

MARTHA BUCHO FARMER

Interviewer: David Neal

Interviewed on: January 29, 2003

(No audio at beginning for about 13 minutes)

Interviewer: So for review, Martha, you lived here basically all your childhood, from a farming family of immigrants.

Martha Farmer: (nodding) Yes.

Interviewer: What are your fondest memories?

Martha Farmer: I'd work, helping with the children in the neighborhood.

Interviewer: What games did you do, when you weren't working?

Martha Farmer: (laughing) Got together, visited. Did things we shouldn't do, like ride motorcycles, if anybody had one! Walking up to Franklin Center when they had dances up at the town hall. We'd pick everybody up on our way, walk up, and walk back after the dance. That was about the extent of our excitement.

Interviewer: How often were the dances?

Martha Farmer: Used to be once a week.

Interviewer: On the weekend?

Martha Farmer: Uh huh.

Interviewer: Was that a lot of fun?

Martha Farmer: Sure, I liked to dance, don't anymore, but I used to!

Interviewer: What kind of music did they play?

Martha Farmer: A little bit of everything. I'm trying to remember who played there. Oh, Perry Mitchell.

Interviewer: Was he a local here?

Martha Farmer: No, I think...well, he'd be local, Girard, closer to town.

Interviewer: What did he play?

Martha Farmer: I can't remember what else was in the band, but I know he played the fiddle.

Interviewer: What is your fondest Christmas memory and gift?

Martha Farmer: Getting an orange and a nickel. It was hard times in the 1920s and from then on up.

Interviewer: How old were you when you got the orange and the nickel?

Martha Farmer: Oh, six or seven years old.

Interviewer: What did you spend the nickel on?

Martha Farmer: Candy, of course! Something sweet! (laughing)

Interviewer: Where did you go to get the candy?

Martha Farmer: Up at Franklin Center. At (unclear) [Rodak's]. It was part grocery, part; I don't know what else was in there. At one time, it had a little bit of everything in there.

Interviewer: Who did you marry?

Martha Farmer: Robert Farmer.

Interviewer: How did you meet him?

Martha Farmer: On a double date.

Interviewer: Let's hear about that. Did he live around here?

Martha Farmer: No, he lived in Erie. We had a couple double dates. Went together about three or four years, and we got married. He was originally from down Dubois, Sagamore, down around that area, but worked at GE.

Interviewer: Where did you have your wedding?

Martha Farmer: Cattusberg, Kentucky.

Interviewer: Why Kentucky?

Martha Farmer: Well, we just took off!

Interviewer: You eloped?

Martha Farmer: We got in the car and took off, and got to Kentucky and got married!

Interviewer: Did you have a honeymoon?

Martha Farmer: Sure.

Interviewer: Where did you go?

Martha Farmer: Down around that area.

Interviewer: Where did you go to down there? I have family down there, I was just curious.

Martha Farmer: Oh, I don't remember the names, all I know it was Cattusberg, Kentucky. We just stayed in different areas. It's nice down there!

Interviewer: What did your family say about your running off and getting married?

Martha Farmer: (smiling) Well, it was too late for them to say anything we were married!

Interviewer: Was there any protest about it?

Martha Farmer: No, not really, they knew it before.

Interviewer: Where did you first live when you were married?

Martha Farmer: In Erie, then we lived in Fairview. Then from Fairview, he bought this little place down here on the left.

Interviewer: You bounced around a bit. You lived in an apartment in Erie?

Martha Farmer: Yes.

Interviewer: The names and birthdates of your children?

Martha Farmer: Ronald Joseph Farmer, in 1942. My daughter, Patty Lou Farmer, married to Dorian Horn. Ronnie married Cynthia Dylewski. My daughter was born first, and my son was born 11 months later. And that's the only two.

Interviewer: When you were growing up, where did you go to school?

Martha Farmer: Falls and Francis Schools. Falls was right down below across from Russell Standards and Francis was at Francis and Gudgeonville Road, where the cemetery is. We used to go behind the cemetery for our lunches.

Interviewer: Was it one elementary and one high school?

Martha Farmer: One through eight grade, and then from there I went to Fairview and had one year of high school.

Interviewer: Remember your teachers?

Martha Farmer: All I remember was one redheaded teacher she had red hair. Her name was Mrs. Kelly. And Minnie Krautter.

Interviewer: Why do they stand out with you?

Martha Farmer: I guess because of the red hair. And Minnie was a wonderful teacher. I learned more from her than any of the other ones.

Interviewer: You had one year of high school. Why didn't you go on?

Martha Farmer: Money, money (rubbing fingers together).

Interviewer: Had to work. Can you tell me about your classmates?

Martha Farmer: One ended up being Dr. Hrinda, a doctor. One was a policeman. And my best girlfriend, her son, he just retired from Justice of the Peace, had an office in McKean. I can't really remember any more than that.

