.

Vivian Carter:

In Ames, Iowa. Did you want to know where I-

Speaker 1:

Where you were born and where you grew up, too.

Vivian Carter:

I was born at Nashua, Iowa on a farm near there, near the Little Brown Church. That's home of the Little Brown Church. You know the song, or you've heard it, "There's a church in the valley by the Wildwood"?

Speaker 1:

I don't think so. I'll have to look into that.

Vivian Carter:

I'll have to acquaint you with that. Okay.

Speaker 1:

And what year were you born?

Vivian Carter:

In 1929.

Speaker 1:

1929.

Vivian Carter:

Depression times, for people.

Speaker 1:

That's the earliest I've had so far with these interviews.

Vivian Carter:

94 years old.

Speaker 1:

Wow. Incredible.

Vivian Carter:

Soon.

Speaker 1:

Soon. Okay. Let's get to the actual questions then. How did your family come to live on a farm in Iowa?

Vivian Carter:

Well, my father inherited it from his mother, his parents rather. And when he was married, then he and his wife moved there and raised their family there.

Speaker 1:

Okay. Can you think of how your dad's parents came to be on that farm or-

Vivian Carter:

Yes.

Speaker 1:

... any further generations than that?

Vivian Carter:

Well, they came from New York, my grandfather did. My grandmother was born in Ohio, I think it was. Anyway, he came to Iowa on the train from New York and came through Chicago at the time of the big fire that burned the city.

Speaker 1:

So 1890s?

Vivian Carter:

He lost his luggage on the-

Speaker 1:

Oh, no.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah. And doing so, because it was on the train, I suppose, when he went to the hotel or wherever they stayed. I don't know. But anyway, that was the story back then. So he came to Iowa, he and his... He wasn't married at that time, but he did find a woman there to marry and then they later... At that time, his wife-to-be lived on a farm just outside of Nashua. And I never did hear how he acquired the farm in the very beginning, or his parents acquired the farm.

Speaker 1:

But they did come upon it at some point after they left New York.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Okay. So what would you say is your favorite story about growing up on a farm? Can you think of any special little anecdotes?

Vivian Carter:

Well, there was a lot of work to do.

Speaker 1:

I bet there was.

Vivian Carter:

Especially since I came from a large family, and there was not a lot of playtime. When you got old enough to help with the work involved, you did. But my favorite times were the summer times, I think. You could play outside and-

Speaker 1:

Of course.

Vivian Carter:

...go swimming in the river and things like that you did with your brothers and sisters. There probably are a lot of stories, if I could remember them all.

Speaker 1:

Just muster them up.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Well, you're free to interrupt me if you can think of one.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah. But I do remember that we had a hired girl and a hired man. The hired girl was like a helper to my mother, and the hired man was a helper to my dad.

Speaker 1:

Did they have titles at all?

Vivian Carter:

No.

Speaker 1:

No?

Vivian Carter:

No, they were just ordinary people and they probably got paid \$5 maybe a week at the most.

Speaker 1:

I thought you were going to say a day, and I figured that sounds normal for as far back as that is, but a week.

Vivian Carter:

And they had room and board because they lived in our house, lived in a small country home. It was very small for as big a family as was raised there.

Speaker 1:

10, 11, 12 kids, right?

Vivian Carter:

10, yeah.

Speaker 1:

Wow.

Vivian Carter:

But when the children, the girls and the boys, too, got old enough to help with the work, then the hired help no longer existed.

Speaker 1:

Just wasn't necessary anymore.

Vivian Carter:

No.

Speaker 1:

But you met them?

Vivian Carter:

Oh, yeah.

Speaker 1:

You knew them.

Vivian Carter:

I remember them. Not all of them, but I remember one especially, that was very nice. She was good to the kids and helpful. After I was married, she looked after my mother, kept in touch with her when nobody else was available, so that was nice.

Speaker 1:

That's sweet.

Vivian Carter:

And the hired man, they got on their way. Sometimes the hired man ended up marrying the hired girl. That happened a couple of times.

