

Interview with Margaret Carter

AI-A-L-2008-038

Interview # 1: July 15, 2008

Interviewer: Robert McIntyre

COPYRIGHT

The following material can be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes, without the written permission of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. These materials are not to be deposited in other repositories nor used for resale or commercial purposes without the authorization from the Audio-Visual Curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 112 N. 6th Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701. Telephone (217) 785-7955.

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

McIntyre: Margaret, will you give your whole name, where you live and where you were born.

Carter: Margaret Carter, and right now I live in Earlville, Illinois. I was born and raised in southwest Iowa, on a farm. I lived on a farm in Illinois for 52 years, and then I moved to town.

McIntyre: So, what was that operation like, the farm you were born on?

Carter: Well, it was corn and not beans. We didn't have beans then; it's too long ago. Corn and milk, cows to milk and hay. Did Dad have feeder cows? No.

McIntyre: Who lived on the farm with you then, growing up? You lived with your parents and who else? What were their names?



Margaret Carter
8/27/1921 - 5/15/2011

- Carter: Mary and Ira McKinley, and then there were six of us, and her [Margaret's mother] parents lived with us quite a bit. So, there were ten people there to sit down to eat every meal. It was hard work for my mother.
- McIntyre: What years were you there, approximately?
- Carter: From 1921 until 1940.
- McIntyre: You said it was hard work for your mother. What about you?
- Carter: Well, I thought it was hard work for me too, but I complained a lot. (chuckles)
- McIntyre: What type of things did you have to do on the farm?
- Carter: Just everything (laughs).
- McIntyre: What's everything (laughs)?
- Carter: Well, gather the eggs. I escaped from the house every chance I got, but when I got back, here I found things waiting for me. Before we went to school, we had to wash the dishes and wash the separator. I found out, if you wait long enough, the bus will come, and you won't have to do it. But, one day I said, "The bus is here; I have to go." And she [her mother] said, "No, your work isn't done." So, I had to wait and do it and walk to school, but I only did that once (both laugh). I'm a fast learner. (chuckles) (unintelligible talking in the background). Oh, definitely.
- McIntyre: What was—
- Carter: I can remember the day the banks closed, and my dad sat out on the stile with his head in his hands, because here was eight, ten people on him. The banks closed, but we made it.
- McIntyre: What was the house like?
- Carter: Well, it was a big... Four rooms upstairs, and there was a big (unintelligible talking in the background) No. (responding to someone in the room) Yes, it was a big two-story house. It had 32 volt [battery], so we had sort of electric, which most of the people in that area did not have.
- McIntyre: You say "sort of electric." What do you mean?
- Carter: Well, it was 32 volt instead of 150. It wasn't the electric as we know it now. We had this business in the basement with (someone in the background adds, "A generator.")
- McIntyre: So, what did it give you, then, as far as lights or appliances or what? Did it light up everything?

Carter: Lights and an iron; that's about it. And then it had a tank over the stairs, and so we had running water. Very few people had running water in that day. My grandfather was very... what, liberal minded? Progressive, yeah.

McIntyre: What about heating of the house?

Carter: Well, there was a hand-fired furnace.

McIntyre: So, was the house warm, like they are today, or not. What do you remember about that?

Carter: Well, it depends on if anybody was down throwing wood in it or coal. (both laugh). (unintelligible voice in the background). What? (unidentified voice in the background). Oh, yeah. (in the background, "Never heated the upstairs"). No, except the bathroom. The bathroom was upstairs, and they did heat that, but that was all. It was mighty cold in your bedroom, mighty cold. (from the background, "No insulation. If it's 10 below, it's 10 below in your bedroom.")

McIntyre: As far as the kitchen, what do you remember about appliances, growing up?

Carter: Well, she had a cook stove and also—I can't remember just exactly when they got it—but it was a three-burner kerosene stove, sitting over there. So she used that occasionally, but mostly [as a] cook stove.

That was another thing. I had to get cobs in for that and to start that. My Dad got me out of bed one morning at 5:00, because I thought I didn't have to get them. But I found out different (laughs). Fast learner. (from the background, "It was a wood fire.")

McIntyre: So, you had to get wood to do the fireplace for the cooking?

