

Interviews

Family Farm Project

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Interview with Pam Owen

Courtney Coughlin

Pam Owen

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Courtney Coughlin
Interviewing Pam Owen of Mount Vernon.
February 7, 1995 at her home.

PO: Pam Owen
CC: Courtney Coughlin

007-037 Chatting about my experiences with John and Rita Norris
and getting ready for the interview.

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CC: So for you, what is it like after moving back here? How long
have you been in Gambier [sic].

PO: We moved in November of '91, so over three years.

CC: From where?

PO: From Syracuse. So it is wonderful to be back. And I talked a
little bit about that in class, the reasons why we wanted to come
back and it just feels like home, and it is home. So it feels like
home because it is home.

CC: What makes it feel like home?

PO: [laughter]Oh gosh, Courtney, family, this sense of place.
Geographic place as well as people. I think that the actual farm
would feel like home as long as all the buildings were there without
the people, surprisingly enough. So the land itself is a strong
drawing. And then of course the people and the relationships. And
just familiar setting, environment, that kind of thing.

CC: How long did you live here before you left for Syracuse?

PO: I grew up here, so I left for college. And then I got married
and we left. So, twenty years, twenty-two years.

CC: Is your husband a native of this area as well?

PO: No, he is a, he was born in Syracuse although he lived in a small
town. Maybe a 60 minute drive from Syracuse. So Syracuse wasn't his
home, but it was his birth place. So when we got married that is
where we went to live for a time, well for quite a long time. And
stayed in that area, moved around, but stayed in that area. From
the time Meredith was newborn and now she is, well until we moved,
and she is 18 now. We have been here 3 years, so that would have

been 15 years that we lived there.

CC: Does he feel the same sort of a connection or is it more of a change for him?

PO: It has to be more of a change, he likes it here. You hear people say, I like Mount Vernon, it is a nice place to live, so he likes it I think for those kinds of reasons. And he likes my family a lot. So that's the way it works I guess.

CC: Is it the sense that this is a farming community and also your community, does the farming make a real impact on the fact that it feels like home?

PO: I can't think of my life without thinking of the farm because the farm and my life are the same. So, I would have to be second guessing, so it is an intricate part and they are woven together. If the weaving of my life did not include the farm then I don't know, would it feel the same or not? I think it is peculiar that I always had this desire to come back home. That the homesickness has never really gone away. I was not miserable by any means in Syracuse I really had a great life there. I enjoyed what I did, when we made the decision to move back and things opened up for us job wise to do that it was a very emotional parting. But, I have always had this undercurrent of homesickness. So I forget what the question is now, but that's part of my answer. Oh I know, I was going to say that that is unusual. I don't know very many people as I talked to my friends, my lady friends, you know we talk about family, we talk about moves and major changes in our lives and there aren't many of my friends, maybe one or two that I can think about. But not very many who have this drive to go back home and this need to be back home, so I think it must have something to do with the farm. And I feel like the farm is almost a person. It is very personified for me. When I would come home on college breaks, when I would bring the children home for a visit to their grandparents, when I drove onto the property it felt like we were exchanging hugs. Like we were embracing the farm. People have told me that is not real weird. Although I think it feels a little weird [laughter]. But I would like to walk through the fields, walk through the woods, go to my little special places and just greet the farm. It is a very much personified part of who I am so if the farm should ever leave our family hands, like John would no longer be able to farm it. Or there would be no one able to pick it up it will be like the death of a family member. For me. It will feel that way. I think...I don't know if that is unusual. I am hoping your research will uncover some of that. I feel like it might be unusual. I would like to know if other people feel

this intense about the land and about the actual acreage as I do. I feel very intense about it, but I haven't worked very hard for it [laughter], I haven't done any of the labor, you saw what some of that labor was like. I did labor as far as taking care of a 4-H animal, 4-H projects, you know doing chores and that kind of thing, but I haven't poured my physical labor into that farm. And I would think that if you did that like my brother does, and like my dad did, then I could understand that attachment to the land. But I didn't do that, but I still have that attachment to the land. If not as much as they do, maybe more. I don't know. So I don't know where that comes from and I would be really interested to find out if other people feel that way. And if they do tell me, and if they don't, don't let me know. [laughter]

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CC: So how do you think your return to the community where you grew up in has affected your relationship with your brothers and their families?

