

Gathering Our Voice

Interview with Carol Peters

Interviewer: Kathy Branch

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Transcribed October 17, 2010 by Melissa Stephenson, AmeriCorps Volunteer

KB: Hi, today is the 17th of August, 2010. And this is Kathy Branch and I'm talking to Carol Peters. And we're going to talk to Carol today about farming in North Central Washington. Hey Carol.

CP: How d'ya do?

KB: So I'm going to ask you a few questions about how you came to be here. How long have you and your family lived in this area?

CP: Umm. I came here in 1943 the first time. And I was married back in Illinois, that's where I lived. I had a good education in farmin' back there 'til I was 18. And people out here... we were in the...out here in the Bracero program with help for harvest. And they were still short of help so we laid the corn by and got in the ol' Chevrolet... and drove out here. And that was a long trip. And you know, my mom was so sure we wouldn't have anything to eat that she practically loaded the car down with canned fruits and vegetables and Dad says, "Oh we can't take that stuff!" [laughs]. But there wasn't many places to eat along the way. Well, we came out here to work in the apple shed and saw a nice lookin' feller and I come back next year to help them apples again.

KB: Did you?

CP: Yeah.

KB: So that's what brought you back? Was it Paul Peters that brought you back?

CP: That's right. And I went on home... after the harvest was over and the shed had shut down. We didn't run year-round then. This was '45 you know. And in '46 he followed me back home and I married him to get rid of him and, you know, it worked. He was out in that orchard everyday. Well as soon as I could get away from our 3 daughters I was out there too and I stayed with him 'til he quit, so I know a little bit about the apple business too.

KB: I bet you do. So when you came to those sheds... so you came in September, is that when you came?

CP: Yeah.

KB: And so those sheds. Who did the sheds belong to?

CP: Well they were co-ops, but there were some private ones. I think there were about 13 around here in Manson that packed their own apples. In fact, my father-in-law packed their own

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apples in a packing shed. And it later became a church [laughs]. Well they didn't want to go clear to Wenatchee to church so they started one here in the packing shed [laughs]. But they got together!

KB: So you came all that way. Tell me about the program you just mentioned... was that a government sponsored program?

CP: The Braceros? Oh, yes. We brought the Mexicans up to help and harvest, and we sent 'em home afterwards. And we didn't take care of all their relatives.

KB: I didn't know that there was immigrant labor from Mexico here at that time. I thought it was mostly the Indian people and then you know, families.

CP: You know, we never got one application from an Indian.

KB: [laughs] Seriously?

CP: And they don't live too far away! [laughs]

KB: My grandma, who was Indian, worked in the packin' sheds when I was a little girl in the '50s. So, I'm, I'm surprised about that, so...

CP: We also had a whole bunch of German prisoners-of-war here, working in the apples.

KB: Really? [whispered]

CP: Yeah. They were good help, nice people.

KB: And what happened to those folks after?

CP: They went home, I guess. We never saw 'em anymore.

KB: So none of those folks just settled here or anything?

CP: Not that I know of. Maybe one or two. Yeah.

KB: So.

CP: [inaudible]

KB: How did you and Paul make your living over the years? Did you always grow the same thing, or...

CP: Well, we when started, we took the orchard over from Paul's dad and it was planted to a variety that nobody knows anything about anymore, which was White Winter Pearmain apples. And the shed hated 'em, they were hard to pack, they were hard to sell. So we cut them down and grafted onto the Delicious. Common Delicious. And I'm here to say that there's never been an apple developed since that can match the taste of the old Common Delicious. But it wasn't red enough. So then we went to Red Delicious and then we went to a few Galas and of course we had Golden and some old varieties, yeah. And they're gone now, too bad. [laughs]

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KB: So what happened when your apples, when you took your apples from your orchard, and packed 'em, where did they go, ultimately?

CP: They went to Lake Chelan Fruit Growers, and-

KB: Which is a co-op.