Interviewer: Let's go back to the farming. I want to know more about the farm equipment. You said he had a horse-drawn plow.

Martha Farmer: A plow, a rig, one of those things with the spikes in them, a drag? Is that what they call them? And a cultivator-horse drawn.

Interviewer: Did you ever get a tractor?

Martha Farmer: After I was married, my husband came home with a big tractor and plows. From then on, we didn't use horses. My dad wouldn't use the horses after that. That saved an awful lot of work and time.

Interviewer: You mentioned your husband worked at GE and you also had a farm, too, out here after you were married.

Martha Farmer: We bought this little place down here on the left and it was 36 acres. It was mostly woods, but there was one field that he used to plow and work.

Interviewer: What did he grow in that field?

Martha Farmer: I remember oats and corn. Something for him to do, I guess.

Interviewer: Did you guys sell any of it?

Martha Farmer: Just before we went to South America, he used to raise hunting dogs, beagles. So, before we left for South America, we had 23 of them to sell before we left.

Interviewer: I'm sure there is a lot to hunt around here. What was the major game around here?

Martha Farmer: Oh, rabbits, deer.

Interviewer: Did you hunt anything?

Martha Farmer: No, I couldn't shoot anything! I learned how to shoot, but I couldn't kill anything!

Interviewer: You didn't want to kill any animals! Did you have cows?

Martha Farmer: Yes, horses, cows, pigs. I used to milk seven of them before I went to school and when I got back home from school. There was more than that, those were just milkers. And I used to clean. It was good hard work.

Interviewer: How many pigs did you have?

Martha Farmer: Not a whole lot, just enough so we could butcher.

Interviewer: Did you do your own butchering?

Martha Farmer: Yes.

Interviewer: How did you preserve the meat?

Martha Farmer: Don't ask me that, I don't know. I didn't pay attention. All I remember is a Smoke House.

Interviewer: How much canning did you do in a year?

Martha Farmer: All the stuff out of the garden. The meat, they went hunting...eating canned rabbit, the whole thing.

Interviewer: Can you remember any blacksmiths?

Martha Farmer: I remember where it was, but I can't give you a name.

Interviewer: Where was it?

Martha Farmer: Just below where the Tavern was at the end of the lot. There was a Blacksmith Shop near the Red and White Grocery Store across from where the Tavern was, where Rodak was across the road. Across the road at Old State and Rt. 98. The schoolhouse was right on the corner. I remember a Cider Mill. I used to go with my dad when he took apples up to get cider made.

Interviewer: Was that right up there too?

Martha Farmer: Yeah.

Interviewer: You had pressed apple cider!

Martha Farmer: (nodding) It was right up there in that corner. My dad used to have two barrels and he would set it on the porch and let it freeze. Then he'd draw the core out-alcohol! You only needed that much (held fingers about 2 inches apart)

Interviewer: Apple wine! Did you guys have a lot of apple trees?

Martha Farmer: Oh yeah. Orchards all over the place. We had applesauce, canned apples.

Interviewer: Did you guys have other fruit trees besides apples?

Martha Farmer: No.

Interviewer: How about sawmills?

Martha Farmer: No.

Interviewer: Cheese Factories?

Martha Farmer: Yeah, there was one right on the corner of Francis Road and Gudgeonville. There used to be a dance hall up in the top floor of the Cheese Factory. They used to make the big round cheeses that you'd buy and they'd cut you off a hunk. Then they would have dancing upstairs of the Cheese Factory, so that was the other place besides Franklin Center.

Interviewer: So, you had two dance halls! Pretty good for being out in the country!

Martha Farmer: The place to go! (smiling)

Interviewer: Mechanics? There wasn't a whole lot of cars was there?

Martha Farmer: No, there wasn't.

Interviewer: Merchants, you mentioned Rodak and other places on the corner there. Any other stores around?

Martha Farmer: The Post Office was right behind where the schoolhouse was, on the same corner.

Interviewer: What about a stone quarry?

Martha Farmer: Right down here at Howard' Falls. Where the Falls are, a quarry was right in there. A lot of that stone they used to pave Route 98, they used a lot of that stone out of the quarry.

Interviewer: Did you ever play around there?

Martha Farmer: No.

Interviewer: What about oil and gas?

Martha Farmer: They took samples around here, but nothing ever came of it.

Interviewer: Wagon makers?

Martha Farmer: No.

Interviewer: Shoemakers?

Martha Farmer: I heard tell there was a Shoe Store up at the same corner, Franklin Center. But I don't remember that at all.

Interviewer: How about Doctors and Dentists?

Martha Farmer: (laughing) Around here, no. You had to go to Erie or Girard.