PO: Oh, I think it has greatly enhanced it, a lot. In fact, one of the, Eli was one of the main reasons we investigated new jobs and everything here before. We had tried before to get work, of course it, teaching, public school teaching market is very difficult to break into here. And then Dean is a psychiatric social worker, a psychologist, he has various titles that he can go by and various credentials, but those jobs are very limited in this area. So we had pretty much given it up and I as I said before we were really happy in Syracuse and we both had jobs we really liked, the kids were really settled, we enjoyed our lives there. But Eli was born and Tim and Heidi asked us if we would be Eli's guardian, and we said yes. And that we would love to and I was really honored that Heidi would ask us that. She gave us her reasons why and then they said, the only thing is, the one thing we are concerned about is if anything tragic were to happen that Eli would have to go with you, and he would be taken out of his environment and away from his extended family members and so we have really kind of added another couple to this list too because we really don't want that to happen. So that interest was reignited. And Dean and I both said, I can't remember who said it first or who verbalized it first or what the sequence was but we thought, if they want us to be his guardian, if it is that important, if the relationship is that strong, then we really felt a need and a strong desire to try one more time, and it was hard to try because you would try to get a job or you would try to get things to work out and everything would be aborted you know, and it was like you get your hopes all up and you have to work hard to do a job search and you have to put your whole self in it

and we thought do we really want to do this again, you know. And the kids were in a school that we really liked and so on our spring break to kind of give us a bigger range of job opportunities, we checked out some schools in Dayton we thought we might like. We checked out some schools in Mansfield and did all of that on our spring break, which of course the kids were thrilled with, they had to go to school on spring break. And we decided that we didn't, Dayton was too far away and Mansfield had a school that we kind of liked so we thought about maybe settling there, there was a Richland hospital there and it would broaden Dean's prospects a little bit. So we started looking everywhere, of course applying in Knox County as well. I think, I don't know if he got a call from Richland Hospital or not but one came from Mount Vernon. A job opportunity. They called him and invited Dean for an interview, and we just couldn't believe it. Just could not believe it. And it was a very traumatic summer because things were ending and nothing was really settled. And we made many trips down here and do we buy a house, don't we buy a house, you know that kind of thing. So that is really what really started it all, was the birth of Eli. And so everything worked out, we ended up right where we wanted to be which we just could not believe. Right here in Mount Vernon. Very happy with the schools that the kids are going to, and we are next to Eli and if anything tragic would happen, Eli would be at home and we would be at home. And so we would have all that family support. And it has just enhanced that relationship as you saw tonight. I wasn't planning on having Eli and Alex tonight, it just kind of happened. And those things wouldn't happen if we lived in Syracuse. And again, I think off the tape Eli said, "It has been so long since I have seen you Aunt Pam," and it has been a week. You know, and in Syracuse it would have been months. And he wouldn't have known who I am. And John's kids, Steven started out, he was the first one to come to my preschool. So I am with him as his teacher every day. And I am able to take the girls places and give them opportunities that they might not have. Meredith and Mark were on a ski trip and we had tickets last week to see the ballet so, Dean and I took the girls to the ballet and out to eat. And, although they have always felt really close to us, even though we were in Syracuse, that is really nice. To be near by and do those kinds of things together. Tim was a little worried at first because he said that everyone would get so excited when we were coming, you know it was like a party, and he said, you know that excitement is not going to be there anymore because you are going to be ordinary after a while. But there is a lot of comfort in being ordinary you know. So that is really, and it has been nice to be with my parents. They live in Gambier now. And Dean and my dad go out for breakfast on mornings that Dean has available and my mom and I can do some things, we don't do as much in the winter, during the school year,

but we make up for it in the summer. When I first came back it was so strange to just pick the phone up and be able to call them without dialing one and an area code. I guess that pretty much answers your question about how it has changed our relationships.

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CC: And what about your parents, so your dad is no longer farming, is that true?

PO: That is true.

CC: And your mother, are they both in good health?