CP: Which has become Trout and now it's Chelan Fruit. And we picked in wooden boxes. I had my share of that too. It seemed like anybody on the crew they didn't like to pick Goldens because they bruised easy. Well I learned them how to pick Goldens without bruising them. And of course I got to pick the scatter trees that didn't have a good crop on them. Paul said, "Will you do these trees," and oh yeah, you'll do anything for your husband! [laughs] And I filled a lot of old apple boxes. But then we went to bins and I didn't get in on much of that. Well that's how we did it, and we hauled our little Jeep of a trailer and he loaded the boxes on the, on the trailer and hauled 'em here to town in Manson and that's where they were packed and stored.

(5:45)

KB: Was that a pretty good living?

CP: No! [laughs]

KB: [laughs] It was hard.

#3CP: We had a very strict manager. Hendershott was his name. And I remember going in to his office and Paul did too, and we'd almost beg on our knees to get a \$100 loan to live a month. Now that was groceries and labor and spray dope. Couldn't do it today. Well, we got along. We had good years and bad years. And every time we had a bad year we figured we'd have a good year, maybe next year, and you know we did sometimes. But it's kind of chance-y nowadays. [laughs]

KB: But do you think it's harder now than it was?

CP: Oh, yeah, it is.

KB: Why is that?

CP: Well, too much regulation for one thing. I think we're gonna kill ourselves off trying to keep ourselves alive. And you know, we never had, oh, all these diseases and everything. I think we vaccinated ourselves. You ever try a little dirt to see what it tastes like when you was a kid? [laughs]

KB: Amen, that's the truth.

CP: And we never had a pair of shoes. In the summertime, we went barefooted. And if we needed a pair of over-shoes to go to high school in, we got a pair of 4-buckles to wear out in the barn lot. We didn't have them fancy ones to go to school on. You had to take the shame, you know [laughs]. And our dresses, I remember the WPA days- Works Progress Administration. Well they came out with a big program helping these farmers out. And givin' the kids a lot of

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new clothes- rayon. And I remember to my dyin' day, my mom said "We will die before we take anything from the government."

KB: That was my grandma! [chuckles]

CP: And we never did, as far as I know. But you know you can get by with flour-sack dresses. We used to [chuckles] scrap over gettin' three of them alike, so you'd have enough to-

KB: -make one dress the same! [chuckles]

CP: I didn't have a button dress 'til I went to high school, and that was 98 cents! So we made all our clothes. Yup.

KB: That's a lot of work.

CP: Yeah.

KB: Well let me ask you, what was the hardest time you had doing all this farming and stuff? What do you think the hardest times were?

CP: Well the craziest thing, we always hand-thinned apples. And the day we got done, the very hour we got done one year back there in the '50s, it hailed us out. And I asked my husband, "Why did we wait 'til this hailstorm and then do all this thinning?" [laughs]

KB: So what happened?! Did it ruin all the rest of the apples around the trees then?

CP: Yeah, they weren't marketable.

KB: Oh, Lord.

CP: It was heartsick [laughs].

KB: All that work.

CP: But we got hailed several times, and then we went to government insurance. Well, we got hailed practically out and they paid us \$25 for 15 acres [laughs]. And the neighbor who knew how to stand up to them, he got a good settlement and his wasn't hurt near as much as ours was. So, it's just... whatever happens.

KB: Did you ever just feel like you were losing hope in it, or did you always feel...?

CP: No, no, I didn't. I figured next year will be better. And we just got along, you know.

KB: Yeah, you get through it. But you know, it seems to me that the climate can be pretty hard here in the wintertime.

#4aCP: Well I've lived here long enough to see it all. Uh, one winter we had 5 feet of snow on the ground all winter. The highway department backed into our driveway and got stuck and had to have help to get out [laughs].