Carter: So he could start the fire. They were very mean to me.

McIntyre: Whose job was that? You, you had to get the wood or...?

Carter: Not the wood... Well, sometimes. You could open the window, and you'd go down and get an arm full of wood. Then you'd throw it in the window, and here was the wood box, right here beside the fire. It was handy. And then you had to get cobs to start it with.

McIntyre: Where did you go to get those?

Carter: Out in the pig lot.

McIntyre: So, how was cooking on there, compared to what you're used to today? (both laugh)

Carter: It was very different, but—

McIntyre: How was it different?

Carter: I didn't do much of the cooking, at that time.

McIntyre: Did it take longer, or not as easy to do, or what do you remember about it?

Carter: Oh, I don't know. My poor mother, but I didn't realize then how hard it was for...See, she had to bake bread. There wasn't... You couldn't even [get] to town to get boughten bread. She had to bake bread for ten people for three meals a day. (from background, "And that stove had to be cranked up, three meals a day...put wood in it or cobs.")

So, the garden they planted was unbelievable. Rows and rows of stuff, and Dad would get up early and pick how many pails full of peas and set them in there. Then we sat all morning and shucked peas or—

McIntyre: You said before that the crop was corn, but then they grew a lot of their own food to eat to, right?

Carter: Oh, yes, very much, uh-huh.

McIntyre: You mentioned peas. What else?

Carter: Well, beans, sweet potatoes and potatoes. The first Saturday that school started, everybody was at attention, and we had to go out and pick up potatoes. We got a penny... What was it, a bushel? Well, a great big bucket full, for picking them up and taking them down to a cave. We didn't have any refrigerator, but we had a cave, and it was very cold; it was deep down.

McIntyre: So the whole time growing up, you had no refrigeration then or...?

Carter: No. I can't remember when we got the refrigerator, can you? (voice in the background, "When we got the Hi-Line.") Oh, yeah, because there was no electricity, see.

McIntyre: So you grew most of the food on the farm, when you were growing up, you think?

Carter: Yes, yes. Dad raised hay, and they put up hay a lot. I remember Mother saying a lot of times, when it was tax time in the spring, they had hay to sell, and they had money to pay their taxes. And that's another thing, when they put up hay, you know, here's your loose hay, and somebody stuck a fork down, and it went up. Well, somebody had to run the horse to pull it up. A lot of times I got that. I was so afraid it would step on my heels, so I had to run (laughs) to keep ahead of that horse.

McIntyre: You mentioned the chickens. You said gathering eggs was part of your jobs.

- Carter: Well, part of the time. I don't really know what my sister did, but... (McIntyre laughs). It has kind of grown through the years, I'm sorry to [say].
- McIntyre: So, you got eggs and chickens from the farm too?
- Carter: Yes.
- McIntyre: What about hogs? Did you do your own slaughtering?
- Carter: Yes, uh-huh. They butchered those down at the barn and processed all of that. And on the cook stove, they cooked the [fat] to make lard, which we used on the farm. (background voice, "And later made the lard and later made soap.") Yes, and made soap out of it too.
- McIntyre: As far as buying food and that type of thing at the store, was very much, if anything, purchased?
- Carter: Very little, very little. (from the background, "Sugar.") Flour, and they bought that by 100 pounds. It was in a bin thing, that you opened out. When it was full, you wanted to watch out, because it would come on out at you. (from the background, "Sugar, flour and salt and some spices.") Yeah, and some brown sugar, which Mother used to make rolls. Oh, they were so good.
- McIntyre: You mentioned the day the bank closed and your father's reaction that day. How old were you then?
- Carter: Well, I was going to Girl Scout Camp, and the only thing that bothered me was, I was afraid I wasn't going to get to go to camp.
- McIntyre: Do you know about how old you were at that time then?
- Carter: I would have been seven or eight or nine. I was a Girl Scout.
- McIntyre: After the banks closed, what do you remember about the Depression, as far as how it affected you or your family on the farm?
- Carter: It didn't affect us a bit. The folks didn't... It didn't really affect us. I didn't know we were poor. I didn't know we didn't have money. I had everything I wanted.
- McIntyre: So food was still available during the... because you grew your own food, so you still had that.
- Carter: And Mother made our clothes.
- McIntyre: Was any clothing purchased at all, that you recall?
- Carter: I can remember the first boughten dress I had. Oh, I just thought it was wonderful.