PO: Well, my Dad is almost 84 and there is 15 years difference between my mom and my dad which is interesting too. And mom is in reasonable health. She is 68 I think, something like that. High blood pressure, heart, something like that. Stuff like that. But she stays very active physically and socially both. It is harder for my dad because he is 15 years older than she is so it is hard to stay active. Although he works at it, and part of it, he will call Dean up and ask him to take him out. 'I need to keep going' you know. So it has been very, his physical limitations have been difficult for him to deal with. He hasn't developed any hobbies outside of farming, so now that he can't do that, you know it is hard to find interest. You know. So.

CC: Would you characterize yourself, or your relationship with your dad, or what is it like to have a farmer as a father?

PO: [laughter] Courtney, where do you come up with these questions? What is it like to have a Dad that is a farmer. Well, I think that's, the question itself is calling for a generalization and I don't think you can do that. I could tell you what it is like for me, and I think that is why I am so interested in this project. I would like to see what other people's experiences are. And as I get older and we talk, like I meet my college friends you know, from way back when and share experience you realize how different it was for them and how similar it was. So I am really interested in finding out what some of these other tapes sound like. I would really like to know. [laughter] But what was it like. Can you be more specific?

CC: Sure, I think a lot of people are curious to know why growing up on a farm, or living on a farm, or why you who no longer live on a farm, why you feel a great connection to the land and a great connection to your family, and I was wondering if there was something about living on the farm or being part of a farm family growing up has anything to do with how it shapes your views of family. Do you

value certain things more than others?

PO: As a result of being on the farm?

CC: Not necessarily as a result but what do you think was unique, when you say your other lady friends don't necessarily feel you knew, the same connection to home, and you said that it might have something to do with farming, I am just wondering if you can maybe guess in your opinion, for you, personally, what some of those things might have been. Because I think that is something people are real curious about.

PO: A lot of my friends for some reason never really bonded with their parents. Not that they don't love them or care about them and that they feel like their parents, it was a reciprocal relationship, that somehow they were glad to leave. And I don't know if that has anything to do with farming or not. Or if the fact that the farm is there is a common thread and something to hold you together. But I think as you talk to the other family members, in this family, I probably idealize things more than any of them because I am in the reality of it as much as they are. But as much as I disliked the work, I really disliked the work, and as a child my goal was to leave the farm [laughter] Isn't that ironic, but that was my goal because I did not like the work and my mom would tell me that I would...she would ask me to do something or she would scold me for not doing what I was supposed to be doing you know, and I would say, 'Well, there is more ways than one to work, you can work with your mind, just as much as you can work with your hands, and mind work is just as valuable.' So I would defend my efforts of whatever it was I was doing, puttering around in my room instead of cleaning it. You know, but even though I disliked it, it was still required of me. My parents let me get by with probably a lot more than some farm families let their children get by with, but they also help me accountable. The time I remember the most was I was supposed to close this door to the baby chicks, chicken coop and it was up on this hillside beside the barn. And so it was quite a way and none of the lights would shine that far, up there, and I forgot to close it, and so if you don't close the door what happens is the fox comes in or some wild animal comes in and eats all the baby chicks. So, it was late, it was kind of like one of those nights at John's, you know, dinner was late, and it was dark and dad was going through the did you do this and did you do that kind of list, and he asked me if I closed the chicks, the little roosters and I just kind of went white, and I said no I didn't. Well, 'you've got to get up there and do that.' You know, he was pretty stern and pretty gruff about the whole thing, because that was probably the only way he could

