

Heather Libby:

Okay, here we go. We are recording. My name is Heather Libby. I'm the adult services librarian at the Knoxville Public Library, and I'm here today with Elaine Jordan. So I guess I've already told what your name is. So Elaine, can you introduce yourself, and if you're willing, would you share with us your birth year?

Elaine Jordan:

Okay. My name is Elaine Jordan and I live in Knoxville. I was born May 9th, 1950.

Heather Libby:

Okay. If the memories that you're going to be sharing with us today are different are about a place other than here in town in Knoxville, could you just make sure to share that with us as well?

Elaine Jordan:

Okay.

Heather Libby:

Okay. So I guess we'll just start with how did your family come to live on a farm? But you've already shared with me that it wasn't a farm exactly. So if you could just tell me a little bit about growing up.

Elaine Jordan:

Okay. I grew up just about on a farm. We lived on an acreage right on the edge of town. It was just like a farm in the sense that we had cows and chickens and we raised a garden and we dressed chickens, and my dad even raised pigeons.

Heather Libby:

Okay. So can you tell me a little bit more about growing up? What your favorite story is about growing up there?

Elaine Jordan:

We actually had a cow that we milked and that was kind of fun.

Heather Libby:

So not quite sure why you say it isn't a farm. What in your mind makes something a farm versus, you've got the animals and the-

Elaine Jordan:

Well, the animals made living on a farm fun because we had sheep, so you always had babies, baby chicks. That was probably the most fun about living on an acreage is having the baby animals. It's also a lot of work.

Heather Libby:

Yeah, it is. See, we had chickens for a little while. I have a different memory of them. I thought they were dirty and gross.

Elaine Jordan:

Well, we ended up dressing them. That wasn't the fun part.

Heather Libby:

No, I wasn't there for that part. Okay. So can you tell me a little bit more about your family? Who was it? Did you have siblings?

Elaine Jordan:

We didn't always have an acreage and eventually we moved off the acreage. So, when I really lived on a farm is when I got married, and that was in my late twenties. I married a farmer and he always told me from the minute we met that this was what he wanted to do. This was a farm that had been in the family for several generations and that he was going to do his part to keep it in the family. So that's where we were going to live.

Heather Libby:

So where was that in Iowa?

Elaine Jordan:

It's just west of Knoxville.

Heather Libby:

Okay. I suppose we can share that's with John Jordan, right? Who we were able to speak with about his experiences growing up on his family farm and then farming. But it'll be interesting to hear some of the different perspectives. Well, okay. Tell me about, you raised your family there on that farm, is that right?

Elaine Jordan:

Yes.

Heather Libby:

So who did that involve?

Elaine Jordan:

We have a daughter and we have a son. Born and raised on the farm.

Heather Libby:

Okay. So do you have a favorite story about raising the family on the farm with? I know your daughter, Shirley, she got into an occasional antic.

Elaine Jordan:

There's just a lot of fun things. Sending them out to get eggs, because we had chicken. I can remember her leading her little brother out. He was just a toddler. Her telling him, "Come on, come on." He'd fall flat on his face. She's helping him get up and they went out to the little hen house and collected their eggs and we hoped he didn't fall down on the way back.

Heather Libby:

Not a concern on the way out.

Elaine Jordan:

Then the one thing that I do laugh about is the only time we had a goat. We had all kinds of animals, cows and chickens, and we had pigs for a while. So we thought we would have a goat, and the goat was fairly ornery. So one day I took the little kids and we went and we picked black raspberries, which are not easy to find and not easy to pick. We took the goat along with us like he was a pet dog because that's how this goat acted. We had our buckets full and the kids were little and their buckets were full. On the way back, that goat knocked those buckets full of black raspberries out of their hands and ate every darn last one of them.

Heather Libby:

No pie for you that day.

Elaine Jordan:

That's right.

Heather Libby:

Oh, okay. All right. So you spoke a little bit about the crops. What kind of crops did your husband grow?

Elaine Jordan:

Corn and soybean, the main ones. And hay, because we always had cows.

Heather Libby:

Right. Were you involved very much in that day to day or were you more gardening, anything like that?

Elaine Jordan:

We were married for about 10 years before we had kids. So, I would work with him on the farm. I didn't know how to run a tractor, but he put me on there hardly knowing what I was doing. I would disc and run the tractor with him. I never did any of the other farm machinery, but it was a lot simpler back then run, get on a tractor. But he did the combining and all the other farm machinery stuff. But I tried to do what I could.

Heather Libby:

Right. Okay. All right. So you spoke a little bit about you guys had animals, and did you raise those to sell? To eat?

Elaine Jordan:

Yeah. It was beef cattle. Definitely. We didn't really have much on the farm as far as pets or exotic things. John said if we're going to raise it and feed it and put all the work and effort into it, it better make us some money. So we didn't have horses for that reason.

Heather Libby:

Yeah. How large of a scale was it for the animals?