KB: Y'all had to pull the highway department out? [laughs]

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#4bCP: And one winter we didn't have enough snow to build a snowman. So I've seen everything. And one year we had 25-below-zero, killed all the old trees, practically. And another year we had 25-below-zero and it pretty much took out the young trees. So, replant.

(10:00)

KB: You just start over and over.

#5CP: Yeah. And our horticulturist, Mel Crowder, he's kind of a star in the industry, he's passed on now. But, he said, "You know, I learned more from Paul than I ever did in any of my learnin'." And we did innovate several things. When we were first irrigatin' the orchards, we did it with ditches. And you went out there with a hoe, and you followed the ditches around to make sure they were runnin'. And then we had a guy brought in from Bolzano, Italy, through the fruit growers down here, and he stayed with us overnight. And he said, "What are you doin' that for? Put it in grass." And nobody had done that around here, and we were the first ones that did it and now they're all in grass.

KB: That is right! You mean, just to keep the water in?

CP: Well, yeah, in the ditches, it went by the trees.

KB: So y'all used to plow all that up around the trees?

CP: Well, we had to dig the lines.

KB: Wow.

CP: The funniest thing about this fellow from Italy, I had three young girls, three daughters. He stayed upstairs and when he came downstairs to the bathroom, he didn't shut the door, and one of them came sneakin' out and said "Oh, he didn't shut the door, Mom!" [chuckles] I remember that part of it.

KB: So that's amazing. So I guess in Italy, they always had grass.

CP: I guess. Yeah, he said they had it over there a long time. Well, it's a lot of nutrients, it goes back in the soil. And they used to... Well, originally, we pruned every winter, left a lot of brush on the ground. We'd take loppers out and cut the small limbs off. And then we'd save the big limbs for wood. Which we'd both saw up for our own wood. Then we would take the loppers and chop all these smaller branches into 6-inch pieces. Now that was the first way we did it, and that was a job. And later of course, we got beaters, and mowers, and stuff like that.

KB: And just let it lie all chopped up.

CP: Yeah, and it went back to the soil. Yup.

KB: You know that's funny, that's a technique I think that organic farmers claim now, but apparently it's not new! [laughs]

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CP: It's kind of going in a circle. I get a big kick out of seeing these city people in the grocery stores. They come in there and they're buying that organic milk. I say, "You know what that is, don't you?" and of course none of 'em do. I say, "That's where they don't wash their cow's tits before they put the milker on!" [laughs]

KB: [laughs loudly] Some of that good jerk for ya!

CP: And they say, "Ohhh"

KB: And they're like, "Ohhh, move on!"

CP: Well, we grew up on raw milk.

KB: Oh yeah, me too. You know it's funny about that and separated milk, because the cream was sold. So our milk was very lean when I was little. When I first had that whole milk from the store it tasted like a cup of cream to me. I was like, "Boy, that's livin' high off the hog, I tell ya."

CP: [laughs]

KB: What were the very best times to farm here? Were there times when you thought it was really the best? Like a certain decade or anything?

CP: Well, one year Paul got a plaque at the annual meeting for raising the best Golden. Yeah, I liked that year. I've liked it all. In fact, we had a manager after Hendershott, who was running the shed, and the Golden machine was a-bruisin' Golden. And they couldn't figure out what was doin' it. So I was younger and I went around to the other packing sheds that weren't having that problem and I spotted the trouble. And I went into the office and said, "Hey, you wanna come over here, I got something to show you in the packing shed." "No, I don't have time." I said, "You better take time," because this was pretty good. So I got him over there and got him on his knees, and found the trouble, fixed it... no more bruised Golden!

KB: What was it?

CP: I don't remember.

KB: [laughs loudly]

CP: I still see him today and we still laugh about it. He was kinda mad then, but.

KB: What do you like most about being here?

CP: Well, my first 18 years was in Illinois and I thought there was nothing like it. Well, when I got out here, I *knew* there was nothing like it. I would never go back. [chuckles]

(15:00)

KB: Is that right?