Speaker 1:

A couple of times?

Vivian Carter:

Anyway, when we got old enough to work, our grandmother told us she'd give us a dollar when we learned to milk the cows. We had cows and pigs and lambs and what other... Chickens.

Speaker 1:

That's one of my other questions.

Vivian Carter:

Is that another question?

Speaker 1:

Yeah. What kind of animals did your family raise? You just answered that.

Vivian Carter:

Okay. Yeah.

Speaker 1:

But, a dollar.

Vivian Carter:

Anyway, when we got old enough to learn how to milk, probably 10 years old. And we were so excited because we would get a dollar. We never had any money at all. We soon learned that it was not fun to go to the barn and milk cows.

Speaker 1:

It's not worth a dollar.

Vivian Carter:

And as it turned out, I had a tonsillectomy right after that and so I was out of the barn and off of milking for a short time. And my mother says, "I need you in the house more than the other two girls." So I didn't have to go back to the barn.

Speaker 1:

Oh, no.

Vivian Carter:

I thought, wonderful.

Speaker 1:

Do you remember what you spent that first dollar on?

Vivian Carter:

Very carefully.

Speaker 1:

Did you live near town at all?

Vivian Carter:

Five miles.

Speaker 1:

Five miles.

Vivian Carter:

So we weren't able to just... But we used to go to town, it used to be a Wednesday night the stores would be open, so all the farm people would go to town, especially in the summer when it was hot. They could cool off and visit with one another and buy groceries. There was always a band concert.

Speaker 1:

Yeah?

Vivian Carter:

Uh-huh. And we usually got ice cream before we went home, an ice cream cone. And that was a treat.

Speaker 1:

I imagine most of the dollars went to that, having been a kid myself.

Vivian Carter:

But I don't remember buying anything special with that dollar. I probably thought I'll have to save that.

Speaker 1:

That's good. That's a good-

Vivian Carter:

Save it for college.

Speaker 1:

That was a smart investment. So we already answered animals. It was cows, sheep, chicken, and-

Vivian Carter:

Pigs.

Speaker 1:

And pigs.

Vivian Carter:

Chickens.

Speaker 1:

That's it. But what kind of crops did your family grow?

Vivian Carter:

Okay. They grew oats, and they grew corn and hay and beans.

Speaker 1:

Okay.

Vivian Carter:

Not the kind we eat, but soybeans.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, that's kind of the Iowa classic, corn and beans.

Vivian Carter:

Right, right.

Speaker 1:

The occasional hay. I haven't heard oats before. That's interesting.

Vivian Carter:

And now they just more or less grow corn and beans.

Speaker 1:

Corn and beans.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah. It's most profitable.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. And these other interviews I've done, it's usually corn and beans, and there were a couple little other outlier crops they would list, but not that many. It was mostly just corn and beans. And there would be alfalfa, I think is the name of it.

Vivian Carter:

Hay, yeah. The hay crop would be alfalfa.

Speaker 1:

But then they would stop growing it at some point because they just didn't need to.

Vivian Carter:

Well, they didn't have any livestock to feed it to.

Speaker 1:

Exactly.

Vivian Carter:

Or horses. We had horses, too.

Speaker 1:

Oh, you did?

Vivian Carter:

Yeah. We called them work horses. They were great big horses. I mean, they were-

Speaker 1:

They were big?

Vivian Carter:

... huge. Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Were they big or were you just little?

Vivian Carter:

No, they were big.

Speaker 1:

Okay.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah. If you got on them, your legs spread out like this.

Speaker 1:

Doing the splits.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah. And we always had a big, huge garden.

Speaker 1:

That's the next question. Did you raise any of your own food?

Vivian Carter:

Yeah, we raised all of our food except... Well, all of our food except the sugar and flour and the spices, if we used much, which we didn't use many spices back then. And then my mother would can.

Speaker 1:

Oh, yeah.

Vivian Carter:

Big canning. We spent the summer canning vegetables and fruit.

Speaker 1:

I bet.