get me to go up, and he didn't go. He was tired, it was late at night and he had done his work and it was my job, and it was probably the only thing he asked me to do, or one of the few things, so I, I was, I still am scared of the dark. I bent down really low to close the door because the door was really low. And I saw these two big, huge shoes, standing right there, and I just screamed and came running down. And I was panic stricken. And it was just a scarecrow, but I didn't know it. So I always closed the door after that. {laughter} [334] I never forgot to close the door. But as I said, as much as I hated to do the work, it was required of me, and there were moments of accountability, you know even though they did not ask me to do a lot, I was required to do what he did ask me to do. And had to work in the garden with my mom. Help her can and help her freeze. Again, Dad was probably more flexible then most fathers went it came to the farm work. I made a deal with him, I may have said this in class, in the summertime, to bake bread everyday instead of drive the tractor. So, there was some negotiation that I could do with him, and as most children, I could sense when it was free and open to negotiation and when it was not. So, I don't know, if those weren't working together, I know your class has heard a lot about 4-H and I was in 2 4-H clubs. One I like a great deal, and one I didn't like as much. I didn't like the, I had a steer as a project, I didn't like that one as much. But I like the one that was more domesticated as you might guess. So I had to take care of my steer every afternoon. That's not all year, that starts about now, and goes through the fair, through July. And Dad would help us with that you know, he would help us to break the steers in to lead, because they have to lead on a halter and they are really wild at first. So he would help us do that and he would help us walk them and lead them back and forth, and he would make sure all the feed, you had to feed them certain kind of food and mix it up and we had a little things like a cement mixer only it was real small and you had to mix their feed up. So, in a sense, we worked side by side with him on that. Less side by side than with my mom in the house. You know, I would do a sewing project or a cooking project and get stuck and need her help, and she was always there to help me with that. So even though, I may not have liked all the jobs and all the chores and all the accountability it was still there and I think maybe that helped me to bond with my family more and that might have been missing in some of my friends backgrounds. And I wonder about that with my own kids, if they are missing that with us, that we haven't had to work side by side, in the sense of gardening, for livelihood. So, I try to find other things to do with them and make sure that we spend time together so that they know who I am as a person and not just as an authority figure. And I think we have been successful with that off the farm. So I don't know, if that, is that the farm that has molded

us and shaped us together or what it is. But it is a possibility.
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CC: We talked earlier when I was introducing this project, when I talked to you on the phone and I said how I was interested in sort of like the self identity of the farmer and the images of farming and of the farmer. And I think you have an interesting perspective on that because you had the chance as a child and as a young adult to see your father farming and to know him as a person and as a farmer and then to come back and to see your brother still involved in farming and to see your other brother who would like to be more involved in farming. And I was wondering, do you have any sort of perceptions of what that means, or any ideas on how your perspective changed. I realize that none of these are easy questions.

PO: Yea, I was trying to think, a lot of it is the paraphernalia on the farm. There is paraphernalia that goes along with any profession whether it be secretarial or in education or whatever, the clothes that you wear, and the things that you have to hold and the things you take to work with you. There is all this paraphernalia, and farmers are no exception to that they have their paraphernalia, that they deal with. I didn't so much pick up on all of that as my brothers did. And they have the caps, the feed caps, you know, Callahan seed on it, and my particular family part of their paraphernalia were John Deere tractors, as children I am sure you saw lots of farm equipment, did Steven show you all his little tractors and everything, and both of my brothers played with that kind of thing. when I was small and played with that kind of stuff I had a doll house and my brother and I would construct things. We had the room over the living room at the farm was empty and we would use it as a play room and build villages and farms out of something sort of like legoes, they didn't have legoes then, that is terrible but they had something like legoes, I think they are called American bricks.

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And we had little tin models of gas stations and stuff like that. So we would make up story lines and they always revolved around the farm. You know, and we would do our dramatic play and that sort of thing, and the field would be way over there and there would be another field and way over here and he is going to go disk and I am going to go into town and get a part. Or, you know, we had our little roles. So definitely that was part of our self-identity and then in this particular community I think, it is very interesting when you go to school. Because you have people who live in town and you have people who are farmers, and trying to blend those in my era, and

for me as a child, that was difficult for me to do. It was hard for me to relate to the town kids and I think it was hard for the town kids to relate to me. So that, formed our identity too, so it would just separate those two groups of people more and more. So you would look towards farm neighbors that had children and you would look towards farm children. But I don't think that is too unusual either. I think people gravitate together with people with common interests and that sort of thing. But that just reinforces your identity because you are now identified with that group of people. Self identity.

CC: Do you think that is still true of the children today that you teach. Do you have many children in your class who are from farm families? Or a mixture...