#7aCP: Yeah, I've been overseas, and I've been here-and-there, and I like this the best.

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KB: What do you like about it? What's the best about being here?

CP: Well, four seasons, I guess, is part of it. And we were such a rural, little community. But now we're not that little anymore. Everybody's decided that we're a resort instead of a little town, you know. It's grown. I liked it better when it was smaller. But everybody's discovered us! [chuckles]

KB: That'll happen when you live in someplace that looks like paradise.

CP: Oh, we was never foolish enough around here to build a house up on a hillside. We didn't have time to look at the view anyhow. So now they build a big ol' castle to retire in and have to hire somebody to clean house for 'em and put a big ol' rock wall around it to keep it from rollin' off the hill and then put a big ol' fence about it and we don't see nothin' to gossip about. So we miss that homey feeling.

KB: [laughs loudly] Yeah, knowin' what the neighbors are up to.

CP: Yeah, that's what we used to talk about. There was a conversation on the radio this morning about, well have the news tell us what's goin' on around here.

KB: That was Kari! That was your granddaughter!

CP: That was Kari, was that you after her?

KB: No, but I was listenin'. I was standin' there.

CP: Which is true, but I said, "Well on the other hand they used to have a community news column in our local paper, told about the social life and everything everybody was doing. We knew what everybody was up to. Well they even told about my girlfriend, she had a birthday, there in the 20s or 30s, they even told what color the candles was on her cake.

KB: Oh yeah...

CP: Now they wouldn't do that today, they'd probably get sued if they got the color wrong.

KB: Yup, I remember that the society columns used to always tell what color gown everybody wore. It was fun. Now we have to watch all those programs on TV to catch up.

CP: Well, my husband's cousin built the hardware store here in Manson. I kinda took care of him and his wife 'til they passed on.... But he said that... Oh, now, what was I gonna say...

KB: About knowin' your neighbors and what your neighbors are up to.

CP: Oh yeah, after he passed away, one of his best friends showed up 6 months later and asked my husband, "Well, how's ole Modest doin'?" I piped up and I said, "Well I reckon you can dig him up and ask him. Because he's been gone 6 months." [laughs]

KB: Oh good God!

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CP: We used to know everything that went on. And we wasn't ashamed of being found out either! [laughs] Mostly.

KB: Well, you weren't up to much. [chuckles]

CP: [laughs]. No, not everybody. Not like it is now. Well it's like I say now, the kids ain't got enough to do, they gotta go to town and tear up the town. Well, we went to town and sat outside in the park for a free movie once in a while and we were so tired from workin' that we didn't tear the town up.

KB: Well that's the truth, that is the truth. You know, you wear out your kids, they don't have a chance to get in trouble. That's the truth. So, what's the thing that when people come here from other places that you share that you're most proud about here? What would you tell people about this place that you're proud of?

CP: Well, I don't advertise it too much. [inaudible]

KB: [laughs] You don't want 'em over here! [laughs] So you're just keepin' it to yourself. But what are you most proud of in terms of yourself and your family?

CP: What's that again?

KB: Well what are you proud of with yourself and your family?

CP: Well... I give most of the credit to my husband. But I've got three daughters. They're all successful, they're all married, they have not divorced, and they've all been baptized waitin' for the Lord to come, and that's my greatest.

KB: That's your greatest accomplishment?

CP: Yeah, that there chapter says you raise 'em up in the way they're supposed to go and when they are old they will not depart from it. Well I just figured, well I got it made. 'Til they got to be teenagers and then I says, "When they get old," and you know it takes some of them a long time to get old and come back to you. [laughs]

KB: That's the truth, that's the truth. I think you're selling yourself short Carol, I know you've done a lot more than just raise your family.

CP: Well, we tried to do it right. I guess we made it out alright.

KB: Now you used to hunt and fish, or just mostly hunt?

CP: Yeah, I was a hunter, and I'm not ashamed of that. I, uh...

KB: Was that important to feed your family?

