

Gathering Our Voice

Interviewee: Gene Weimerskirch

Interviewed by: Nancy Warner

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NW: I did want to talk about food systems, during your life and also what you learned from you parents and what they learned from their parents. What was the source of most of your family's food?

(0:03:40) GW: A lot of it was grown here on the farm. We had pigs for pork and we had cattle, of course, milk cows as well as beef cattle. My mother was real good at canning things. She even canned meat, like the beef. Also, of course, they always had a big butchering bee in the wintertime and butchered several pigs and cured the ham and bacon. We had a basement in the house where they put all the canned stuff and hung the hams and the bacon – cured it and then smoked it. It was well preserved. As I recall, most of that meat lasted until the next butchering time in the next winter. The canned beef was canned as I remember in quart jars and it was well preserved and lasted well. Of course, we had poultry – chickens and eggs. So we were never really without plenty of food.

NW: Could you tell me a little bit about this butchering bee, what that looked like? How many families were involved?

GW: Usually there would be at least two families that would get together. We had a large – they called it a scalding vat – that they'd build a fire under. It was an outside thing. They'd kill the pigs and put them one at a time in this vat and get the water temperature up to the right temperature and then roll the pig out onto a table and, I guess they called it, scraping the hair off of the pig. They had a framework that they would hang them outside in. Of course, they always hoped it would be a nice day. A few times the weather didn't cooperate but they still seemed to always manage to get the job done. They would cut the meat up and start the process of curing it and all this stuff. Sometimes they'd work practically all night after butchering a bunch of pigs to get all the meat taken care of. (0:06:44)

NW: Who did the actual butchering? Who cut the animal up?

GW: My father did most of it. There was an old gentleman that lived down the road. He was an old bachelor. He considered himself to be a sort of veterinary. He was real handy at helping with things like that and he would be insulted if you didn't ask him to come and help. Of course I think he always liked to come get those home-cooked meals. He'd work right alongside of my parents and they'd work most of the night on that day when they had butchered all these pigs, getting the meat safely taken care of to the point where they could go ahead and process it. (0:07:36)

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NW: So how many pigs would they kill on one of these days?

GW: They'd probably kill as many as ten pigs.

NW: Would that be for one family or two?

GW: That would be mostly for one family.

NW: So your father was doing the butchering and he was helped by the neighbor. What was everybody else doing? You, as a kid, what was your job?

(0:08:04) GW: I liked to help scrape the hair off the pigs. They'd give me a tool which was sort of like a big, I guess the way to describe it would be like a big cleaver only it was pretty sharp and you could just grab it with both hands. It had handles on it and you'd just scrape the hair off. It came off quite easily after the pig being in that scalding vat.

NW: How long would the pig stay in that scalding vat after it was killed and then it was dropped in there.

GW: They dropped it in and leave it in there and roll it around. They put ropes around it and one person on each side and they'd roll it back and forth. I don't recall the amount of time but it didn't seem like it took very long until you could just reach down and start pulling the hair off. Well then they knew it was ready to roll out and actually complete the job of taking the hair off of them.

NW: How old were you when you started this scraping job?

(0:09:12) GW: I was probably six or seven years old.

NW: What other jobs were going on? Somebody had to kill the pigs. Would the butcher kill the pigs too?

GW: Usually my dad would do the killing and then of course after the scalding and the hair removal was done they'd hang them up on this framework and remove the insides. That was the first stage of getting them prepared for cutting up.

NW: What did they do with all of the intestines and everything?

GW: Well as I recall, most of the intestines were not used. However, in those days, the small intestines – they'd turn them inside out and clean them – went through quite a cleaning process. They'd use those for stuffing full of sausage. They were very careful to be sure they were totally sanitary, you know. As I say, they'd turn them inside out. I don't recall exactly what they used to

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be sure that they were thoroughly cleaned, but they didn't have plastic casings and all those things in those days to put the sausage in. Then from there, of course, when the sausage was in those, they had a smoke house and they'd hang it in the smoke house and smoke it for I'm guessing probably at least a month – the smoked sausage and, of course, the hams and the bacon too. (0:11:10)

NW: Back to the process, the animal is hanging on this frame, the entrails are taken out and then the rest of it is cut up into hams and so on.

GW: That's correct.

NW: What about the feet? What happened to the feet?

GW: Well they'd make pickled pigs feet. They had some rather large containers that they put those in to pickle them. I remember having pickled pigs feet and beans with them. There was very little wasted. They saved the liver and the heart and even the brain or the head – they would make head cheese out of the head. That was another process that took some skill and I can't tell you exactly what the process was. But it was a big job, it probably took at least two or three weeks before they had all of this procedure done.

NW: It sounds like a lot of work.

GW: It was. It was a lot of work. As I say, that first day they'd work most of the night to be sure they had all of the meat taken care of to the point where it was safe, as far as keeping it clean and out of the weather and all that.