Vivian Carter:

We used to buy peaches by the bushel basket or pears or apples. Always bought them by the bushel basket. So you'd peel and you'd peel and you'd peel, and then you can.

Speaker 1:

I was peeling apples last weekend. It is quite the chore to do.

Vivian Carter:

It is a chore. It is a chore.

Speaker 1:

But you said you did a little more work in the house than anything else?

Vivian Carter:

I did. My big outside chore was the chickens. Feed the chickens and gather the eggs daily.

Speaker 1:

Okay. How was doing that?

Vivian Carter:

That was a much cleaner job. I liked it better.

Speaker 1:

Than milking the cows.

Vivian Carter:

But my job was to make the lunches for the family before they went to school. Everybody had to take their own lunch, and so I had to bake something every day, because if you made a cake, a big cake, it would last the day and there'd be nothing left for the next day.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, with that many people in the house.

Vivian Carter:

So that was my job, bake something and then make sandwiches for eight lunches every day.

Speaker 1:

How early would you have to be doing that?

Vivian Carter:

5:00. I used to get up at 5:00, to get that done.

Speaker 1:

Was it just you hanging out in the morning, or were other people up at that point?

Vivian Carter:

In the kitchen, and my mother was there, yeah. The rest of them were milking cows or whatever needed to be done outside. Mostly taking care of the cattle. Feeding. A lot of feeding to do.

Speaker 1:

Oh, I bet. Lots of livestock, like you said. Oh, what was I going to ask? It's on the tip of my tongue. Oh, what did you grow in the garden, if you can remember?

Vivian Carter:

We grew tomatoes and sweet corn and peas and beans. We tried other vegetables like broccoli and some cabbage. We grew cabbage. Those were the basics. The things like broccoli were not successful. We used them, but they had a tendency to attract bugs and worms so it was not-

Speaker 1:

Yeah, certain crops will do that.

Vivian Carter:

And nobody was that crazy about broccoli, either.

Speaker 1:

I doubt they were. Did you ever pickle any of your vegetables as opposed to canning?

Vivian Carter:

Yeah, cucumbers. Cucumbers. We grew melons, watermelons, occasionally.

Speaker 1:

Oh, that sounds good.

Vivian Carter:

And muskmelon. That basically is what we grew in the gardens.

Speaker 1:

But it was spices and flour and sugar that you would go into town on Wednesday to get.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Did you supply your own produce... Or not produce-

Vivian Carter:

Butter?

Speaker 1:

Meats.

Vivian Carter:

Meat, yeah.

Speaker 1:

Yeah?

Vivian Carter:

The men would periodically butcher an animal and cut the meat up. We grew chickens. We dressed chickens out take them to the freezer. That was before you had your own freezers. They had a big one in a locker, what they called a locker, in town. And then people would take whatever they wanted to freeze to town, to the locker. It wasn't very handy because every time you wanted it-

Speaker 1:

You had to walk five miles to put your chicken in the freezer.

Vivian Carter:

We did have a car, though, or a horse and buggy. I can remember, when a little girl, going to town with my mother in the horse and buggy. She was taking some eggs to town to sell and needed to buy some groceries, and I got to go. I felt really-

Speaker 1:

Really special today.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

I do see those, still, every so often, the Amish community around.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah, the Amish.

Speaker 1:

Did you ever get your own freezer in the house?

Vivian Carter:

Freezer?

Speaker 1:

Yeah.

Vivian Carter:

Yes, eventually. But see, we didn't have electricity on the farm until I was probably a sophomore in high school. So that would've been about 1915, or 1945.

Speaker 1:

Oh, okay.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

And I'm sure that would go for plumbing, too.

Vivian Carter:

The plumbing we got a couple of years earlier. And I don't know why it took so long to get the plumbing, but it was a mess. I remember that. But we finally did get plumbing and have an indoor bath.

Speaker 1:

Getting it set up was the mess, or just-

Vivian Carter:

Well, convincing my father to spend the money to do it was the problem at my house.

Speaker 1:

I bet it was, yeah.