(20:00)

#8bCP: Yes, definitely. We didn't, well, when I was growin' up, we had a few cows, but Daddy raised a whole lot of hogs and we lived on hog meat, and we sold the beef to make money. But

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in our time we did not have meat like we do now, and I took it upon myself when I was I guess 12 years old and Dad let me go out squirrel huntin' back there with a 410 and uh, I'd come home with 3 or 4 squirrels and he never worried about me. And I said, "I'd never give my kids a gun at that age and let 'em go out alone." No. But I did it, and then I got out here and got to deer huntin' with him, and I liked that. I don't like killin'. But pretty good meat when you can't afford to... Back there in the war, I remember meat was so scare they was sellin' horse meat. And I got a mess of it unknowingly. I don't want no more of it. It just made me sick.

KB: Well you were quite the horse woman, too.

CP: Yes, I was a horse-lover. I could ride before I could walk. In fact, I had to, we didn't have a car.

KB: And you and your sister did trick riding too?

CP: Yes, we showed off. We was entertainers. And a pony farmer loaned us ponies to break and then he could sell them as broke ponies and make more money. Well, that was fun. We had a pony then to ride all summer. And one time I got one that, we had a pond right there where the hogs was. In other words, you could call it a hog waller. Well, that pony took off for that pond with me on it, and it stopped right at the edge and I didn't. And I got a spanking because I got my clothes dirty, and I never thought that was quite fair! [laughs]

KB: [laughs] So were there hogs out there in that wallow too? Weren't you a little bit afraid of those hogs when they got together?

CP: No, I grew up with hogs. That's one of the reasons I got married. To get out of Illinois and get away from that hog smell in the summertime, you can't believe what a smell that is!

KB: [laughs] I know, we always kept two hogs, it's a bad smell. My grandma told me they'd eat a kid if you got into the pen, so we always stayed out of the pen. So, what do you think connects you to this place, what keeps you here?

CP: Well, I'm too old to move [laughs]. I'm pretty crippled up in my legs, my legs ain't no good anymore. Forgive my English, I was a straight-A student in English in school, never had a bit of trouble, but when I went home at night we talked farm, we didn't talk English. There wasn't a hog out there who understood pure English [laughs]. So...

KB: [laughs] They can't diagram a sentence either. You have nothing to be apologizing for.

CP: Well I like it here, I've never found any place better, and I hope to stay in my home as long as I can, which everybody does. And I've had good health. And, got a good fellow taking care of my yard and a woman taking care of my house, and all I gotta do is sit here and look at the, well I call 'em the aliens [KB laughs], that come in, the tourists, and I'm right across the road from the lake here and I see all kind of things. And I see more than that when I look out here at the swimming pool. I see more than I need to see, but I've got curtains I can pull [laughs].

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KB: [laughs] There are some days that I wanna call them the terrorists that have come, from the drivin' alone. So let's see, where did you get most of your food? Now we know that you hunted, and did you grow a big garden always?

CP: Oh yes, I had a big garden. I think we put away 43 apple boxes full of potatoes one winter. Big ol' Red Pontiacs. I had a big garden and I canned and I canned, probably 400 quarts every year, and we used it.

KB: So that was just for your family?

CP: Yeah.

KB: Or did you share with neighbors?

CP: Well yeah, yeah.

KB: Did you all ever, did you share produce with your neighbors or anything like that?

CP: No, everybody raised their own. You know back then, in the Garden of Eden, they all had to fend for themselves and people nowadays don't have to take care of their food. It comes to them out of the store. They don't realize that we *all* raised our food then.

KB: And how important it is.

CP: Yeah.

KB: What did you always have to get from the store? You raised pretty much everything.

CP: Well, I don't remember my mom ever going to town with us. We was 13 miles from town. We'd go Saturday night. And she'd send the eggs with us and sometimes the cream. But she didn't go shopping. And we would trade them for groceries.

KB: So what all did you get from the store?

