

Interview with Nancy Schroeder

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By: Kelsey Stucky

1. When and where were you born?

I was born on September 13, 1935, in Rino County, Kansas.

2. When you were my age, where were you living?

In the same house that I was born in.

3. Who was living in the house with you?

My mother and my father and my older brother and older sister.

Three more sisters later.

4. Describe the house you were living in.

It was built the same year I was born, and they moved into it shortly before I was born. It was across the street (I mean road) from my grandmother's house. They had lived with my grandmother before that. It was a large house with three bedrooms downstairs, a dining room, a living room, a sunroom where my mother had her sewing machine, and a hallway, and a bathroom downstairs, and then a full basement with a generator. So we had 32-volt electricity, which was a big thing in those days since that was before most rural people had electricity.

5. What did your parents do for a living?

My father was a farmer; my mother was a farm wife.

6. Tell me about what kind of classes you had in school?

Yes, it was a rural high school at Langdon High School, and we had Algebra and Geometry, and some had Trigonometry, not me, There was a Home Ec. Class

for the girls and a shop class for the boys where they made furniture and such, and we made dresses and such. Starting off with aprons, I believe. And then we had American History and English Literature, music, and band.

7. How did you get to school?

We had a school bus that picked us up in the morning and brought us home at night. Then it also picked up other farm children. We were about eight miles from the school so it was long. It took about an hour probably to get around to all the farms and to get to school both ways so we wasted a couple hours that way.

Although sometimes it was entertaining. One time the bus driver went off and left us and he was there early, so the next morning I was terribly embarrassed but my mother marched out to the bus and proceeded to tell him that we were on time and he was early and that he should never to do that again and he backed down completely. Now I'm kind of proud of her. At the time, I was embarrassed to death.

8. What was your daily life like?

We did have some chores. We gathered eggs and fed the chickens, saw that they had water, and we usually had a pig or two just for our own use and we had milk cows. My dad did the milking. We just had two or three. Mostly my dad was a wheat farmer, but we just had these things for our own. We had a big garden and stuff for our own use. We had horses to ride.

9. What kinds of foods did you eat?

Just ordinary food, but it was real food. Our fast food wasn't McDonald's; it was chicken. And my mother would or she'd send one of us out to catch the chickens. Have you ever seen a chicken hook? It's a long wire with a hook on the end and you catch the chicken by the leg. Anyway, she would decapitate the chickens and we would dip them in scalding water and pluck out the feathers and, umm, doesn't that sound like fun? It wasn't that bad. We were used to it. Then we would cut them up and she would fry it, and it tasted good. Mashed potatoes and gravy and all that kind of stuff. My Aunt Viola made homemade bread, but my mom usually didn't and when her kids would come to our house they enjoyed the store-bought bread, but we loved my Aunt Viola's homemade bread.

10. What did kids your age do for fun?

In the winter we went ice-skating and we played in the snow and it seemed like we had more snows then. And we entertained ourselves with our drawing and telling stories and that sort of thing. We put on plays and directed them ourselves costumes and all. And we had circuses in the summer. We had a trapeze and we used the top of a gate, a long gate for a tightrope, we'd walk across that. You had to be pretty brave. Took a few times to learn how. It was about maybe four feet off the ground, four or five. We did learn balance. We had a favorite tree that we always climbed and there was a jumping off place. I guess it's where my daddy cut off a big limb at one time. Probably it was broken or something. So that was the place where we had to jump off. My brother insisted that we do it. We did, even if we were afraid.

11. What kind of clothing did you wear?

You're wondering about the blue jeans and the bobby socks. We did wear those on Friday and mostly on Fridays we wore jeans. And we'd roll up a couple of rolls and the boys did that too sometimes. And then we'd have bobby socks that we'd turn down rolls. And we wore saddle shoes. I don't think you know what those are. They're kind of like a white oxford with a saddle across the instep that was either brown or black, or red. They tied. We wore skirts and blouses mostly and a sweater over your shoulders sometimes if it was cool enough. And plaid skirts, wool in the winter maybe, or something in the winter but, in the summer they were lighter cotton ones that my mom made.

12. Have you seen some of those trends come back?

We wore ponytails in our hair and I see a ponytail across from me. We wore those. And, umm, the jeans, of course, they've never gone out. You wear them more than we did though. And no one ever wore jeans to church. To church we sometimes wore gloves and hats, even in the summer my mom did, and sometimes we did too, like on Easter or something when we felt like dressing up or our mom felt like dressing us up.