McIntyre: What about shoes? That was purchased?

Carter: Yeah, it had to be, yeah. I don't remember about shoes. (from the background, "I don't know about the girls, but the boys would go barefooted. You couldn't bother with a pair of shoes.") The folks always lined us up, you know, all six kids, by age and by height and so forth, every year. Friends that look at those pictures now said, "My goodness, but you folks were well dressed." The boys had leather jackets. I mean we really were.

McIntyre: But it was all clothing that your mother made?

Carter: Yes, except then, after the boys got bigger, of course. Then they bought that. (voice in the background, "Sis, did you ever go hungry? Do you remember ever being really hungry?") No, never in my life. (in the background, "Remember the cows that we were butchering and the raising of the garden and the canning, canning, canning? And Mom's ability, with flour and sugar and baking?") Um-hmm. (from background, "We just never went hungry") Never did.

McIntyre: Did the family have a radio, do you remember?

Carter: Oh, my.

McIntyre: Do you remember listening to radio programs at all?

Carter: Yeah, there was *Fibber Magee* and, and those Negro men, *Amos and Andy*.

McIntyre: What about any political things, like FDR's speeches or anything like that?

Carter: I guess the folks listened to him, but—

McIntyre: You didn't at all?

Carter: I wasn't.

McIntyre: Where your brothers listening to baseball games at all or anything like that?

Carter: (from the background, "We didn't have time.") Dad kept us busy, for which I'm very grateful, because we learned how to do things. (another unidentified voice in the background, "I think you should mention, the hard work didn't make them die young.") The hard work didn't what? (in the background, "Didn't shorten their lives.") No (laughs), no. You know, I used to complain, and my mother would say, "Well, I don't think it hurt you any. (laughs) (unintelligible voice from the background). Yeah, Mother lived to be over 101.

McIntyre: You said the house you grew up in had running water, when most of the houses around you didn't?

Carter: Right.

McIntyre: Was it the whole time your lived there, or was that something that was added?

Carter: Well, see, when the electricity came through, our roads, you know, then they did get a refrigerator and a washing machine. They had a washing...Remember downstairs, going like that, and the clothes in [it]?

McIntyre: Was the canning process something you helped with?

Carter: Yes, and I did a lot of it in my own home, after?

McIntyre: Why don't you try to describe that process, not in your home, but as a child? What was going out to canning?

Carter: Well, sitting on the porch, opening peas and beans...It wasn't a really fun time. Of course, Mother would try to get things going interesting, and we'd try to sneak out. But somebody would always tell on you, mostly him. (referring to man in the background, who laughs heartily.)

McIntyre: So, what all was canned on your farm?

Carter: Peas and string beans and corn and fruit, oh, yeah. Then Dad planted a big... and beef. Oh, that homegrown beef was so good.

McIntyre: What about milk? Did you process your own milk there?

Carter: You milked and (chuckles) brought it and put it on the table. Well, it ran through a separator. So, you had real thin milk and this heavy cream. They say heavy cream isn't good for you, but Mother lived to 101, so it couldn't be too bad, because I've seen her when the meal was over, everybody was done, and there's still some cream in the pitcher—and this is separated cream—she would take it and pour it in her glass and drink it, mmm.

McIntyre: How far were you from other farms in the area? Where you pretty isolated?

Carter: No. The first year I went to school, I went in the hack. The school was consolidated, which is kind of ahead of its time. That would be in 19-what? It would be '27 or something like that. So, the hack would come and pick you up. The hack was pulled with horses. [That was] the first year only, then they got a school bus.

McIntyre: How many were in the hack that have picked you up? How many would ride in that?

Carter: Well, quite a few. There was a big boy that was a junior or senior, that lived out at the end of the district. Evidently [they] had hired him. So he would take

the hack home, you know, and drop us off and keep the horses at night. Then he'd pick us all up in the morning.

McIntyre: How long a ride was it from your farm to the school?

Carter: We lived close to town, I mean, a mile and a half.

McIntyre: And the school, what grades were there?