Elaine Jordan:

Oh, you know what, that's one thing I never kept track of was the numbers. Maybe 50 head of cattle, very few. We did have pigs for a while, which was fun. It was a fun experience for the kids because pigs would have babies and they loved to see all the babies on the farms be born.

Heather Libby:

Did you have any middle of the night birthing stories?

Elaine Jordan:

No.

Heather Libby:

It seems like there are often those. Okay, well that's good. Did you raise any of your own food?

Elaine Jordan:

Oh, yeah. We always had a garden. We maybe some fruit trees, a few fruit trees. We always raised chickens and I dressed chickens for about every year we lived on the farm.

Heather Libby:

Did you do canning? Freezing?

Elaine Jordan:

Yep.

Heather Libby:

All of that stuff?

Elaine Jordan:

Yep. All of it.

Heather Libby:

Okay.

Elaine Jordan:

Pickles, freezing, canning, all of it.

Heather Libby:

I think you spoke a little bit to this, but who did what kind of work on the farm?

Elaine Jordan:

Well, I'm here to tell you-

Heather Libby:

Just never ends.

Elaine Jordan:

... we lived on that farm during the eighties when it was hard to hang onto your farm. So, John always had to work off the farm just so we could keep the farm. So that meant that me, and when the kids got old enough, and let me tell you, that was pretty young, we put them to work when they were pretty young. We had to do the chores because he often didn't get home until late and he had plenty to do. He'd often work in the field after he got home from his job in town. So we all worked. As soon as those kids were old enough, they helped haul hay bales to the cows and helped plant a garden. As soon as they were old enough, they were on a tractor or driving a truck. So, everybody worked on the farm.

Heather Libby:

Yeah, family endeavor. Now, you mentioned some of the farm machinery and technology, but do you have any specific memories? It's fine if you don't.

Elaine Jordan:

I do have specific memories. I'll never forget, it seemed like we would go out in the spring and we must've had wet springs. I don't think we do so much, it doesn't seem like we do now, but we sure did then. So you'd go out and we always had wet spots, it seemed like, in every field and you'd try to avoid them, but oh God help you if you got hung up in that wet spot with your farm machinery. I can remember John with a bigger tractor and maybe the neighbor with a bigger tractor using chains to chain up to my tractor. They would get on there and pull. I can remember my tractor going up and I thought it was going to turn over backwards with me on it. It happened again and again. Farming is a dangerous occupation. It really is. These were tractors that didn't have cabs on them or anything. They didn't have anything like that. That was a spring occurrence, just about every spring.

Heather Libby:

Were there any injuries ever?

Elaine Jordan:

No. Fortunately, nothing ever really bad happened. Thank goodness.

Heather Libby:

Yeah. So how many members, if any, are still farming today?

Elaine Jordan:

Our son is still. He has his own farm. He is on a farm that my father owned and he had his cousin farm it most of our lives. When my dad's cousin retired from that farm, he wanted to keep it and he knew Justin wanted to farm. So Justin was only about 24 or 25, he was pretty young. He said to him, he says, "Justin, I want you to have that farm." And Justin said, "I'll try it. I'm pretty young." We helped sign papers so he could, because he bought it on contract from my dad. So I remember it was an overwhelming responsibility for him because he says, "Gosh, all the other kids my age are going to college and doing things that 24 year olds are doing." He said, "I'm the only one that is buying and owns a farm." It was

overwhelming at the time. Well, now he's 40 something and he owns a farm that's probably worth \$250,000 or more. So, I think he made the right choice.

Heather Libby:

Yeah. Well, that's good. Any other memories you'd like to share or anything we didn't get to touch upon that you were hoping we talk about today? Well,

Elaine Jordan:

I can't say enough about my husband and my son. One thing I do think that we all learned, and my daughter too, growing up on a farm, we learned to be independent but also care about things. Learned to work hard. I just think it was a great experience. It was hard, especially during the eighties when times were tough for farmers and a lot of farmers lost their farms. It was very sad. We managed to hang on to ours, thank goodness. I'm glad that my joke about Justin is, we raised you and amply demonstrated how hard it was and how you didn't have any money living on a farm, but you still want to farm.

Heather Libby:

Right. What do you think it is about it?

Elaine Jordan:

He likes farming differently than the way we did it. He likes having land and he farms very organically and sustainably. I think he enjoys that. He wants farming to be done differently and he's a young farmer. The way that's going to happen is by farmers doing it, and he's one of the farmers that's doing it. He's demonstrating that it's possible to farm that way and still make money and still take good care of the land. He has two daughters and he says, "Why would I do anything and put anything on my crops or on my land that would harm my children?" So, we're pretty proud of him.

Heather Libby:

Sounds like you should be. I appreciate that and I appreciate what you and your husband did to get him there and for helping our community in that way. So thank you. Thank you for sharing your memories with me today. I really appreciate it.

Elaine Jordan:

Oh, this was fun. Thank you.

Heather Libby:

You're welcome. All right, I'm going to sign off now.