Vivian Carter:

He was a pretty stubborn man. He did it such and such a way, and we could do it the same.

Speaker 1:

So you've kind of brought this up a little bit, but who did what kind of work on the farm? Were there certain chores assigned to certain people?

Vivian Carter:

Pretty much, although we were flexible. Mostly the men, the men and women both, worked at the animal chores, like feeding the animals and carrying the food to them. The girls never did have to clean the barn, thank goodness.

Speaker 1:

Thank goodness.

Vivian Carter:

But they did help with the milking, and then later it was you milked by hand until we got electricity. Then we got in a separator, a milking machine and a separator, which separated the cream from the milk. And so you sold cream, and then you sold milk.

Speaker 1:

Wow. And that was a little bit after electricity that you got those?

Vivian Carter:

Right after electricity.

Speaker 1:

Right after?

Vivian Carter:

Uh-huh.

Speaker 1:

You were eager to use it.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah. Everybody was glad to have a milking machine. You didn't have to sit under the stinky cow and milk the cow.

Speaker 1:

How long would that take, would you say?

Vivian Carter:

Well, it depends on how much milk the cow was giving, probably 20 minutes. You had to clean the udder with warm water so that the milk wasn't infected with...

Speaker 1:

Yeah.

Vivian Carter:

So by the time you did that and you got her milked, and it was about 20 minutes.

Speaker 1:

That only makes my back hurt a little bit, thinking about it.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah. It was not fun.

Speaker 1:

One thing I hear in these interviews a lot is weeding the fields is a really big chore, especially for younger kids, would you say?

Vivian Carter:

Weeding? Weeding.

Speaker 1:

Yeah.

Vivian Carter:

We never had to do that.

Speaker 1:

Really?

Vivian Carter:

We had a team of horses and what they called a cultivator. For one thing, they didn't plant as many seeds as they do today because they have fertilizers now that will grow many.

Speaker 1:

That'll ensure that growth.

Vivian Carter:

Let's see, what was the question? Gone after.

Speaker 1:

Oh, well, now I can't remember. Let me think a moment. Weeding the fields.

Vivian Carter:

Oh, yeah. No, we never had to go out and weed. We had to go out and shuck oats. They cut the oats and then they bound them up into bundles. I don't know if you've ever seen a bundle of oats or not.

Speaker 1:

I may have. I couldn't recognize it if I saw it, though.

Vivian Carter:

It was probably two feet tall. They came in bundles that you could handle. They stacked a bunch of bundles together, and you had this big golden pile of oats, with straw. Oats at the top and straw.

Speaker 1:

Oh, they grow in stalks, don't they?

Vivian Carter:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

I know what you're talking about.

Vivian Carter:

Like a grass.

Speaker 1:

It's sort of like wheat.

Vivian Carter:

Uh-huh.

Speaker 1:

Okay.

Vivian Carter:

I can remember helping out with that, which I didn't like either, but you did it because it was expected.

Speaker 1:

You've already brought up that milking machine and that separator. Did you use any other type of high-end machinery? Did you have a tractor or combine at any point?

Vivian Carter:

Not for years, we didn't. I don't remember what year my dad finally got a tractor. But he didn't have a big farm, so he could get by with the horses. But they used to pick the corn. Well, it took forever. They'd take the team of horses with a wagon with sides on it and pick the corn, throw it in the wagon. It'd go on into almost November, December sometimes.

Speaker 1:

I bet it did.

Vivian Carter:

Now they just drive along with their computerized machine, press a button, and away they go. They don't need to do anything but sit there.

Speaker 1:

Another couple of years, you're not even going to have to sit there.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah, true. But that's the way it used to be.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. A lot of stuff has changed.

Vivian Carter:

Because your yields weren't very good. Things didn't cost as much, so you didn't need as much money.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. I can attest to that. I have another question, and it's on the tip of my tongue again. Oh, how many acres was the farm, if you know?

Vivian Carter:

I think it was either 160, I think. 160 acres. There was one piece that was 80, and then there were a couple of other pieces at different corners of the farm then, and I think those were another 40 or 60 acres.

