

Speaker 1:

Hello. What is your name, and where do you currently live?

Carlyn Meyer:

Carlyn Meyer. I live in rural Peosta. I'm around 12 miles from Dubuque, Iowa.

Speaker 1:

Are your memories about somewhere other than where you live now?

Carlyn Meyer:

Yes.

Speaker 1:

Where would that be? Where did you grow up?

Carlyn Meyer:

Okay. That was Clayton County, Iowa, and a farm about three and a half miles from Guttenberg, Iowa.

Speaker 1:

Please give us your birth year. What year were you born?

Carlyn Meyer:

1938.

Speaker 1:

Okay. Well, let's get right into the questions so that we can record some of the memories that you have. How did your family come to live on a farm in Iowa?

Carlyn Meyer:

Well, we're from German heritage, I believe the late 1800s, Meyer Family, Clayton County, Iowa, probably around Osterdock and Guttenberg, Iowa, in that area.

Speaker 1:

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

Carlyn Meyer:

Well, some memories I have, I was growing up, of course, in 1940s and graduated from high school in 1955 at Guttenberg. In that period of time, my dad's place, he had 166 acre farm and there was a 40 acre wood timber. Some good memories I have of hunting in the fall of the year, squirrel hunting. That was big. There were a lot of hickory nut trees in that acreage. Also, as far as hunting, I'd liked hunting mushrooms or morels in spring of the year. Also, in the fall of the year, at times, I would hunt or dig ginseng. So I have good memories of being in the woods, so to speak. I always liked that.

Other memories? Well, growing up, I had a brother three years younger than I, and I remember fabricating a net out of baler twine, and we would tie it between two trees. Probably in the evening, long summer days after our milking was done, we would play volleyball. So he was on one side, I would be on the other side. We made our own rules, so we could hit the ball three times to get it over, and then we would keep score. So, we were quite competitive on that.

Also, some yard games, I remember playing croquet different times. We had a ditch that we mowed. So, in the game of croquet, sometimes we would hit one another's ball and then knock the ball into the ditch. That was always a big deal. Just games like that. Out in the other yard. We could play softball at times or 500, which was a game where you hit the ball. If you caught the ball, you had a high score. If you caught it on first bounce, you had a good score. If you caught it on second bounce, a little less, and so forth. The game 500. So those are memories I have of growing up, and things that I liked to do. There are probably other things that'll come to mind. When we quite young, playing in the dirt with our little farm toys. That that'll do it for now.

Speaker 1:

What about your instrument? I remember you telling about how fun it was for all of you to play instruments together. Can you tell me about that, and what that band was called?

Carlyn Meyer:

Yeah. When I was a freshman in high school, my parents had gotten me a trombone through mail-order house, probably Spiegel or Monkey Ward. So I started taking trombone lessons in high school there. Anyhow, through that process, and then after the high school, there were three sets of brothers. My brother was trumpet, I was trombone. Another set of brothers were cousins, and that was the bass fiddle and that was the clarinet. Then the other two brothers, they both played accordion, but they could also play the guitar and the steel guitar.

So, we had a little band that we was called an FFA band. We did some of that. In the summer of 1960, I met my future wife at a dance at Lakeside Ballroom, Guttenberg, Iowa. But that summer, we would have what we would call jamborees or jam sessions. Now she could play the trumpet, and so forth. So, if somebody had a birthday, we'd get together and you could have maybe upwards of anywhere from 6 to 10 people playing different instruments.

So we'd have a big time playing waltzes, and polkas, and foxtrots, so forth, so we enjoyed that. Through the years, off and on, I continued to play the trombone. I'm not a musician but, for some reason, I kept playing it. I'm 85 years old now, and I still play it three times a week. It's good for my mental capacity, reading notes, trying to memorize songs I used to memorize, and see if I can still play them. So, I keep at that. To me, it's exercise and it's personal amusement, playing trombone.

Speaker 1:

You didn't have cell phones back on the farm, and I remember you saying that you would get together to play those instruments. Sometimes, wasn't there special occasions, like a wedding? It was called something, you would show up at somebody's house. What was that?