Interviewer: Doctors didn't make house calls?

Martha Farmer: Oh yeah. Dr. McCune was one of them. And Dr. Tanahill (?) That's two I remember. They made calls, if it was necessary.

Interviewer: They lived in the area?

Martha Farmer: Girard.

Interviewer: They ever come out to your house?

Martha Farmer: I don't know.

Interviewer: How about Feed Mills or Grist Mills?

Martha Farmer: There used to be some in Franklin Center but I don't know where.

Interviewer: Any Leather Goods makers?

Martha Farmer: No.

Interviewer: Where did your clothes come from? Probably hand-me-downs.

Martha Farmer: Hand-me-downs from my sisters.

Interviewer: Where did the new clothes come from?

Martha Farmer: Mostly from my Godmother in Erie. She had a vegetable garden and would go into Erie. She didn't have a car and had to go to Erie. Somebody had a car and she would go in with them. Girard was the closest place.

Interviewer: Any horse or cattle dealers?

Martha Farmer: They used to come around here all the time. They used to come through and the farmers would sell.

Interviewer: Let's talk about prices of stuff. Milk?

Martha Farmer: Milk, we didn't buy, we had our own. Coffee? Eight O'Clock Coffee we got 3 pounds for a quarter.

Interviewer: Bread?

Martha Farmer: We made our own.

Interviewer: After you were married?

Martha Farmer: My husband used to go to the Bakery and get bags of it for a dollar. He used to get 8-10 loaves.

Interviewer: Where?

Martha Farmer: In Erie. Because he used to work at GE (General Electric)

Interviewer: You mentioned a cheese place; do you remember how much their cheese was?

Martha Farmer: No.

Interviewer: Butter? You probably made your own.

Martha Farmer: Yes.

Interviewer: How about flour?

Martha Farmer: We made our own flour. I have no idea. (smiling)

Interviewer: How about clothing? Pants, dresses, I know yours were all hand-me-downs but do you remember what prices were?

Martha Farmer: About 25 cents to a dollar, I imagine.

Interviewer: How about toys?

Martha Farmer: (laughing) You made your own if we're still back when I was growing up!

Interviewer: How about candy?

Martha Farmer: Delicacies! You really appreciated it if you got it!

Interviewer: How much was candy down there?

Martha Farmer: If you got five cents worth, you had enough, if you doled it out; you had enough for a week.

Interviewer: What kind of candy did you guys have?

Martha Farmer: Licorice, little round hard balls I remember.

Interviewer: Candy canes?

Martha Farmer: No, I don't remember candy canes.

Interviewer: Do you remember what land values were like?

Martha Farmer: I don't remember when I was in my teens, but after I was married, we bought 36 acres for \$1,000 with that old house I showed you.

Interviewer: That was in the early forties then. What about furniture? A couch, chairs?

Martha Farmer: You saved and you saved and you saved then you bought some furniture or you did without.

Interviewer: How much was it?

Martha Farmer: After we bought this place on Francis Road, we got a couch and two chairs, a table and four chairs for \$500.

Interviewer: Did you work throughout the years?

Martha Farmer: For maybe about a year, I worked at the Girard Model Works.

Interviewer: What did you do there?

Martha Farmer: On assembly line, making tracks for trains.

Interviewer: When was this? Was it during the War?

Martha Farmer: Just before I went to South America. In fact, I quit there and got ready to go to South America, and that was in the fifties.

Interviewer: How did you get to work?

Martha Farmer: A neighbor had a car and I rode in with him.

Interviewer: Did you know any Civil War or WWI veterans?

Martha Farmer: No.

Interviewer: What about churches in the township?

Martha Farmer: There was only one, a Methodist Church and it was on Gudgeonville Road. It was Father DASHO and

he was Greek Orthodox. And that was the only church around and all the neighborhood children had to go there, there was no "yes-or-no" you go, because that's the only church there was. I can remember a big furnace in the back of the church and all of us kids gathered in the back around that furnace and we didn't really know what was going on in the front of the church!

Interviewer: Staying warm, were yah! (laughing). Now, is that the Methodist Church you showed me?

Martha Farmer: No, no. This was on Gudgeonville Road, down this way. This is the Methodist Church in Franklin Center.

Interviewer: So that's another church, you didn't go there.

Martha Farmer: No, not at that time. You had to walk. You didn't ride anywhere we walked. That was the only one close enough around, summer-winter you walked. And there was no saying, "No, you can't go," that was the only one there.

Interviewer: Were there any circuit riders?

Martha Farmer: No.

Interviewer: Did the church or school have any social gatherings?

Martha Farmer: Not like they have nowadays.

Interviewer: What do you remember about politics and government?

Martha Farmer: Not a thing! (emphatically) I didn't pay any attention to it.

Interviewer: Know any old Road Supervisors?