Carter: Twelve, up to twelve. It was a progressive school. My Dad was involved in that all the time.

McIntyre: You say progressive, what do you...?

Carter: It was consolidated. See, it wasn't a country school, like most of the isolated places, you know, one room. So, it was ahead of its time for consolidation.

McIntyre: And there were separate grades then?

Carter: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

McIntyre: About how many attended the school? Was it a pretty small school?

Carter: Well, there would be, on average, ten to fifteen in every class. (from the background, "Depends on the year. Twenty-five to thirty would be the maximum per class.") Yeah.

McIntyre: Did the farming interfere with your schooling at all? Would there be times you'd have to work on the farm, rather than going to school?

Carter: Well, the boys did. Sometimes they had to stay home to pick corn, but the girls didn't.

McIntyre: Did school start differently, because of the farming, as far as the time of year it started up?

Carter: No.

McIntyre: Now, it's starting up like in August, it seems like, more than—

Carter: Yeah, well, it didn't until in September. But, no. I know what you mean, but I don't ever remember stopping school to—

McIntyre: To harvest or to plant or anything? (background voice, "It was a shorter school year than we have now.")

Carter: Yes, but it never stopped school in the middle, or in October, for you to pick. The corn was all picked by hand; there was no combines. Then, if you pick it by hand, then you have to scoop it off, when you come in. And this boy

(referring to unidentified man in the room) picked 100 bushel a day, a lot of times, and scooped it all off.

McIntyre: During the Depression, you said you had food, because you grew your own, so you didn't realize you were poor. But what about the ones at school, the other ones you knew in town. Did it affect them more?

Carter: Well.

McIntyre: Do you know of people losing homes or anything like that or...?

Carter: I didn't pay any attention to that. (from the background, "Everybody had a garden.") Yeah, and beef. [They] raised cattle, even maybe just one or two to butcher. But they had—

McIntyre: The town that the school was in, about how big was that?

Carter: Oh, about 300.

McIntyre: So, what else was in the town, a general store?

Carter: At that time, they had a hardware store and a grocery store and a garage and a telephone, you know, central.

McIntyre: Were the telephones on the farm the whole time you were growing up or...?

Carter: Yeah, we always had a phone, yeah, a party line. (voice from the background, "Tell him about that.") (laughs) Beulah.

McIntyre: What do you remember about the party lines?

Carter: Well, if you wanted to get it and somebody was on, forget it. Whose house was on fire, and they tried to get the line, and the lady said, "I am talking now," and she wouldn't let the phone up? (laughs). She was ornery (laughs). (unintelligible voice in the background) What? (unintelligible response) Oh, yeah (voice from the background, "Eight or ten on a party line, and everybody knew everybody else's business.") Ours was a long and a short [number and duration of rings, identifying which house the call was for], and Harold's was a long and two shorts. You had a different, you know—

McIntyre: A different ring for each house.

Carter: And so, anyhow, everybody would listen to see what was going on. You knew they were listening, because you could hear them breathing sometimes.

McIntyre: What do you recall about the farm equipment, growing up?

Carter: Well, I—

McIntyre: Did you operate any of it yourself or...?

Carter: Joe and I, one time, a couple, three years, we had a corn cultivator. His [Joe's] legs weren't long enough, so he sat up in the front and did the horse. Because my legs were longer, I was sitting in the back, supposed to be there. Dad frowned when we plowed out corn (laughs).

McIntyre: What about other vehicles, trucks or cars? Did the parents have any?

Carter: Yeah, they always had a car. Sometimes, when we'd all get ready for church, then Dad would have to take a teakettle of boiling water down and pour somewhere and get the car started. Then we would go to church.

McIntyre: Do you remember what type of cars they had, when you were growing up?

Carter: (from the background, "Hand crank.") Oh, yeah. Oh, I'd forgot about that crank (laughs). Poor Dad (laughs).

McIntyre: What was that like, the cranking?

Carter: Well, I'm sure it was hard work. We were all sitting in the car, making remarks (laughs) and freezing. And then Mother did drive; she didn't back very well. So, us kids would sit in the back seat and make comments, when the car lurched back, you know. (laughs) I don't know why she didn't throw us out. (laughs) She was a very patient woman.