CP: Well we didn't get a whole lot. [KB coughs] Mom generally made our bread. But when we got into high school and coming home from the little town, we'd go in the store and they'd have these great big loaves of hobo bread, 10 cents, and was it good, 'cause we was used to homemade you know, and we was a little tired of it. Well, what did we buy... sugar. I remember, we had ice cream maybe twice. In the summertime. And there was one, two, three, four, five of us, and one quart had to do it for all five of us. And we didn't have it very often. And it was pretty soupy by the time Dad got it home, too.

(25:00)

KB: So did y'all make ice cream?

CP: Yeah, we did. And on one of the farms we lived on, they had an ice shed insulated with straw. And they cut ice in the winter and it'd last pretty well through the summer.

KB: [coughing] Wow, I forgot about ice sheds.

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CP: Well, I had an ice box when we was first married.

KB: Did ya? Where'd you get your ice?

CP: That's a good question. I guess we got it here in town. But then... yeah. But we didn't use a lot of ice. But the main refrigeration, we had a cistern. We got a rope out and tied it on to the milk bucket and hung the butter and stuff down in the cistern to keep it cool as we could.

KB: Well now, how would you get... would the cistern collect snow in the winter, because it doesn't rain much here at all!

CP: It comes off of the roof of the house. And every spring we'd generally clean that cistern. And everybody'd get together and talk about how many mice they got out of their cistern.

KB: [laughs] Ewwwww

CP: Old Chicago Pete over here, he come from Chicago, he was kind of a funny old fellow. He had some goats. And the neighbor down below him on the water cistern when they got one in here, he noticed his water was getting' kind of milky, so he went up and checked the cistern, and one of Old Chicago Pete's goat was in there. But this old guy didn't die, he just, he didn't even get sick. We just took care of it like Hobby Morehead, she lived up there, and they asked her on the radio, "What'd you do when you got sick?" and she said, "Well," she said, "We either got well or we died."

KB: [laughs]

CP: [laughs] That's kinda how it was. The only medicine I remember is bromo-quinine, and that cured everything. And if I could keep one down, I'd get a half a banana, and was that a treat. I didn't get many bananas! It just didn't stay down with me. And if you died, it was consumption.

KB: That was what got you? [chuckles]

CP: That was the only ailment. [chuckles]

KB: Good Lord. But you know, I think it is kind of true that if you can't get sick, you don't. You just don't.

CP: Maybe we're headed back to that too.

KB: Yeah, maybe. Now how did you learn to gather food, was that from your folks?

CP: Yeah, oh yeah.

KB: And what about Paul? Where did he learn to do orcharding?

CP: Uh, his dad taught him mostly. His dad took over orchard land here because the owner before could not pay the taxes, so he got the orchard just for paying the back taxes. But he wasn't an orchardist, but Paul took an interest in it, and he was a good orchardist.

KB: So did he just study on it? How did he figure that out?

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CP: Just learned by... accident [chuckles].

KB: By doin'?

CP: Yeah.

KB: Well I can tell that your husband was a very methodical man, because I've seen all those notes that he kept.

CP: Yes, we were married 63 years if I've got my arithmetic right. And even before I married him he was keepin' a daily diary. And he kept it every day until he passed away. And I've got all those books with everything in 'em, all the history here in Manson. He wrote down everything-- the weather, when the apples bloomed, when the apples were picked, the weather, and how many times he had to paddle the kids, so I'm takin' that out of some of 'em because I don't think nobody needs to know that [laughs].

KB: I think everyone should know that! [CP laughing] So do you ever go back and look at those?

CP: Yes, one of the girls was here this spring, from Arizona. She got the book out the year that her sister got married and she was one year younger, and being a teenager [chuckles], she said "Mom, I can't believe I was ever that bad!" But it's down in black and white! [chuckles]

KB: [laughs] Now I can see where your kids wouldn't want you to leave some of that stuff in... but don't let them get ahold of it!