Carlyn Meyer:

That was called a chivaree. That was a chivaree. That was a big time. They came out at the farmhouse there, my parents, we were just married. One night there was a large clamoring outside, hitting on pots and pans, and all kinds of noise out there. So they were invited in, and then they had their instruments

with them, so we had a jam session, jamboree, and then there was a lunch served afterwards. So, it was a big time.

Speaker 1:

Okay. On your family's farm, what crops did you grow?

Carlyn Meyer:

Well, it was crop rotation, so there was corn one year. I'm talking about the same field now. There was many different fields we had. But one field, first year was corn, the second year was oats, the third year was hay. Then the rotation would start again, corn, oats, and hay. That's how that was done.

Speaker 1:

Your farm, or the farm that Grandpa Meyer had, how many acres was it? Was enough to support your family? It wasn't a large farm, is that correct?

Carlyn Meyer:

Yeah, that's correct. It was 166 acre farm. One area was 40 acres of timber. Then there was another little timber that could have taken up a few acres on the other side of the road. But, it supported us. Then a little later, as I grew older and I could drive tractors and so forth, then my dad rented a small farm about a mile and a half away on the same gravel road we were on. So we farmed that for half, dad farmed that for half. We've got half the oats, half the corn, half the hay.

Speaker 1:

There was something unique about your farm there on Jolly Ridge, it was close to the schoolhouse. Can you tell us what your schooling was like as a child?

Carlyn Meyer:

Yes. The schoolhouse was right there, just across the fence. The teacher taught all the grades. It so happened the grade that I was in, a lot of times, there's only 10 or 12 in the school. But the grade I was in, there was three girls and myself, so there's four of us in the grade. So, that was a big grade for country school. Anyway, we had several teachers. One of them I know taught three years, one taught two years. I think my older sister even taught me one year. So, that's how that was. The whole spectrum, geography, mathematics, literature, English, and music, and one teacher had to do it all.

Of course, there was a recess time. We had a little field out back where we could play softball, and play tag, and whatever games we had. Also, in the later years of country school, we had bicycles. So some of them were that lived on the same gravel road, they would come to school with their bicycles. So bicycles were big then, bicycles were big. Talk about bicycles. I remember getting a new bicycle. It was probably out of the Spiegel catalog, and it had a light a light on the front and it had whitewall tires. So, it was a nice looking bicycle.

I got so that I could ride on the gravel road. I could balance myself. I saw that I could ride without hands on the handlebar. I don't recommend riding on a gravel road that way, but I got so that I could do that. I could even turn into our farm driveway, just leaning, not using any hands, and I could turn like that. So, I had balance. We would use the bicycles. We'd build little ramps, and jumped the bicycles over the ramps. So, bicycles were big.

Speaker 1:

So that school that you were discussing is no longer there, but there is something left, a remnant from that time. What was that? What is that?

Carlyn Meyer:

Well, there was a cemetery, and the corner of that cemetery was the school property. When I graduated from that school in 1950 or 1951, that was the last year of that country school. So a few years after that, the school was moved. The building was actually moved into Guttenberg. So that corner where the school property was became cemetery property, then it made the cemetery property square, squared out now. Some of the land went back to my dad's farm, that's where the ball field was. But there's only remnant of that school, and that is the boy's toilet. That is still there by the fence row in the cemetery. That old toilet is still there, and it's still kept up yet.

Speaker 1:

It looks like an outhouse. It is an outhouse.

Carlyn Meyer:

Yeah, it's an old style outhouse. Yes.

Speaker 1:

Yes. So on that farm, what animals did your family raise?

Carlyn Meyer:

It was the mixture, the spectrum of chickens, some roosters, because they were butchered, and that meant gathering eggs. Then, of course, there was hogs. Hogs, they would get to around 200 pounds. Dad had a way of gauging them. When he thought they weighed 200 pounds, they were ready to be taken into the Guttenberg Stockyard to be sold. Also, we had milk cows. Generally, I'm just guessing, we'd milk average from 12 to 15 cows. So, that was it.

The milking was done then with mechanical milkers. the first milkers we had would milk two cows at a time, and then it was on a cart and you had the long extensions, the hoses and so forth. Later on, we got the kind that you strapped underneath a cow. We had three of those. So one person could operate three of those at a time, just at intervals. So my brother and I were the ones that milked the cows in the evening. But fortunately, dad, he did the morning milking. I never liked milking cows.