McIntyre: You mentioned using the car to go to church. Was that in the town, the church?

Carter: Yes, uh, huh. There was three churches in town.

McIntyre: Did your whole family go to a church?

Carter: You bet, every time there was—

McIntyre: You say, "You bet." So, there wasn't much choice; is that what you're saying? (both laugh)

Carter: There was no choice. You went, and you went at night, and you went Wednesday night to prayer meeting, and when else did we go?

McIntyre: So, Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday? Is that?

Carter: Yeah. [It] didn't hurt us a bit. (voice from the background, "We'd do all church suppers.") Oh, yeah, they were wonderful.

McIntyre: What do you recall about holidays, growing up, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, ones like that?

Carter: Well.

McIntyre: Were they big gatherings or not?

Carter: Yeah, Grandma and Aunt Margie. We always had Christmas presents and... We had everything that was necessary. We didn't have too much extra, but we weren't hurting a bit.

McIntyre: You said, in the spring you sowed the hay to pay... Was that the property taxes?

Carter: Um-huh.

McIntyre: What other crops were sold for cash?

Carter: Well, I suppose. (addressing others, unidentified) He [her father] fed corn; he didn't sell corn, did he?

McIntyre: So, the corn was mainly used to feed the cattle he was raising?

Carter: Uh-huh. But I can't think. Well, they'd sell wheat and oats, yeah, because they'd thrash. He and two other men owned a thrashing machine, and it would go round and thrash at different places. Then they would sell that.

McIntyre: So, would the different farmers help each other out during the harvest time?

Carter: Yes, and the wives too would come and help the... Our two neighbors always came down and helped Mom.

McIntyre: With the harvest? Then she would go to their homes too?

Carter: Yes.

McIntyre: How about the kids? Did they go from farm to farm, doing the same thing?

Carter: Well, yeah. See, you had to get the bench out and scrub it. Then you had to get wash basins out. They would come and wash in cold water—and towels were laying there—before they came in to eat, you know. Then, sometimes... There would be a lot of flies in those days, and some people had to go and (laughs) push a branch back and forth, to get the flies away from their food. I don't know. Just things happened.

McIntyre: Things happened during the harvest, you mean?

Carter: All the time. (from the background, "When you get eight people living in the same group, things happen.") They do. Don and I always had to do the dishes for these ten people. Poor Mother had gotten the food ready, and we'd all sat down and ate. Then they all went in the room, and Don and I had to do the dishes. We had a little song we sang. (sings)

*Away down yonder, not so very far off,
A jay bird died with the whooping cough.
He whooped so hard with the whooping cough
That he whooped his head and his tail **right off.**"*

Same song, second verse, and we'd sing. We'd get up to about [verse] forty-four, and Mother would come and close the door. (both laugh)

Carter: (voice from the background, "Sis, what do you remember about pests and dust?) Well, see, I didn't concentrate on that too much. But dust... In seventh and eighth grade, in our classroom, the dust was so bad in the classroom that it was just like I fog. I can remember that. Aunt Margie. (from the background, "Dust storms, coming out of Kansas, Nebraska.) Now this is Iowa; this is not Illinois.

McIntyre: Right. Which part of Iowa were you in, at that point?

Carter: Southwest corner, six miles from Missouri, and fifty miles from Nebraska, down in the corner.

McIntyre: The first time you left was to go to college?

Carter: Um-huh. We all went to college.

McIntyre: What about pets, growing up, remember? Did they have pets?

Carter: The boys had dogs.

McIntyre: What about you, nothing? Were there cats on the farm too?

Carter: Yes. Mother wasn't real fond of them. She called—

McIntyre: So, you had more working animals than pets, at that time?

Carter: Yes (both laugh). She named one Ugly, and Kathy didn't like it. "Get away, Ugly," she'd say (chuckles).

McIntyre: Did the kids each have a certain area they had to do, as far as chores? You mentioned you were doing eggs, and everyone kind of helped in dishes.

Carter: I don't know. Everybody was busy. Of course, the milking had to be done.

McIntyre: Was there a difference in the chores that the boys and the girls did? Was that divided at all, along those lines?

Carter: No, I don't think so. Everybody worked. Everybody did.