CP: Uh-uh.

KB: So did you... you sold pretty much everything you grew, except for your garden that you kept for yourself?

CP: Oh yeah, we sold all the apples.

(30:00)

KB: And you always belonged to a co-op of some kind?

CP: Yeah. And we had a group that came from Spokane, a Seventh Day Adventist group of... I guess it was grade school college kids and they'd come over every fall, a whole bunch of 'em and they'd pick up apples that fell on the ground during... the pickers would drop a lot. They'd take 'em home and make cider and make apple stuff out of 'em. Bins of 'em. So they never went to waste.

KB: That's something... And I know that you canned a lot?

CP: Yes, I did. [inaudible]

KB: That's a lot of hot work.

CP: Nothing like an old home-canned tomato.

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KB: Yes honey, I canned yesterday! [CP laughs] I did, I made pickles yesterday.

CP: I loved it, but I'm... kinda can't do that anymore.

KB: That is hard work! It is hard work!

CP: Yeah... but doesn't it look pretty on the shelf!

KB: Oh isn't it nice to have those jars lined up, all labeled and pretty? And you just know that in the middle of winter you're going to taste what a peach tastes like in the middle of summertime. Yeah.

CP: [laughs]

KB: So do your children and grandchildren do those things the same way that you did them?

CP: Uh, my oldest daughter cans... some. But the middle one doesn't and the younger one doesn't and I don't think any of the grandkids do. One wants to learn but we don't get together to do it. But... It's fun!

KB: It is fun. It used to be something... Do you have memories like I do of all the women being in the kitchen in the summertime?

CP: Oh yes, friendly and socializing and...

KB: And you get a lot of work done.

CP: Oh, yes.

KB: More hands.

CP: Yes. I've canned, let's see, about 5 canners, that'd be about 35 quarts of peaches a day, that's a big job.

KB: Yes it is.

CP: Well on top of that I was foreman out in the orchard, in harvest. I'd drive a tractor and I'd haul the apples bins into where his truck was and he'd load 'em on the truck and take 'em to the co-op.

KB: Did you all load those bins by hand or did you have a forklift?

CP: Oh no, tractor with a lift on. They weighed a ton. Yeah, and I'd oversee the crew and I was the one that... [chuckles] when we got done we didn't want any partial bins, we wanted 'em all filled when we left the field. And I had to run the tractor between here and there and get 'em all straight so they'd help each other finish a bin. And, oh, great days, I wish I could still do it!

KB: Really? You miss it!

CP: Yeah... never regretted being a farmer!

Suggested citation:

Gathering Our Voice, 2010, Initiative for Rural Innovation & Stewardship, www.gatheringourvoice.org

KB: Well you got one farmer out of your group of kids! You got one!

CP: Yeah [laughs].

KB: That's pretty good.

CP: Yeah.

KB: So how did you learn to take care of the land? Who taught you to take care of your land?

CP: Mostly it came through magazines and books, and Trout had a meeting ever so often. And we had field men that came out and taught us how... and of course Paul taught them too, but [laughs].

KB: Yeah?

CP: And that's how it...

KB: So just kind of shared knowledge? And you really had to keep up with that stuff because things changed?

CP: Oh yes. And today's worse. Keepin' records. And I don't suppose anybody ever looks at 'em after you keep 'em.

KB: Now that you have to tell exactly which tree gives you which apple. I don't know how people are going to be able to do that.

CP: It's like my sister, she's in the cow business. And they got about 700 cows and they got a name for every one of 'em... that's pretty good, isn't it?

KB: Do they brand them with their name? [laughs]

CP: [laughing] No, they get an ear tag I guess.

KB: So what's gone from here that you miss?

CP: Oh, the friendliness. If you want to be... feel friendly, you talk to the old-timers, they haven't lost that. But the young people are too busy. And we're all in a race to get everything done and we're not getting much done anymore! We're in too big a hurry. Yeah, I miss that. And of course...