Speaker 1:

On that farm, did you raise any of your own food?

Carlyn Meyer:

Yes. Concerning milking, I should mention that we separated the milk. We had a cream separator. Originally, it was a crank one. But, then they went to the electric motor on the cream separator, so that was a big deal. The milk had to be run through the cream separator morning and evening. So the cream was then put in cream cans. Near the house, there was steps that went down, three or four steps, so it was an area that was a little cooler down there, and that's where the cream cans were kept.

In the summertime, there was a cream hauler. Later in the years, I was the cream hauler. We hauled cream into Guttenberg, to the creamery, three times a week. In the wintertime, colder weather, it was twice a week. So anyway, the milk, that was fed to the hogs. So the milk, the whole milk itself, was put in a big barrel. Then there was a feed that was ground, a mash, a grain with ground, and then some concentrate put in it for healthy animals. That was all put in that barrel and mixed up, and that's what we called sloping hogs. Also, a big deal then was grinding feed. Grinding feed, that was probably a weekly job. With a hammermill and a belt, and you line the tractor up. Then I remember we had a little dugout where the back wheels of the tractor fit into, so we knew where to line the tractor up with the belt. So that was a big deal, grinding feed.

Speaker 1:

So your farm was pretty self-sufficient. You had what you needed.

Carlyn Meyer:

That's correct.

Speaker 1:

About the food, go back to some of the food for your family, how that-

Carlyn Meyer:

A large garden, plowed the garden. I did a large part of the garden also, that meant hoeing and cultivating. Cultivating wasn't any fun because it was a push type cultivator with two handles on it, and five little shovels. So that took an effort to push a thing. But my brother and I, that was our jobs to do that. Then there was also a good raspberry patch there, I believe maybe even some blackberries, and then-

Speaker 1:

Muscovy?

Carlyn Meyer:

Pardon?

Speaker 1:

Muscovy ducks?

Carlyn Meyer:

Yeah, as far as animals. When you get into animals, yeah. Not only was chickens, but we did have Muscovy ducks, and then we also had some geese. Sometimes we would have upwards of a dozen geese. Of course, the geese were in the second yard. There was three yards, with the house yard fenced. Then there was the machinery yard, the center yard. That's where the geese generally were. Then there was the barn yard, and that was fenced, and that was for cattle and, at times, we had a bull. Anyway, the geese were in that middle yard. So when somebody would come into the yard with a car or truck, you know how geese are, they make a lot of noise and they start running, and flapping their wings, and squawking. Anyway, they let you know when company came.

But the geese were raised to be eaten, and also Muscovy ducks. I don't remember how many Muscovy ducks, perhaps upwards of 15 or so. When it comes to eating ducks, you cannot beat a Muscovy duck, their food. That's some of the fond memories that I would have. The holidays, no, it wasn't turkey. It was Muscovy duck or it was cooked goose. You couldn't beat that. The older farm women, they knew how to prepare duck. They knew how to prepare goose, and they knew how to do gravy, and they knew how to do dressing. So, there you had it.

Speaker 1:

That was a lot of work. Who did what work on the farm?

Carlyn Meyer:

Well, of course, the field work. I was put on a tractor maybe at 9 or 10 years old, maybe 9 years old already. Dad had a very small Farmall tractor. That would've been his first Farmall. Maybe he got that around 1940. Maybe he bought the tractor. No, I'm not certain. Back then, it was transitioning from horses to tractors. So he had that small Farmall B, only one tractor. I'm guessing about 1947, after second World War tractors were yet scarce, and so he was able to buy, as a second tractor, a 1936 model Oliver 70. Of course, that seemed to be a big tractor compared to the Farmall B.

Talking about tractors at that time, the farms in that area through that time period, they start transitioning from horses to tractors. One tractors, but then two tractors. So it was just normal then to have two tractors. So when dad had the farm sale back in 1971, he had two tractors at that time. He had an Oliver 77, which was bought new in 1951. Then he had a WD Allis Chalmers. That was the tractors he had at the farm sale. As far as the brand names, he had more Oliver's, at different times, but only two tractors at a time.