End of Side A

Begin Side B

(000)

PO: In circle time and in conversation time, different farming type things might come up. Like Steven really wants a Backco, and in fact he has got a backco (sp?). So, he talks about this Backco a lot.

CC: What is a Backco?

PO: I am not really sure, Courtney {laughter}, it is kind of like a bulldozer and it has a scooper and I am not really sure. It is a machine. It is a bit like a tractor kind of thing. And I said to Eli, oh look there is a Backco, a picture, and he goes, 'No, that's not a Backco that's a' whatever it was, a skidder or something, so I don't know. But that surfaces sometimes in their writing. In their story dictations, but it doesn't separate the children yet. But I personally felt, and I think my brothers would agree, that there was a separation as you got older. And that separation could be viewed as a positive or a negative, a hurtful one depending on how you look at it. But I don't see it this soon, they are all very accepting. I have another little boy who lives on a farm and he talks sometimes about things that are happening. Right now they are all really interested in each other and what they have to say. You know, we are just doing the mail, the post office thing. And they can't believe that some people have mail brought to their house and others have to go to the post office. The world is all interesting to them, they are trying to figure it out in a philosophical sense, we are all trying to figure it out, but [laughter] but they are just more literal than we are at this point. They are just trying to figure out how the mail gets from here to there. So I don't see a separation that early. There could be, I mean I suppose...

CC: Interesting. And what about, you said a little bit about how you think or maybe your brothers think that you romanticize about the farm. Which is really easy to do I would imagine, if you are not doing the physical labor daily. What do you think are some of the negative parts of farming, or what do you think are some of the problematic issues.

PO: Well, things that we have all talked about before, you know, for me, just the physical labor. I just don't think I have the stamina to do that, I don't have the desire to investigate to see if I have the stamina to do that. [chimes] Another family story involves my adamant opinion about not marrying a farmer. I was not going to marry a farmer. I refused to date guys that were on the farm. I wouldn't even talk to guys who were on the farm. [laughter] Because I didn't want anything to happen. Because I did not want to be a farmer's wife. It just takes so much work and so much effort. Maybe some of that has changed now that people are working more off the farm. You know, I am not really sure, I think probably you and your class mates know more than I do about farmers and their wives now, you know, if farmers wives are working more off the farm and bringing in an income. But I know I wasn't cut out to garden the rest of my life and provide for my family's food in that way. That just wasn't a desire, it wasn't a goal. And it looked to me as a child that you have to really want to do this. And I didn't mind so much, we would sometimes, mom and I would be up until really really late, midnight or later, doing the corn for the freezer. And I just didn't want to do that. I didn't want to have to come home from a shopping trip and have to chase cows and put them back again where they belonged. I didn't want to have to deal with the emotion of the weather. Or dealing with the weather. My Dad was extremely careful about keeping that kind of thing from us, keeping his worry from us but he was and he is a great worrier. I don't like to talk to my Dad about the farm because it brings up all that worry and it makes anxiety resurface. It is always there, it is always there, but I don't want to talk about it. It is too emotional to talk about, and I really don't know psychologically how to do that with my dad, but Dean does. So that is kind of neat, and I think that is kind of unusual. So that my Dad, I tease my family and say that they love Dean more than they love me, [laughter] you know, 'Daddy loves you more than he loves me,' but he can really talk to Dean, he is distanced enough from it that he can listen to it, and I didn't want to have to live with that kind of anxiety and I really don't think you have to live with that kind of anxiety, but I didn't want to do what it takes to get rid of it, or to keep it under control. It just seems like too emotional effort, too much physical effort, too much financial effort.

So, I just didn't want to get involved with it, and my brothers are facing the reality of that every day. And I am not. So it is much easier for me to romanticize about it and remember how wonderful it is. And to feel, to dredge up, I don't have to dredge them up, they are there, easily there, how connected I feel. The farm is a person to me. So there is my mom and my dad. my brothers and my sisters and the farm. It is just all, it is all family.

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But I am not paying the price in that relationship.

CC: Do you ever have the feeling that there is any resentment that maybe you have the opportunity to enjoy the land and still be close by but without doing any of the work?