NW: What time of year was that?

GW: It was usually in February, as I remember when they would do this. (0:13:03)

NW: It was critical to keep the meat cold during this process.

GW: Yeah. They didn't have refrigeration in those days like we do now. Mother Nature was their refrigerator.

NW: How did they choose which pigs to slaughter?

GW: They preferred the pigs that weighed from 200 to 250 pound. They were not real old pigs. They were just young pigs. In order to get the maximum amount of ham size that was desirable they decided they'd pick pigs out of the litter and we had quite a few pigs in those days.

NW: Prior to slaughtering, what would you feed your pigs?

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GW: Well they fed them grain and of course we had milk cows and they would run the milk through a separator and the cream was sold and the skim milk was fed mostly to the pigs. We had a mill to grind the grain that we fed to the pigs. That was another chore that had to be done quite often because we had enough pigs that they ate a lot of grain. (0:14:37)

NW: Tell me something about that mill. How big was that mill?

GW: The first I remember of it was it was run by an engine out of an old Model-T Ford. Then, as time progressed, they powered it with a Model-A next. I think that Model-A engine probably completed the years of use that it had those days. They had a mill house which was just an out building that was used exclusively for this feed grinder. It had enough room in it so they could grind quite a bit of grain at one time and, of course, everything was put in sacks in those days. My older brother did a lot of that. He was 16 years older than I was. He did a lot of the feed grinding. In fact he made a little extra money by doing some grinding for the neighbors around too. (0:15:59)

NW: So it's a house and it has some sort of funnel that you would pour the wheat into?

GW: Yeah. The mill had a big hopper on it. They'd dump the wheat out of the sacks into the hopper. They hung a sack under the mill again to catch the grain. They would probably grind maybe a hundred pounds of grain into each sack and tie the sack and, of course, set it off to the side. That's the way they operated those days.

NW: We're so isolated from all this food processing now. It's a little hard for me to picture all this because I've never seen it. You pull out a Cuisinart now and pour in clean wheat grains to make flour. Some people do that. But you're talking about having wheat that was harvested from your farm with all the chaff that would come with it. You had to clean the chaff before it was stored?

(0:17:16) GW: See they had early day combines that threshed the grains similar to what they do nowadays. Only, of course, they were much smaller machines and the grain was clean enough that they didn't have to reprocess it before they ground it.

NW: The grinding stone, what was it like?

GW: Actually it wasn't a stone. They called it burrs in the middle that ground the grain. They were made of hard metal. The early day mills, way back, they were grinding stones. But these were all steel.

NW: Do you know where you would get parts like that. Was it common for farms around here to have their own mill?

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GW: Well not everybody had one. Because, as I say, some of the neighbors would bring grain over to have it ground. The mill, I think, was made by International Harvester. I think the name on it was McCormick Deering, which of course was an early International Harvester company and they later merged with International Harvester.

NW: So it was a metal structure with burrs, with sort of rough spots in it that would actually grind.

GW: Yeah, they'd turn and the grain would go in between those and they'd grind. They even cleaned it up sometimes and made some flour with it. But it was kind of a coarse flour. We didn't really care too much for the bread that was baked from it.

NW: Yes, that would be very, very hearty bread. So mostly you ground the wheat to feed it to the pigs.

GW: Yes and also for chicken feed. And, they would also feed some grain to the cattle, like if they were fattening a steer. They'd want to give it a little extra grain. (0:19:41)

NW: Before we leave the wheat, where did you get most of the flour that you would use for making bread?

GW: My parents would buy it. Well some of the small towns around had mills that they ground flour. In the fall I remember them buying several sacks of flour and bringing it in. They had a room upstairs in the old house where they stored it. So it would stay nice and dry. They also liked to keep the flour over about a year before they actually used it. They said it made better bread. I don't know exactly why, but that's the way they liked to do it. Of course, my parents had had experience. They were quite young when they came from Luxembourg but they'd had experience over there of going through all these processes of preserving food and creating the flour that they needed and things like that. Over there they had a mill that did grind the grain with stone grinds. It was on a stream. It was powered by water power. Of course, I never got to see it but I did get to see the old home where my dad was born and grew up, several years ago when one of our sons was in the service over there in Germany and Luxembourg, of course, is just a hop and a skip across the border from where he was stationed. He was stationed at Zwiebrucken Germany. (0:21:42)

NW: That's great that you got to go back there to Luxembourg.

GW: Up on the wall, there's a picture

NW: Of the house that's in Luxembourg?

GW: Yeah. Doug, that's our son that was in the Air Force. He and I are standing in front of the house there. It was built in 1674 by some of our ancestors and I haven't kept in touch but I assume – well at that time I had a first cousin still living in the old house and I didn't get to meet

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her because she was gone someplace for the holidays but we did get to see the outside of the house and get our picture taken in front of it.