The field work, I didn't like chores, but I liked field work. I liked tractors. So if it came time to put in crops and dad said, "Well, you stay out and work into the night, but you don't have to do chores," well that was fine with me. That was fine. Field work, and that meant doing the plowing, discing, drag harrowing, and cedar-old style, a corn planter. Mainly the corn planter my dad did, because I guess he was particular on that. So I don't remember planting, but I remember I had to cultivate corn. Back then, you'd cultivate it about three times.

Cultivating was slow work. The tractor was idled down and, after a good big dinner, it was easy to get sleepy, so you had to watch yourself. More than once, I plowed out a few hills of corn, and so I had to go back up and reinsert them. Back then, a corn planter planted three or four kernels at a time, and they were roughly three foot apart. So, you had corn hills. Today, you've got a kernel of corn, you got a sock of corn every eight inches, or whatever it is. No weeds. Back then, you had weeds. That's why we cultivated three times, and so we didn't have all the crop the soil, and the pesticides, and all that. That's good or bad. Whatever you think of it, it's good or bad and the in between.

Speaker 1:

So you didn't use herbicides to kill the weeds, you cultivated?

Carlyn Meyer:

We cultivated. But on the corn planter, there was also a couple canisters for a fertilizer. Okay. So it not only planted the corn, but it did put starter fertilizer into the hills also. So, that gave the corn a boost.

Speaker 1:

Back to the work part, what about your mother? What work did she do on the farm?

Carlyn Meyer:

She was big on chickens and gathering eggs. Of course, we all helped at that time. But, that meant washing eggs. Eggs had to be washed, and they were put in egg crates. The egg man would come around to pick up the eggs. At times, sometimes later, it was my job to take them into town. I would even deliver eggs sometimes to a few of the town people that we knew. So if I felt like delivering some eggs, as I was just in the high school, I'd want to go to the dance at Lakeside, but if I delivered some eggs, I had some money to spend. Anyway, that's how that was. But short time, we were all involved. The younger brother and a younger sister, sister was four years younger, we were all involved in chores. So it was an operation, everybody had their duties to perform, and you just did it. Our parents, we were disciplined, but yet it was a good discipline, nothing harsh. So we all had our duties to perform, and we did it.

Speaker 1:

You've described some of the farm technology. Is there anything that you may not have mentioned, the type of equipment, machinery?

Carlyn Meyer:

Originally, I can remember driving a tractor and there was a big hay wagon behind, and then there was a hay loader behind the wagon. My dad was probably in the wagon, and the hay loader was putting the hay into the wagon. Then he would have to shovel the hay, or keep it forked that way. So after a few years, we had a baler. The first baler was a big old thing. It had a motor on it. So what that meant, it had a bale wagon behind it, a flatbed wagon. So there was a person back there with a bale hook. As the bale would slide back in the chute, you'd grab it with the hook and pull it back into the wagon and you would stack the bales up. So, that was baling.

Later on, he did buy a new baler, and that was a power takeoff baler that didn't have the engine. Well, that engine that was in this other baler, when we would get a full load of bales, you would stop the baler engine and you go and, with the second tractor, haul the bales in and get them up into the barn. But I can remember that, coming back, starting that engine on that baler. When it was hot weather, it was a bear to start. It was a hand crank job. Then getting the bales into the barn, first of all, when it was loose hay, there was a lot of pulleys.

So you had a rope and you had a big tined fork. It was on an apparatus that came down by the rope. That fork was stuck into the hay that was in the wagon. Then there was a shelf by the barn there, where the operator, dad, would stand on that shelf with the rope in his hand. The signal was given then, and I'd be driving the tractor out there, and one of my siblings would be out there, giving the signal. So I would start and, as the tractor pulled the rope, up went the up fork and it hit the top of the inside of the barn there, the track, I would call it the track, and it would go back, and then dad would signal the stop. The one who was signaling would tell me to stop, and he'd pull the rope, the trip rope, and that hay would drop. So, that was loose hay.

Later, as we'd come in with the baled hay that we still had, the same process and the same forks could be used. I think he maybe could get six bales with one fork load. So, it was the same process. The bales went up with the fork and hit the track up there, went back and the signal was given, and then he could trip the bales and the fork would drop the bales. Anyway, later on, it was a big improvement because he had a bale elevator. That elevator was put in the side, the gable end of the barn. So we could drive up

outside the barn there and put the bales right into the elevator. So, that was the bigger deal. So, that was the process there with hay.