PO: [laughter] I don't know. That is a good question. I don't think so. I don't sense any resentment from anybody. I certainly don't sense any resentment from Tim. And I don't sense any from John either. And John had the opportunity to leave. Dad encouraged him to leave.

CC: I didn't know that.

PO: If you would talk to my Dad and it is probably not a good idea, [laughter], but if you talked to my Dad he would start to cry and he would say, he would tell you this 'With tears in my eyes,' and he is very dramatic when he tells this. And this is one reason I don't like to talk to him often because I hear these same things over and over. 'With tears in my eyes, I beg those boys not to go into farming.' You know, and John spent some years in college but didn't do well and ended up dropping out of college, and he said that farming is where I am supposed to be. So, he gave it a real effort, I think, to do what Dad wanted him to do. Which was basically to escape all of this effort, but he just couldn't do it, it was too strong for him. And So that is what Dad would say. I forget what the question was Courtney.

CC: I was just asking if there was any resentment.

PO: Any resentment, so I don't think there is, because he had an opportunity to leave if he wanted to leave. And Tim had the opportunity to leave if he wanted to leave, and he didn't but ended up having to do that. So no, I don't think, I don't sense any resentment at all.

CC: I wouldn;t imagine that there would be. That is interesting.

PO: I don't, I am not reaping anything, I am not getting anything from the farm, only just my own emotion. So, and I am not sure if John values that anyway [laughter], you know I don't see any resentment, I don't even see any source for there to be any. But it is a good question. I mean it is one that I think could exist in some families.

CC: Family dynamics.

PO: Yea,

CC: I think that always is difficult, my sense is and I don't know, you may be able to add more to this, is that working close together and having different attachments to the land, for whatever reason, whether it is for financial reasons or for emotional reasons or just family ties. Everyone coming together with their different reasons for feeling attached, it might bring them together for their different reasons for their different sentiments or it could have an opposite effect. Perhaps. I don't know.

PO: I suppose like anybody just going out for a cause that , you know, that maybe your reason for supporting this particular cause, there may be multitudes of reasons but the group is still working together to accomplish whatever it is they are trying to accomplish.

CC: And why do you think it is that your father tried to encourage your brothers to get out of farming?

PO: Well, I think for the things I talked about earlier, the emotional pressures, the financial pressures, the physical pressures, its just not worth it kind of thing. Like I have been there, I have done that, trust me, it is not worth it. I think Dad probably feels the most like it is not worth it. And thats interesting too.

CC: Even though he has done it all of his life.

PO: Right, right.

CC: Did he do it all of his life?

PO: Yeah, and when Tim said that he wanted to work in town at that gas station or something, he wanted to own a gas station. Did you catch that?

CC: Just briefly, and I...

PO: Yeah, that kind of went by me too, and I need to investigate that just as a family member. I have never heard that before. I had never heard that Dad wanted to do anything but farming. I don't know how he really got into farming except that his Dad was a farmer. And Tim had made reference to the fact that he felt like Dad thought that Dad was trapped. I think Dad thought that was the only thing he could do, because his father was a farmer, there was a little dysfunction there. [laughter] The father was a farmer, the mother, they were separated somehow, not legally or anything like that, but they lived in different houses and it is never anything that I can get to the bottom of. And the work was enormous, of course they had horses then, and so it was more like an Amish type methods, you know methodology. And Dad was forced to, and I get this story very clearly, Dad was forced to drop out of school, which he has always resented to work on the farm because they couldn't make. my grandfather couldn't make it without another set of hand, so he missed a lot of school when he was in school, and still managed to get A's and B's. I really believe that in my heart of hearts that my Dad is an extremely bright. But just never had the opportunity. So, he only had an 8th grade education. Which probably shouldn't go any further than the archives. And he has always seen education as a way out. So it may very well be true that he felt trapped, that it was the only thing he could do, that his father set the record for him, set the pattern for him. That could be, but I don't know and I don't want to ask him about it. {laughter} He is not volunteering this information. I get a lot of information from my DAd when we look through photo albums and we look at picture and he tells stories. And the way it works best is if he is sitting next to Dean and they are looking through these pictures and he will tell Dean things that he won't tell me. But he doesn't realize that i am listening. That I am in the next room, or that, so I have learned a lot about my Dad's childhood by hearing him talk to Dean. But I am uncomfortable for whatever reason, asking just overt questions about issues that seem to be sensitive. But it is very clear that he was resentful, i mean he has told me that, not just Dean. But he did not want to quit school but he had to and back then that wasn't that strange. Now that would be really strange to us. But it was more socially acceptable then, but he has always resented it.