NW: Wheat, two different kinds of wheat. You would buy the flour from these mills. Now what towns were these mills in? Do you remember?

GW: I think the little town of Mansfield had a mill at that time. I can't recall the name – they had names for all these and I don't remember what they called some of these flours. The flour sacks, they didn't waste anything. They used the flour sacks. A lot of times they'd have print on them and stuff and I remember some of the women making work dresses out of the flour sacks. And they made a pretty nice dress, really.

NW: I bet some of those logos really were quite artistic.

GW: They were. They had designs on them. Most of them had flowers or something like that. I assume the probably had the sacks made some place where they made things like that and shipped them into these various little mills around the country.

NW: Did you know of anybody locally who was an artist who designed flour sacks?

GW: No, I didn't really. I'm not saying there wasn't someone. But that was just a little bit removed from the farm here.

NW: I know that people made their own apple labels around here so I wondered if they made their own wheat labels. Have you seen any old flour sacks around?

GW: I haven't seen a flour sack for years. I wish that we had preserved some of them.

NW: I was wondering if there were any at the museum. It would be great if we had some.

GW: Probably, someone may have some, if you did some inquiring. There may be possibly that some of the families. I have a sister that lives in Wenatchee and she's older than I am but I doubt very much that she would have anything like that but there is that possibility. I'll ask her and maybe she knows of somebody that would.

NW: I'm just thinking of how appealing it would be to have a dress made out of flour sacks now. It would be a designer dress.

GW: It would be really something. This sewing machine here was my mother's sewing machine. They did a lot of sewing on it. They made a lot of clothes, like dresses and aprons and things of that sort. I can remember my sister making clothes on it. She was just a girl at the time but she was pretty good at that. (0:25:38)

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NW: That's a real skill. I'm going to go back to some of these other things that you mentioned. We talked about the pigs and that's really interesting. One thing I wanted to follow up on that before we leave pigs. I'm German and I really like sausage and all these things too. How many hams would you get out of a 250 pound pig?

GW: Of course, a pig has two hams and two shoulders. In between were the slabs of bacon that they'd get out of the carcass. They'd cut the slabs into a piece probably about so square and they'd string a piece of twine through one end of it to hang it by. The hams, I think they also did put twine through the hock part of the ham to hang it by as I remember. Had one occasion one year, my brother who was 16 years older than I was working in a field down the road here. He didn't know my parents were gone and of course I was gone with them and I guess my sister was too. He saw these people carrying some things out of the house and he just assumed it was some neighbors that came by and the folks were giving them something. But then when they left they drove down the road south of here and went right by where he was working and they waved at him and he waved back. When my parents got home, they were people who we didn't know. They'd just come by and found no one home and went in the house and stole a bunch of stuff. They took several hams out of the basement and they took some clothes out of the closets and various other things. By the time we knew about it, why nobody knew where they'd gone to. They didn't have a lot of communication in those days to have the sheriff run down a car. Of course all my brother knew was that it was a Model-T Ford touring car and there was probably four or five people in it. But he didn't recognize any of them or anything so they never did catch them. Fortunately they didn't take all of the meat. Of course they probably didn't have room for all of the stuff but they did take quite a bit of stuff. They took various things out of the cupboards like extracts and things that they baked with. They took canned fruit out of the basement. They took quite a bit of stuff. They were pretty well loaded when they left.

NW: So you'd get two big hams. You wouldn't cut it up into smaller hams? You would just smoke it as two big hams per pig? Then the shoulder roasts and bacon?

GW: There was quite a bit of bacon of the slabs in between. I think they referred to it as a side of bacon.

NW: Whose job was it to feed these pigs?

(0:29:37) GW: Well, I got in on that quite a bit, as a kid. And, I recall, usually when there was a litter of pigs there would be one runt in the bunch. They called it a runt because it wasn't as big as the rest of them. And I recall one runt that my dad, I think he didn't think it was going to make it, it was probably so small and delicate that he probably thought it would die anyway. But he said well I'll give you that pig if you can raise it. Of course, I made quite a pet out of it. It got to where when it would see me out in the barnyard it would come running and I would give it a little milk or some grain or something and it turned out to be the biggest pig of the litter, actually. Called it Wiggy. As I say, it was a real pet. It would follow me all around the place when I was out. I sold it. There was an old gentleman that would buy pigs and other livestock and haul them

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to Seattle. I sold it to him. I assume that he made a few bucks off of it because I only got six dollars out of a grown pig.

NW: What year was that?

GW: It was probably sometime in the early 30s, 1930s. Of course, by comparison of today's prices things were pretty cheap those days. But I'm sure that he probably doubled his money on it.