13. What was some popular music of your time?

Let's see we had Elvis Presley and Pat Boone, Frankie Lane. I can't remember all of them.

14. What did you do on dates?

You don't want to know everything, do you? No, we usually went to a movie and, umm, over at Turon, it was a nearby town that had a movie house, and we then would have a coke sometimes afterwards or a malt or something at the drug store. The drug store had a pharmacy in it, and it also had a doctor's office in the back with a real doctor. Sometimes the doctor would come out to visit if it was an emergency like when my brother had an appendectomy he would come out to the farm. He didn't actually do the surgery out there. I think probably in the earlier days they did, but he went to the hospital in Hutch for the surgery. But he did come out and visit him before. He did make house calls and he would come out and deliver babies too. Most of my siblings and I were born on the farm. Except for my youngest sister. She was born in the hospital.

15. What were popular movies and movie stars?

Yes, there were lots of them. Let's see Gone With the Wind and From Here to Eternity, lots of good movies in those days, or at least we thought they were. I can't think of all of them though. There was Doris Day and Ava Gardner, Elizabeth Taylor, Clark Gable. You don't know any of these people, do you?

16. Who was president when you were growing up?

Truman or Eisenhower. I think maybe Eisenhower. I'd have to check it for sure. I don't know what years. I did learn American History, but it was further back than that.

17. What did you know about the Korean War?

We knew about the Korean conflict because there was a draft at that time and the young men were drafted shortly after they graduated from high school. I

guess when they turned eighteen. A lot of them joined the naval reserve or the National Guard or something even before that and trained on weekends and such.

18. Did you know people who were serving in the Korean War?

I did know people who went. One of my cousins did.

19. What about telephones?

We had one telephone in the hallway for all of us and it was a crank telephone. You cranked it like three long cranks and a short crank for somebody or maybe two cranks or whatever for different people's numbers. And it was a party line so most of the neighbors were on it. All of our neighbors were and you could listen in. If there was an emergency, which was just to keep cranking it for a long time so that everyone would know that there was a fire somewhere or something that we should know about. They might have done that at the end of WWII. I don't actually remember that, but anything that was national, but usually the news was just local on the telephone.

20. How did you get your news of the world?

That was usually radio or newspaper or my dad took some news magazines. Life and Time, U.S. News and World Report, I remember.

21. What about TV's?

We didn't have them. We did have Satellite and Ladies Home Journal. We had a piano and at one time they tried to teach two of us to play violin. It didn't take. But some of them did turn into piano players. That was more successful.

22. What did you know about the interstate highway system?

I think that was started during the Eisenhower administration. I don't remember a great deal about it. I know we used to go a different way to Hutchinson than we do now. Because this highway that goes across, Highway 61, is diagonal through Arlington. that was put in later.

23. Tell me how life was different for you than it is for teens today?

We had more free time and we didn't have as many lessons and ballgames and activities and we had no computers and no cell phones and no Blackberries.

Well, when we had blackberries, they were the real fruit.

24. What are the biggest changes that you have seen throughout your lifetime?

Communication and traveling. The world seems to be much smaller because we travel so much faster now by plane or by car than we did in those days. We were isolated.

25. What advice would you give to teenagers today?

I wish that the teenagers today could have a little more free time and not have to work or have an activity every single minute so they'd have more time to be creative and do their own thing.

26. How did you wash your clothes?

The way we did that was with a Maytag washer in the basement. You dipped your clothes out and would run them through the ringer until they were rung dry,

not real dry but dryer than they were soaking wet. And you would pop them into baskets and carry them upstairs and hang them on the clothesline to dry. If the weather was bad, we did have some lines in the basement where we could hang them to dry also. Every Monday my mom would wash clothes. There was usually enough clothes for all of us. She did a lot of ironing. She ironed everything.

27. Is there anything else that I should have asked you that you would like to tell me about?

Well on Christmas Eve we would always have oyster stew. I don't know where they started it. I think at one time they would have fresh oysters that came in on the railroad from wherever they gather oysters and they would ship them by boxcar into Penelosa and my grandparents would get those and make the oyster stew on Christmas eve because it was easy and the big dinner was the next day, Christmas. So it became a custom in our family to always have stew on Christmas Eve. And one year when we had canned oysters I found a pearl in my oyster and that was the same year that my fiancé gave me a pearl necklace for Christmas.