Martha Farmer: (shaking head no).

Interviewer: Now when did they pave the road?

Martha Farmer: All I remember is my dad worked there. And they were taking the stone out of the quarry down here, but I don't know what year.

Interviewer: How old were you at the time?

Martha Farmer: Eight, nine, ten years old, somewhere around there. We didn't pay attention.

Interviewer: Do you remember any Police, Constables?

Martha Farmer: No. We were good kids!

Interviewer: Do you remember the earlier names of the roads around here?

Martha Farmer: Francis, Mohawk, Gudgeonville. There was a covered bridge on Gudgeonville Road. And Old State, I don't know.

Interviewer: Do you remember any major natural disasters?

Martha Farmer: Just that big snowstorm that year in '45.

Interviewer: Let's talk about that snowstorm. How did that affect you out here?

Martha Farmer: Well, I always had plenty of food in the freezer and my refrigerator, and that lasted a couple weeks. Then the Army came in and opened the roads. The cars were going on snow about that deep (about a foot wide) and through as tunnel. And that's when I lived out here in this small place on the left, and my husband worked at GE.

Interviewer: Now, was your road out here cleared off pretty quickly?

Martha Farmer: Well, a few days.

Interviewer: When you were younger, do you remember how snow was dealt with? Were there any plows around?

Martha Farmer: Yeah, there was, but not like what they have nowadays. The Army came in with blowers to open the roads in '45 because there wasn't enough equipment around here to open it.

Interviewer: Before that, when you were younger how did you guys deal with getting the snow out of the way?

Martha Farmer: You shoveled! (laughing) Made tunnels from the house to the barn.

Interviewer: What about the roads?

Martha Farmer: Well, you didn't go out on the roads until they were opened up.

Interviewer: They had plows...

Martha Farmer: Up until when it got so deep in 1945 when there was so much snow.

Interviewer: We talked a lot about the different groups that at the time were immigrants. Do you remember where a lot of them were from?

Martha Farmer: Most of the same areas, I guess. My Mother and Dad came from Austria-Hungary and then they lived in Munhall and Homestead, around Pittsburgh, I think. Then they bought this farm here in 1919.

Interviewer: Do you remember where the other families emigrated?

Martha Farmer: A lot of them from Russia, some of them from Austria...seemed like they all spoke the same language, though.

Interviewer: A lot of Slavs? Do you know why they came?

Martha Farmer: Better life than what they had, evidently.

Interviewer: Were your parents' farmers over in the "Old Country" also?

Martha Farmer: I know my Dad was in the Army. Of course, you don't remember all that stuff when you're teenagers; you're not interested, really. But when he bought the farm, he was a farmer. He used to work in some kind of factory in Munhall.

Interviewer: Do you remember any diseases going around during your childhood?

Martha Farmer: Measles, chickenpox, all the regular kids diseases, I guess.

Interviewer: Nothing strange?

Martha Farmer: No, not that I know of, outside of one family that had a boy die from leukemia.

Interviewer: You remember anybody else dying at an early age?

Martha Farmer: You mean young, children?

Interviewer: Well, even in their twenties or thirties.

Martha Farmer: Yeah, there was a baby girl, she was in her teens. I remember her.

Interviewer: What did she die of?

Martha Farmer: I have no idea. And there was a little baby that died too, but I don't know from what.

Interviewer: You mentioned there's a cemetery nearby. Where else were people buried around here?

Martha Farmer: Just down below. Remember I talked about that Russian priest? Well, he started a cemetery and it was part on my Mother and Dad's ground. And whether it was ever recorded, I don't know. But people were buried there, but they're gone out of there now.

Interviewer: They moved them?

Martha Farmer: Uh huh.

Interviewer: Any other memories you'd like to touch on?

Martha Farmer: Hard memories. It was hard, compared to now. Children won't even walk a block to school!

Interviewer: How far was your walk to school?

Martha Farmer: About two miles, a mile and a half to two miles.

Interviewer: Anything else you'd like to expand on?

Martha Farmer: We just got married; I had the two children, my husband worked at GE. He got picked out of quite a few to go to South America. So, we lived in New York. And from there, they shipped us to South America, all our household, car, the whole thing. We lived in the Excelsior Hotel in San Paulo until we found a house. Then we came home from vacation, we didn't have all our vacation, and he had to go back. And then we lived in Campinas, in San Paulo.

Interviewer: How long did you live in South America, total?

Martha Farmer: Between eleven or twelve years, instead of three.

Interviewer: Not a lot of snow down there!

Martha Farmer: (shaking her head no) I think one time I remember a thin layer of ice but by noon, it was seventy degrees. Nice weather, better than Florida!

Interviewer: Well, thank you for your time.

Martha Farmer: Oh, you're welcome.