NW: Yes, I'm sure, taking it to the city. That's interesting about your parents buying the wheat flour and storing it for a year before using it to make bread. Do you know other people around here who did that or do you think that was a practice your folks brought from?

GW: It was probably a practice that they brought from Europe. And, there must have been something to it because they always wanted to have that year-old flour. Mother said it made better bread.

NW: Is there anything else on the wheat growing or processing that you think would be of interest to people nowadays who are thinking about getting local mills going again? If we were to do something like that what would you think people would need to consider?

GW: I just don't think it would be accepted because there was a lot of work to it and these big mills can do such great volume now that people don't like to do all that much hand work anymore like they did back then. (0:33:07)

NW: Well how about even if we had more local mills, like if we had a mill in Bridgeport, or one in Wenatchee, or one in Coulee City? People would have to store their grain locally before they could take it to the mill. So could you tell me a little bit about how that used to happen? Did you have grain storage at all here? Or, did you just grow grain that you would grind to feed the chickens and the pigs?

GW: That basically is what they did. We had a fairly large grain bin down here behind the barn that they stored the grain that they were going to keep on the farm. Of course, they did store quite a bit in sacks too. The barn that we had had two bins in it. That was another interesting thing that happened. We had an old Model-T Ford truck and I worked real hard because I liked to drive the truck in from the fields when they'd pick up the sacks. Then we'd put the sacked grain in these bins and dump it there in the bulk. Of course, I remember one occasion when I backed the truck out I got a little bit close to the corner of the bin and I pushed the wall out a little ways and the grain started running out on the ground. It didn't occur to me that the grain could be picked up and saved again. I thought, oh boy, I'm really going to be in trouble now because I knocked the corner out of that bin. My older brother came and he started laughing at me because I was about to be in tears and stuffed some sacks into the gap where the grain was running out and went and got a jack and jacked it back into place. Of course we picked up the grain and it wasn't wasted, but I thought it was. (0:35:17)

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NW: What other kinds of cooperative food processing went on in this area? You talked about the pigs. What did you call that again when a couple of families would get together.

GW: Well they'd have what I called a butchering bee and I think that's what they referred to it as in those days.

NW: How about cattle? Did you do that with cattle?

GW: We'd usually butcher one or two at a time and that was just something the family did on their own pretty much.

NW: Would you butcher your dairy cattle when they got to be a certain age?

GW: They didn't often butcher the real dairy cattle because they didn't make as good a beef. They usually had some Herfords or some of the more beef-line cattle that they used for their meat. The dairy cattle, if they didn't want to keep them, they usually ended up selling them to a cattle buyer. There was quite a few cattle buyers around the country. Some farmers that considered cattle buyers and they would come and buy them. Sometimes they had old trucks, not old for those days but they were old trucks what we would call, and they would haul them, as I remember, into Spokane to the stockyards and sell them through the stockyards. I remember this one old guy he'd buy some cattle from my dad and take them into the stockyards and he'd come back and he'd say: oh, I lost money on that load, I lost money. Of course Dad didn't necessarily believe him anyway. After this happened five or six times, he came and wanted to buy cattle and Dad said: gee I don't think I'm going to sell you anymore cattle. He said why? Well, he said, I don't want to cause you to go broke, you loose so much money on them.

NW: How about if we talk a little bit about some seasonal activities? We've already talked about how you would butcher the hogs in winter. What were some other main activities related to food production in the winter?

GW: Well, they had chickens the year around and they would get quite a few eggs, more eggs than we could use for the family. So, they would take them to town every so often and trade them in for groceries. Of course I didn't do it, because I was just a kid, but I can remember them taking some pretty good sized crates. They'd put the eggs in these little cartons in a case then they had a box that they'd put them in, probably about this square and they'd take several dozen eggs at a time to the store where they'd trade them in for groceries. The grocer then, in turn, sold eggs to the city folks. (0:39:12)

NW: How would your family get cash - selling a cow to the guy that comes buy, the cattle buyer or selling eggs? What other means did you have for generating cash?

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GW: Well the cattle buyer usually paid in cash. When they'd sell cream – there was a place in Coulee City that I remember where you could take the cream to. From there I don't know just where it went. But they would take it there and I think they got a check for that. Later, there was a couple of traveling buyers that came through, like Metamore Dairy and they'd sell the cream. They'd put it in five gallon cans and this guy would come through about twice a week and pick up the cream. He didn't give them a check directly but he'd usually, when he came back the next trip he'd have a check for them with him. He had a truck that he hauled ice cream on too. I always made a point in the summertime of being out there to greet him when he'd come after the cream and quite often he'd give me an ice cream bar or something. Of course, we had ice boxes and sometimes they'd buy a couple of quarts of ice cream from him and put it in the ice box if he came by before lunch or dinner and then we'd have ice cream for lunch or for dinner. Some of those truckers had big blocks of ice they'd sell too. And when they'd have a special occasion like the last day of school or something, they had these ice cream freezers that you cranked and they'd make homemade ice. That was quite an event in those days. All the neighborhood would come to the last day of school and they'd have a big picnic and freeze ice cream and everybody would visit and I had a great time.