KB: You think everyone's life is a lot more complicated now?

CP: Yeah. When I was a-growing up... I mean, after I got married... you didn't have to decide if you wanted a boy or girl, you just took what you got. Everybody got married and everybody had kids. Now you've got a choice and you've got to figure that out too, and that's quite a problem.

KB: [laughs]

CP: I had three girls, I didn't have no boys. Everybody says "Oh my goodness, no boys?" I said, "Oh, I found out you get boys soon enough if you've got girls!"

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KB: That's right! [laughs] It's kind of like sugar and flies, isn't it?

CP: Mm-Hmm.

KB: Do you think that the food you grew and ate when you were younger, it tasted better, was better food than it is now? Or do you think it's the same?

(35:00)

CP: Yeah, it's just like I said about the old common Delicious apples, best one we ever had. There's not been a new one beat it. But people had to have color on the skin. Take it home, peel the skin off... you've got an old tater! It tastes kind of like an old tater. People just don't realize just how good the commons were.

KB: You know, I think that about corn sometimes. Because I grow a lot of corn. And you know how corn used to have a really corny taste, and nowadays they just want it to taste like sugar. So it has to be just real, real sweet. But I think you lost a lot of that corn flavor. You know.

CP: Oh yeah, I do too.

KB: Just trying to make it suit the market I guess.

CP: Everything's picked too green anymore, it isn't picked for flavor.

KB: That's the truth.

CP: And they don't want it to get bruised, I guess, but.

KB: Well nobody wants a spot on anything.

CP: Mm-hmm.

KB: Yeah. And if you've ever gardened, and you've gardened more than anybody, you know—there's spots on stuff! Doesn't hurt anything.

CP: No, no I never had any trouble raisin' zucchini and nobody else ever did either. [KB laughs] Except my daughter. She lives down close to Atlanta and she's planted zucchini three years and she gets the blooms but she never gets a zucchini and she can't figure it out and I can't either. And I said, well my main problem was how do you plant half a hill?

KB: That's right!

CP: That's all you need is half a hill. [laughs]

KB: You know it is, every year you say, I'm not going to plant that much squash again!

CP: That's right, she says she's done tryin'!

KB: That's funny, I never heard of anybody not... I mean squash is what.

CP: I never heard of a zucchini that wouldn't produce.

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KB: That's right! It's kind of like midway through summer you're like "STOP!" [laughs]

CP: There's a male bloom and a female bloom. And I've hand-pollenized them sometimes when I thought they wasn't going to set on good. But I had a sister-in-law, came from Indiana. She would pick those blooms off and rinse 'em in water and dip 'em in flour and fry 'em in butter, and I'm telling you it beat any tater chip I ever had in my life.

KB: Aren't those good? Did you ever do it with pumpkin blossoms?

CP: Yeah, squash or pumpkins.

KB: Oh boy, I like those pumpkins ones, they are delicious. But there's something about me that won't let me do it very often because I think I'm cheating the fruit somehow. I don't know, seems crazy.

CP: [laughs] They're kind of a treat all right.

KB: Yup. Well is there anything you'd just like to tell people about your life and farming? Or any observation to sign off?

CP: Well it's kind of like I went to the Trout meetings and I'd get up and speak once in a while when I'd seen things I didn't like. And some old woman come over from the other side of the mountains and she turned around and said "What are you gripin' about? You've got it so much better than we had it over there!" And I says, "I know it, and that's why I'm gripin', is to keep it better than over there."

KB: There you go. Well I know you've had a tremendous influence around here, you really have. Everybody knows who you are, that's for sure.

CP: Well I'm pretty windy, I said my legs ain't no good, but my mouth's gettin' stronger and... [telephone rings loudly]... there goes my telephone, I'm hard of hearing too.

KB: [laughs] Well, I'll get that for you and we'll stop right here.

CP: You can just turn it off.

KB: That's okay...

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