Speaker 1:

Well, that seems pretty big to me. I mean, I'm not very good with measuring.

Vivian Carter:

A lot of it was grassland. It wasn't all farmable.

Speaker 1:

Well, yeah.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

So how would you use the grassland? Is that just livestock?

Vivian Carter:

Yeah, your cattle. We had dairy cows, of course, and they grazed the cattle in the summertime. They grazed-

Speaker 1:

The grass.

Vivian Carter:

... the grass in the pastures that they couldn't farm. Some of it was too wet, but it could make good pasture.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, I bet. There's a lot of really nice soil in Iowa. So are there any members of your family still farming, like siblings, direct descendants, anything?

Vivian Carter:

Well, not siblings, but descendants, yes. Yes.

Speaker 1:

Who would that be?

Vivian Carter:

Well, let me go through my family. My oldest brother's two boys, two of his boys, they're farming up near Plainfield, Iowa. And Dave's boys, he only had one boy, and he didn't farm. None of Todd's boys farmed. My brother Todd just passed away here. We had his funeral the other day.

Speaker 1:

Oh, really?

Vivian Carter:

Yeah, he was 91. He was getting up there. And Jeff has a farm. He bought the home place where I grew up, but he doesn't farm it anymore. He owns it, and I think he leases the land out. So I guess you'd say he's still farming it, but not physically.

Speaker 1:

So nearby farms are working the land, and he just kind of owns the property of it.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

But he does live on the original homestead?

Vivian Carter:

No, he lives in town. He's a carpenter. I think he built three houses, lived in all of them.

Speaker 1:

Wow.

Vivian Carter:

He's a beautiful builder. He built a spiral staircase that goes up in one of his houses and it doesn't have any... It just spirals up. There's nothing to brace it there.

Speaker 1:

Wait, so there's no supports on it?

Vivian Carter:

Uh-uh.

Speaker 1:

Is there a railing?

Vivian Carter:

Well, there's a railing. It curves, yeah.

Speaker 1:

That makes me feel a bit better. I would love a spiral staircase.

Vivian Carter:

It was beautiful.

Speaker 1:

If I ever-

Vivian Carter:

But he had to figure it all out so it wouldn't tumble down, so it would stand there.

Speaker 1:

I hope it hasn't.

Vivian Carter:

No, it hasn't.

Speaker 1:

Well, that's really all the questions that I have.

Vivian Carter:

It was a different life. So much different than it is today. Are you comparing this with today's farmers?

Speaker 1:

Well, I'm not sure. This is more of just a retrospect project, but do you have any thoughts on that at all?

Vivian Carter:

Well, I'm not into it, so I guess not.

Speaker 1:

Other than it is very, very different. Just driving by, seeing all of these more modern farms, all their machinery. It's crazy.

Vivian Carter:

But if you notice, there are very few buildings left on the farms anymore.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, except for the-

Vivian Carter:

Nobody lives there.

Speaker 1:

Except for the big garages and stuff. There are occasional ones.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

Sometimes there's just a little patch of land, but that person might not necessarily own the fields. They might just live out in the country. Like my aunt, she has something similar.

Vivian Carter:

But for Iowa being such an agrarian place, you don't see any livestock anymore. It's rare if you do.

Speaker 1:

Oh, yeah. Very, very few compared to I'm sure what you would've seen.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

We have the occasional fields of goats and cows and such, but nowhere near as big as you're describing.

Vivian Carter:

No, no. No big dairy functions. Well, ours wasn't so big. Everybody, they had a little bit of this, this and that, so they had everything they needed.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. Now everything's a bit more focused. Like you have a dairy-exclusive farm. If you could even really call it a farm anymore. It's more of a warehouse.

Vivian Carter:

Yeah.

Speaker 1:

But yeah, that's all I had. Thank you so much for meeting with me. We really appreciate it.

Vivian Carter:

A long time ago.

Speaker 1:

A long time ago, indeed.