NW: Where was school? Where did you go to school?

GW: I went to a little country school the first eight years that I was in school. It was across the field here a couple of miles and I'd usually ride horse back to school. A couple of other kids that came from different directions, we'd usually meet about midway and ride our horses to school. They had a barn at the school that we'd put the horses in for the day. In the wintertime, when I was smaller, my parents quite often boarded the school teacher and he would take a sleigh and pick up a lot of the kids on the way to school. That was a fun deal too.

NW: Did you have anyway to cut and store your own ice for use in summer?

GW: We did cut some ice. But we didn't have a good enough storage room. It didn't last – well, maybe into May sometimes. But by that time the weather had gotten too warm and the ice had melted.

NW: When the ice guy came by that was really important to your family. You had a root cellar too, where you kept meat cool?

GW: Oh, yes. Part of the basement was kind of off to the side and it had a separate room that they could keep a lot cooler than the rest of the basement. That was where they usually hung the hams and things too. And, as I remember, the canned fruit and other canned things that Mother canned would be kept in that room too.

NW: Did your family learn anything about drying native plants from the Indians? Like roots or herbs or anything?

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GW: I think they did. This was before I was born. They had an Indian man that worked for them one year. I think he taught them some things about drying some of the plants and things. But I don't know very much about it because it was before I was born.

NW: No one really passed that down to you as something you should remember?

GW: No, not really, no.

NW: Besides storing the flour for a year before using it for bread and the basic sort of butchering and sausage making, were there particular types of foods or methods that your parents traced back to Luxembourg that you grew with?

GW: Well I'm sure that a lot of the things that they did were things that they learned as kids back in the old country. One was making sauerkraut. They'd chop the cabbage up and put it in great big huge stone crocks and I guess they salted it down and whatever it took to make good sauerkraut. It was good sauerkraut. And it kept the year around, as I remember. (0:46:08)

NW: So in the root cellar you'd have a good crock of sauerkraut all the time and you'd also have that crock of pickled pigs feet.

GW: Yeah, they did.

NW: How about any special cheeses or any kinds of dairy products besides cream and eggs, which you've already talked about.

GW: There was a cheese that they made. I don't remember really liking it too well and I don't remember exactly the process it went through to make it but I know they had it in pretty good sized bricks. I think they used it more in cooking, like mix a little cheese in with the noodles and things like that. But I can't tell you a lot about it because that ended in later years as the commercial cheese and things were more available.

NW: It wasn't anything your family made and then sold or gave away as gifts at Christmas.

GW: No they didn't sell it. They did sell butter. They made butter and that was another job I had sometimes when I was a kid, churning the butter. They'd go through this process of working it. They made some really nice butter. They did sell some of that to the grocer.

NW: With butter – did they have sort of imprint that would brand it as coming from your family. Was it decorative or any brands like that?

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GW: No, I don't remember them branding it in any manner. It was in cubes, pretty good sized, probably a pound or so in a cube. As I say, it was excellent butter – tasted really good with homemade bread and jam and stuff. It was home canned jam too. (048:24)

NW: Where did you get your fruit? Down off the river?

GW: Yes, we got the fruit down at Bridgeport. There again, there was an old gentleman that during the summertime, he'd come through every two weeks or so and have fresh fruit to sell. That was another occasion that I always looked forward to as a kid because, in season, like whatever he had like peaches, cherries, pears, plums, and things like that. And, also some of the fruits like cantaloupe and things like that that he would come through with in season. (0:49:15)

NW: So this has always been a major travel route between the river and the coulee?

GW: Yes, one of the main roads. Of course, when I was a kid, it was just a gravel road but it was still one of the main routes.

NW: When you were a kid, a lot of people were obviously using horses still, but as cars and trucks began to come along, people still used horses for a long time out here, didn't they? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

GW: Yes, in the early days they hauled their grain that they sold on wagons generally either to Coulee City or Mansfield. We were about an equal distance here. In 1926 was when they bought a Model-T Ford truck and hauled the grain on it. Dad said that in the wintertime when there was snow on the ground he would tie two sleighs together and haul sack grain usually to Coulee because it was more downhill. That was an all day trip and sometimes they'd stay overnight in Coulee City and come back the next day empty. Of course quite often they'd bring back something, like maybe if they were fixing up a building or something they'd bring back some building material. Or, maybe bring back some building material for one of the neighbors.

NW: So you had neighbors all around you, the whole time you were growing up?