Okay, corn picking. We had a corn picker, a one row corn picker. The first two rows had to be picked by hand because, the corn picker, you couldn't get that close to it. That's just the way it was. So he would have to pick that, and I would have to drive the tractor. It took a while to do that. But then the corn picker had one row corn picker. He bought a nice new corn picker, and that worked real good for a while, but then it wore out. Then he bought another second hand picker, that one wasn't so good. Then he bought another one and another one. Corn pickers didn't go that good you one year. At that point, he had an Allis Chalmers tractor, so he bought a brand new two row mounted picker for that Allis Chalmers tractor. That picker didn't cause trouble. We could pick corn. I could get on that picker all day and pick corn. Anyway, that was corn picking.

Okay, oats. Threshing oats. Okay. As a youngster, I can remember driving a tractor. I didn't have to load the bundles into the wagon, as I was driving the tractor with somebody else. There was a threshing crew, maybe six of us, six or seven places that threshing machine had to go to, and they took turns wherever. So, the bundles were stacked up in shocks. That was hauled to the threshing machine. It was a big old threshing machine. The neighbor had a Massey-Harris tractor, that was put on that threshing machine.

But I believe in 1952, if I remember right, things started changing. My dad bought a brand new Oliver combine. It was a power takeoff combine, didn't have an engine on it. The Oliver Tractor had light power, so we just had a lever to kick it in and kick it out. That was a big deal back then, a brand new combine. So that's how we did, we combined our oats, that would combine barley, and also it would combine hay seed. I remember combining Timothy seed. So I was great on using the combine with the Oliver Tractor and the new Oliver combine. The Oliver 77 and the combine, that was a good combination there. So you had your crops, your corn and your oats, and talked about making hay, Timothy or alfalfa. Of course, there was some clover too. So, basically that was it on-

Speaker 1:

How many members of your family are still farming?

Carlyn Meyer:

None.

Speaker 1:

What career did you go into?

Carlyn Meyer:

In the summer of 1960, I was in a service for two years, from 1957 to 1959. When I got out, I was still on the farm there. Then I accepted the job as a cream hauler. At that point, I was still doing some farming with dad. I had a cream route. Then, I believe that summer, there was that cemetery, mowing the cemetery. That was mowed about every two weeks. So there, I had three jobs, in a sense. Farming just wasn't quite for me. Field work, that was great. Not chores. No, that wasn't so great.

So in the July of 1960, I was hired on at the John Deere Dubuque Tractor Works, so I served there for about 32 years, and that's where I took early retirement. When I took early retirement, I was into the farm toy model business. I still do some of that. I'm a scratch builder for farm toys, make farm toys for others, farm toys of the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and so forth. So I was into that when I took early

retirement. My wife and I, we traveled to farm toys shows and so forth, so it wasn't like I was sitting around doing nothing.

Speaker 1:

Name a few of the pieces that you made that were farm toys, the tractors you restored. But, what were the pieces that you made from scratch?

Carlyn Meyer:

I started out with mounted plows, like for Allis Chalmers little model, Allis Chalmers tractors that had come out in 1985. Then somebody wanted a disc, and so then I started making disc, and the disc got bigger. Some of them had the folding wings on them. Some of them had the hydraulic thing. Some of it got pretty elaborate. Some of them were pretty big. Then the plows kept be getting bigger too. Four bottom plows to five bottom plows, six bottom plows, seven, even up to an eight bottom plow. Some of that stuff got pretty elaborate. Then I started also building old style side rates. I just built one this past winter, it's got the big old wheels on it. In the basket, the reel turns on it. I have a gear on it. It'll go into gear, so that the reel turns in the basket. It's quite elaborate. So I built four little model plows and that side rake this past winter, at 84, 85 years of age.

Speaker 1:

You sell them. Where do you sell those?

Carlyn Meyer:

At the Dyersville Show, at the national show in November, and also at the summer Toy Show. As this is being recorded here, in a couple of weeks, I'll have table at the summer Toy Farm Toy Show, selling some stuff that I made, as well as some older tractors that I refurbished and repainted, and so forth.

Speaker 1:

Well, thank you for being willing to share your experiences about what your life was like on a farm in Iowa.

Carlyn Meyer:

Thank you.