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CC: Do you have any sense about what will happen to the land. Do you think it will stay in your family? Do you think that John's children will want to work the farm? Do you have any way to guage that?

PO: I don't know. I mean at this point Steven is very interested in farming but he is four [laughter] and all four year olds love what their daddy's do. You know, Lisa doesn't have any interest at all. I guess your options are that the girls would marry a guy and they would inherit the farm or Steven would inherit the farm and farm it. I don't know. I have thought about that a lot. Like what is going to happen to that, the farm, and my Dad thinks about it even more, I am sure. So, I don't know how Dad would feel if the whole thing was sold off, if he cares, oh he has got to care, you know, so I don't know. I have no idea what will happen to it.

CC: Does your father, even though he is not in the best of health, does he have any interest in, does he like to visit the farm, does he like to...does

PO: Until last year he did lots of things, he would drive the tractor, he would cut firewood, but he dropped the chainsaw and it was running and he was the only one there and a lot of accidents were starting to happen and it became unsafe for him and he finally realized that, so he is very interested and I think it is hard on him emotionally a lot to have to give that up. He is just not able to any of it any longer. So he drove himself until there is just no more to give. He would say things, like I can't get up there like I used to be able to you know, and Dean would say, 'Well, I don't know many 81 year-olds that can get up and drive...and [laughter] and then Dad would say, 'yea, that's right, you know, 'by golly,' [laughter] I am doing alright, I am 81 you know. But I don't think he has taken a real active part since he was 81, 82. It has been really really hard, and he doesn't walk well now, so it is really, it is really not safe for him to walk up to the mailbox without a walking stick or a cane or something. So the farm is pretty up out of the question.

CC: So how does mother fit into this? Was she interested in farming? Did she enjoy being a farmer's wife?

PO: I think so. Yeah, I always got the sense that she enjoyed her work and her work was always very domesticated of course, you know the garden and the canning and ironing and housekeeping and COOKING, and cooking and cooking. [laughter] I mean they ate like the livestock, you know, so she was just a tremendous cook. Everyone remembers her like that. She has gone to South America on a few trips with groups of people since she has been in her 60's and they have retired from the farm and she cooks for them, talk about identity, it is part of her identity. And the most grave insult would be to say something negative her meal or her food, so, in fact the only fight I remember my parents having was over a cherry pie.[laughter, chimes] And she

went storming through the house, crying, slamming doors, refused to come out of the bedroom. And that was the only scene like that that I ever remember and it was about food, that is really interesting. I hadn't related that, I didn't put that together until tonight.

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So, and she played a limited role in going into town to get broken parts. That is a big deal women going into get parts while the men continued to try to fix that machine. If the machine is down, then you are down. And I don't know why that is, if it used to take longer and now you can get a part sooner than you could, I don't know. She didn't get parts as often as like Rita, Rita goes in and get parts a lot. And one time, is someone interviewing the Cassell's or did they just make a visit? At one time the Cassells and my parents and other farm families were involved in the black angus association and you may hear a little bit about that from them. I don't know, they still have registered black angus, we had them we were growing up but john hasn't had them. So my mom was involved in that organization. And they had a booth at the fair that sold black angus sandwiches, and she always worked that booth you know. We spent all day every day at the fair. Have you gone to fair yet, the Knox County Fair?

CC: No

PO: And you won't get to, it is really something else, it is like the event. My friend from Syracuse, she kept hearing me talk about the fair and she wanted to come down for the fair and I said No you got to realize this is just a county fair, the country get real excited about it, but really that is all it is. But she came down and brought her son who is Mark's good friend too, and she wants to come down just for the fair. I think that is really funny. So she played a role in that, in those farming kinds of organizations, but it was a pretty limited role. Dad took care of all the finances, he claims that she wanted mom to get involved in all of that but mom didn't want to have anything to do with the money. Probably the discussion about money was so frustrating to her that she just decided it wasn't worth it. You know, so that was her role it was a very domesticated role.