GW: Yes, the neighbors, well they'd already gone through the process of the homesteaders, a lot of them leaving the country and of course the neighbors would take over that land. The country wasn't as populated as I remember it had been in the earlier years. One time there was a homesteader on every quarter section. They just couldn't make a living on that small amount. (0:51.45)

NW: Let's move into some stewardship questions. For you, and I suppose this is more in your adult years because when you're a kid you're not really thinking about these things, but what were the biggest challenges in managing your farm? Do you refer to it as a farm or a ranch or both?

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GW: Well, we called it the ranch because it was a combination of livestock and mostly wheat growing. Of course, not only did they grow wheat, but they grew some oats and some barley and other things like that too, and rye.

NW: Well let's go back to those crops. Those are interesting and then we'll come back to the stewardship challenges. What did they grow the rye for?

GW: It was used for feed too for the livestock. I think one of the reasons they grew rye in those days was because it would produce a crop in the drier years where sometimes the wheat was almost a failure. For the wheat in some of those dry years, of course a lot of that was because of the farming methods. They couldn't preserve the moisture like we do now. So quite often the wheat would be grown in the low spots where there was some spring run off most years and that soil was wetter and of course, usually the soil is a little deeper in those low spots too so it would produce wheat. The rye was grown on some of the higher ground. The oats and the barley were usually grown in the low spots too because of, as I say, the moisture problem.

NW: Was the barely also grown to supplement the feed for the animals?

GW: Yes. (0:54:04)

NW: Did you make beer?

GW: No. I never knew of them making beer. And I don't know what kind of process they would have to go through to make the beer. I really don't know. There probably were some people that made home brew but my parents they liked to have maybe a bottle of beer maybe on a rare occasion but they were not drinkers.

NW: Did you use the oats for your family, or was that just for the animals?

GW: The oats were for the horses. That's what they liked to feed the horses.

NW: So you really had a lot of crops. You were managing the rye, wheat, oats and barley. The only one that you were really growing to – well really you would trade the wheat, it was a cash crop. So you weren't really directly eating any of those grains.

GW: Not very often. Like I say, occasionally they would clean up that mill and grind a little bit of home grown flour but it was rather coarse.

NW: Back to the stewardship challenges. You just talked about one of them, that's moisture management of the soil. That's really interesting. I wish we had pictures of what that looked like. Arial photos of those kinds of farms would have been probably really pretty and interesting. Was that a common practice or was that something unique to your family – to use the hollows for the wheat and the oats?

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GW: I think most farmers did the same thing. It was just a matter of survival – where you could grow a halfway decent crop. Of course the crops in those days, by today's comparison were really low yields. There was a lot of hand work. I sometimes marvel at how we got the work all done. Of course they usually had hired men that helped too – seasonal men. I remember some of the neighbor young men that were happy to make a dollar a day. They'd come and help for a few days. I remember one young guy. Times were tough and he was about out of clothes to wear. When he came to work for us his clothes were all ragged and that's all he had to wear. As soon as he made a couple of bucks, why he got some new overalls and a shirt. Shoes were a very important item too. His shoes were worn clear through the soles, as I remember. He was just tickled to death to get a job and make a few dollars.

NW: How about weeds? Did you have much of a problem with weeds?

GW: The Russian thistle and some of the other weeds were a problem. The Russian thistle, we called them tumble weeds, they didn't have the method to cultivate the soil to keep the weeds down so quite often they'd get pretty big. Then they'd take a drag, a couple of cables with weights tied onto it and a horse on each end and drag those weeds loose. Then the wind would blow and they'd blow up against the fences. Sometimes they'd blow so much pressure against the fence that it would actually lift the fence posts out of the ground and the fence would be out in the road. I can remember as a little kid that we would drive through the fields sometimes to get places because the road was full of weeds and the fence was in the road. (0:58:46)

NW: So in the middle of winter, if your fence is uprooted, are you going to leave that fence until spring or are you going to try and fix it?

GW: Well, they would repair the most essential part of it but sometimes it had to be left until spring.

NW: Where were the cattle? Does your ranch include some range land, some shrub-steppe?

GW: Yes, there was rangeland – mostly grown up to sage brush and bunch grass. A lot of it was land that had been a farm and had been abandoned when the homesteaders left the country. They just left it and it grew back to sage brush and grass of various kinds. There was a lot of free pasture in the country. We'd let the cattle out and it was my job, when I got old enough, to go round up the cattle in the evening. Sometimes they'd be as much as three miles from home. A lot of times it was dark before I got home with them.

NW: So you'd round them up and bring them to a different part of the pasture?

GW: No, we'd bring them home because they milked a lot of the cows that we sent out to graze. We'd bring them home and milk that evening and milk in the morning and then turn them out again. In the wintertime they had to be kept up and fed. I can remember that I sued to go out in

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the evening sometimes and the coyotes would be howling and I would imitate them. I got pretty good at imitating them. I remember one night, I was imitating this coyote and I thought, gee, it sounds like he's getting awful close. There were some clouds around all at once the moon came out from behind the clouds and I think he was about ten feet from the horse. It kind of gave me a thrill. (1:01:10)

NW: It was a lot of work to get all those horses harnessed, well of course you talked about riding a horse to school. When did your family convert from using horses for plowing to a tractor?

GW: About 1936 they bought the first tractor. They had a lot of horses and that's how they paid for the first tractor. They traded horses in. There was a horse buyer that came around with the tractor salesman and he'd buy the horses. I imagine that a lot of those horses probably went someplace to a slaughter house for horse meat. I don't know where they went from here. Of course, they probably went someplace where they were still using a lot of horses for work horses too.

NW: Yeah, some places used them through the 40s. You really were on the main road. Everybody came through here to sell things and trade. That's probably what happened to a lot of horses in Douglas County then.

GW: Yes, I'm sure.

NW: Thinking about horses and your cattle. You especially had the dairy cattle in the barn so you could milk them. So you had some fertilizer – manure. How did you manage that? How did you use it?

GW: They had a manure spreader and they'd take it out and clean the barns and spread it out on the fields.

NW: Which fields would you fertilize? Would you rotate it or would you just focus more on the oats?

GW: They would try to put the fertilizer on the shallow spots in the fields to build up the soil. The spreader was ground powered, of course, and they'd hook a team of horses to it. It had a couple of revolving wheels on it that kicked this manure out the back and spread it out fairly evenly on the ground.

NW: You'd let it dry quite a bit before you'd do that?

GW: Well, not necessarily because the spreader would spread it and it mixed down to the soil when they plowed it with the old mold board plows. (1:04:12)

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NW: In the wintertime though when the fields were snow covered, did you have to stockpile the manure?

GW: They would stockpile it, yeah.

NW: That would of course start heating up quite a bit.

GW: It would make steam, yeah.

NW: I guess that makes me think of different energy sources – going from horse power to kerosene and then gasoline. Could you talk a little bit about that? You mentioned earlier how the wheat mill ran off of a Model-T engine, so I'm assuming that ran on gasoline.

GW: Yes.

NW: But didn't people use kerosene in between?

GW: They used kerosene lights and then, of course, later graduated to gasoline lights. The gas lights made much better light than the kerosene lights. I can remember there was a school down the road where they had dances sometimes. This is kind of a humorous thing. Some of the guys of course would go to the dances and they'd have a jug and they'd go out and get a drink every so often. Another kid and I saw them go out. They'd have intermission and four or five of them would go out and they'd stand around in a circle and they'd tip up the jug. So, I don't know what we were going to do with it. I guess we thought we'd play a trick on them. We thought were getting the jug of liquor and we hid it. But after a while the gas lights started running out of gas and they went out to get some gas for the lights and it was gone. We'd got the wrong jug. It dawned on us what we'd done, so we waited until they went back in the hall. They were getting a little bit tipsy from sampling the other jug. We waited until they had gone back in the hall and we sneaked the jug back and put it in its place. And they came out and found it. One of them says, oh you're just too damn drunk, you couldn't find the jug. Of course, they never knew what we did.

NW: So that was at a dance.

GW: Yeah.

NW: So how did you and Flora meet?

GW: We met at a dance in Chelan. Of course this was modern times by comparison to back in the old days.

NW: When did you meet?

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GW: We met in 1945, just as World War II was ending. She had already signed up. She was going to go to nursing school. She had attended the University of Arkansas the previous year. Her parents came from Arkansas. She had a scholarship and went back to attend the university. Then we met. She had been going to go to nursing school but she changed her mind and we became engaged and were married the following March in 1946.

NW: Yeah, those dances. A lot of people met at those dances. Where was the place in Chelan where dances were held?

GW: I think they called it a dance pavilion. It was right on the lakeshore there at Chelan.

NW: Close to Campbells?

GW: Yeah, just down the street a short distance, as I remember. A neighbor kid and I, it was during harvest, and we were both hauling wheat to town. We met downtown and I don't how the conversation came up but anyway he said, why don't we go to Chelan tonight, to the dance? So we did. I took my car. I had a '41 Chevrolet at the time. And we met these two girls. Both couples got married. Well in fact they got married before we did. But their marriage didn't last. But ours did. (1:09:31)

NW: Yeah, you've been married a long time.

GW: It will be 60 years next March.

NW: I wanted to ask you a little bit about water and fire – two basic elements. What was the main source of water for your family here when your parents came?