CC: Was that the role, do you see that role changing with your sister-in-laws?

PO: Rita is in pursuit of a full-time job. She would like a secretarial you know, computer kind of position. I think that would be really healthy for her to do that. And she does, she is probably less involved

in the farm than my mom. I would say. I don't know if that has to do with personality of lifestyle or if it has to do the way of the farm. It is hard to tell. It is hard for me to know how attached she is to the farm, how much of the farm she feels a part of. It will be interesting to see how she responds to those questions. There are moments that I think she is very attached to the farm and there are moments that I think she is interested in what the farm might be able to do for her financial future. And then there are times I think she doesn't care about it at all. So I don't really know and there are so many facets to her personality that it is hard for me to judge. So it would be interesting to see what she has to say. But from the surface, from me looking into that home, I would say that my mother was more emotionally invested in the farm than Rita is.

CC: O.k.

PO: But it is yea, it is a guess. It is only a guess.

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PO: Of course, Heidi, now they don't farm, see she just told you tonight that, Heidi has a lot of opinions. And she is great to talk with, she really is wonderful. I think she is personally struggling right now to figure out where she fits in life. You know, when you are a mom, and you have little kids and I think she definitely wants to be with them, but at the same time she wants to have their own identity. Tim had an auction when he went out of the farm business and that was hard on her. So, she, so if it wasn't hard on her she at least recognized that it was a painful process.

CC: I didn't know that.

PO: So, she's identified somewhat with that farm and she has to make kind of some kind of farm identity to marry Tim in the beginning because Tim was farming when they got married. I know also for a fact that she is very involved in finances and Rita is too, Rita does the books, so that is a definite difference between those two ladies and my mom. Rita really loves the computer she likes little gadgets and you know, and so that is a fun thing for her to do. She worked at the bank for a little while, so she is really good with numbers. So they both do the money and like I said, that is a big difference. And neither one of us, myself included is as domesticated as my mom. [laughter] I mean it is like...

CC: It is hard for me to believe I look around your house, and

everything looks so pretty and homey and comfortable.

PO: But I don't bake and cook and you know, it is not, we had frozen pizza tonight you know. My mom would have never had frozen pizza. So, it is not quite as, I am not as domesticated as my mother.

CC: Probably few people are these days.

PO: You know holiday time the meal is the big item, you know, Thanksgiving turkey and all that kind of thing. You know, I don't have to have all of that to have Thanksgiving. But the family has to have all that to have Thanksgiving or to have Christmas. So, we keep up the tradition, and I don't know how long we will keep up the tradition. One Christmas Heidi suggested that instead of having the big ham and everything that goes with it, she suggested having soup and salad. You know, it was like, you can't do that, but we did, and I thought it was great and Heidi thought it was great, but everyone else missed the ham and the scalloped potatoes and you know.

CC: And she just thought of doing that has a change?

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PO: Yeah, and she also it wouldn't be past Heidi to just to throw it out to see how everybody would react. You know. Heidi and I are kind of like that. See what we can do to stir the family up here. [laughter] See if we can get them to gasp [gasp sound]! [laugheter. 'You're not going to have ham!'" So that is, I am guess I am not as in to all that food. Food is a real big, and I really think that you will find that, all the students who go out to interview farm families will find that food is a big link. [laughter] A big link.

CC: Interesting. Was there anything that I haven't touched on that you wanted to talk about or make sure that people understood.

PO: I really haven't thought about it a lot, Courtney.

CC: I don't want to not give you the opportunity to say something that you think is important but that I might not know is important.

PO: I think you have asked a lot of really good questions.

CC: You can think on it too.

PO: Yeah. I think the biggest thing for me and I have already said it, and I think it is peculiar, I really find it puzzling that I think of that farm as a person, or as an individual or as an entity

unto itself. [laughter] You know, I think that is really unusual I am very interested to find out how that turns out you know for other people. And we talked about school and how you related to that.

CC: Then I will turn off the tape.

END OF INTERVIEW

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