GW: We had a drilled well. The old well still pumps water down here. But we don't use it for domestic use here. We have two other wells. We have sort of a community water system. One son lives down here and the other one up above us and we've got both these wells piped into the main line and everybody uses water off those two wells. The one well that we use water off of too, up here, was drilled in 1912, I think. 1908 or 1912, I think they said and it has pumped water ever since. And the other one down below that we don't use for domestic water was drilled about the same time. Later we drilled the main well, right out back here. We drilled it. It's the main well. It supplies the most water. The old wells originally pumped water for the livestock and things with what they called a reciprocating pump and also powered by wind power. They could power water either way, either with an old gasoline pump engine or with wind power. They seemed to always have enough water for the livestock. Of course, we didn't have lawns and things those days, like they do now to irrigate. I did, I was probably about 12 years old or so, I built a water tower. We put a tank up on top of it. In the summertime it was heated by the sun and during the hot weather the hired men and I would take showers from that water. We had one of the most modern homes in the country. It had modern plumbing, indoor plumbing and a pressure water system. It had a bathroom and everything in it. I remember the neighbor kids, one

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family in particular that lived down the road a couple of miles, they'd get the mail out here on the main road and they always had to go to the bathroom when they'd get here. Those kids, it was a novelty to them, I think. They'd come in: Mrs. Wimerskirt, can we use the bathroom? (1:12:54)

NW: Let's see – fire. Actually before we leave, were there any springs on your property or potholes that you'd use for watering the cattle?

GW: Yeah, there were some potholes where the run off water ran into them. I remember a couple of them, even during those dry years, usually lasted most of the year before they'd dry up. I remember my dad going out and digging a hole, after they dried up, he'd dig down probably seven or eight feet and slope it down to the water so the horses and the cattle could go down in there and get a drink. That was hard work too. I really don't know how they did all the work that they did. (1:13:55)

NW: Well they ate a lot of bread and butter and hearty foods, I guess. Okay, fire. Did you have periodic fires on your rangelands? Lightning fires?

GW: Occasionally, yes. That was a pretty serious thing those days because they didn't have fire fighting equipment like they do now. Sometimes it would burn acres and acres before it either went out due to a rainstorm or all the neighbors getting together and plowing around it and everybody taking shovels and wet sacks and stomping it out when it got to where they'd plowed a furrow. I remember going to several fires too and helping.

NW: When there was a fire, when you'd just see a plume of smoke, would everybody just kind of head that way?

GW: Yeah, they did. Of course, we had phones. A lot of the people had phones. They were sort of a makeshift phone line but they could call each other. The old crank phones, you know?

NW: Yeah, partly line phones?

GW: A party line, yeah.

NW: Everyone really was in touch with everyone.

GW: Yeah, they sure were. And, of course, there were some of the women in particular, they'd call them rubbernecks. They'd hear the phone ring, even if it wasn't their ring and they'd have to go listen. We had a central, up here at Sims corner. There was a lady named Clarabelle Gander. Clarabelle was the central.

NW: What does that mean?

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GW: Well, she would relay the phones then onto the main line. Like if you wanted to call Wenatchee or someplace, you'd call Clarabelle. You'd tell her who you wanted to call. Then she would plug in these plug-ins and hook you up to the main line. Everybody knew Clarabelle knew everybody's business because they knew she was listening in.

NW: Did you sometimes say hi Clarabelle?

GW: You know, kind of a humorous thing about that or sort of an interesting thing. Last fall during hunting season – she'd been married once before, I never knew what happened to her first husband but she'd been widowed apparently and she had two children then she remarried and she had another son. Anyway, of course, she also ran the post office there at old _____, she was the last post mistress.

NW: What was the name of the town?

GW: Mold, M-O-L-D, mold.

NW: Now who named that?

GW: I don't know. That name was given before my time.

NW: It seems like a west side name.

GW: Yeah, it does. I don't know how they arrived at the name of Mold. Anyway, last fall during hunting season these two guys drove in – talking about hunting, wanting to know if they could get permission to hunt. Finally one of them said, you don't remember us do you? And I said, well I probably should but I can't place you. Well I hadn't seen one of them for over 60 years. It was these two sons, they were half-brothers. As I say, the one I hadn't seen for over 60 years and the other for over 40 years, I suppose. The last time I remember seeing him was – their mother learned that I was going to Spokane and she asked, this one son lived up near Medical Lake, and she asked if she could ride with me to go see her son and I took her along with me. And that was the last time I'd remember seeing him.

NW: Well, that was probably pretty fun to see them.

GW: Yeah, we had some pretty good visits. Especially the older one was more. Well he was gone from home, I think, mostly from the time he was 16 years old on. He was older, of course. When he came back after World War II he started a service station in, can't think of the name, it's a big town over on the coast.

NW: Tacoma?

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GW: Yeah, Tacoma. Then he bought his own service station and had a service garage and a parking lot. Apparently he was quite successful and sold out then. As I say, he's older than I am but he's still in pretty good health and likes to go hunting. He told me how he got started in the business. He said he borrowed some money from an insurance company (1:19:42)

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