- McIntyre: Were the boys more in the fields than—
- Carter: Oh, yeah.
- McIntyre: ... than the girls were?
- Carter: Uh-huh. Yes, I was never in the fields at home, not until I got married. (background voice, “How did you get along?”)
- McIntyre: When did the boys start going in the fields, what age? Do you recall that?
- Carter: Well, see, Joe and I weren’t very big when we were doing the cultivating. But a lot of times, on Saturday, when corn-picking, the whole family would have to go out and pick. The bigger you were, the farther away you got from the wagon, because you would be able to throw it farther. I thought some of the boys aimed at people in front of them (both laugh), instead of the wagon, but— (giggles)
- McIntyre: How many hours do you think you spent working, on a weekly basis?
- Carter: Oh, mercy.
- McIntyre: ...doing chores and farm work and all that, as you were growing up, most of your time? Or did you have much free time?
- Carter: Not very much free-time. (directed to someone else in the room) You answer that.
- McIntyre: (laughs) What about?
- Carter: (voice from the background, “You had to exist. That was the substance you produced so that you could eat and you could live. And you can’t do that if you’re playing all the time.”) No.
- McIntyre: If you had free time, what did you do? Were there certain games you played?
- Carter: Well, I took piano lessons.
- McIntyre: Were there many games you played?
- Carter: Oh, yeah. We’d play games in the evening. And then we all got into a big contest. What was...Malt-o-Meal [a hot breakfast cereal] or something, wasn’t it? The whole family would gather, because you would see how many words you could make out of a certain sentence. Dad had a dictionary this big, and he would sit down there, and all of us would work on it. We thought we had it; we all practically had the thing spent. I don’t believe they even answered back, did they? (voice from the background, “Malt-o-Meal ran a contest; how many words can you find in this phrase?”)

- McIntyre: You said you played games at night. What type of games did the family play?
- Carter: Dominoes.
- McIntyre: Was that just the kids or the parents too?
- Carter: No, parents played too. Carroms.¹ Oh, yeah; the boys played carroms.
- McIntyre: What was that?
- Carter: You have a big board and four sides. They got real good at it. Oh, Dad was real good at it. My dad was a school teacher before he went to farming. Both of them [father and mother] were very sure that each one of us was going on to school.
- McIntyre: When you were growing up, was he still a school teacher then?
- Carter: No. He taught about four years after they were married. Then he came back to the farm. They taught in Kansas.
- McIntyre: You said, "They." Was your Mother a teacher too?
- Carter: Ah, yes. She had gone out to Washington and taught school out there, so she had taught. But she didn't, after they were married.
- McIntyre: So, during the years you were growing up, both of them were 100 percent on the farm then?
- Carter: Right.
- McIntyre: Was there any outside employment for either one?
- Carter: No. No, with six kids, they had plenty to do at home (laughs).
- McIntyre: You said everyone in your family then went on to college?
- Carter: Yes.
- McIntyre: Was that pretty unusual for the high school you were in? Did the other families do that too?
- Carter: Pretty unusual at that day, um-hmm, because I know my brother, Harold, the oldest one wrote. He went two years to Monmouth, and then he came home and said—because he wanted to farm—he guessed that he would quit and not go back. The parents said, "Well I guess you're not. You're going back. We want you to have a degree." Which he did.

¹ A "strike and pocket" table game of Eastern origin, similar to billiards and table shuffleboard.

- McIntyre: Did most of the kids in your school graduate from high school?
- Carter: Yeah.
- McIntyre: Were there dropout rates then, like now?
- Carter: Oh, no. I don't—
- McIntyre: It was just kind of expected that you would go all the way through?
- Carter: Yes. (voice in the background, "Most of them graduated.") Yeah. (another voice in the background, "If you didn't graduate, they thought you were sick or something.") (first voice, "Yeah, you graduated.") Yeah.
- McIntyre: When you went off to college, the family still lived on the farm, so you'd be back summers and things like that?
- Carter: Um-hmm.
- McIntyre: You started college where?
- Carter: Monmouth [College].
- McIntyre: In the education field then?
- Carter: Music, uh-huh.
- McIntyre: How long did you attend there?
- Carter: I went two and a half years there, and then I quit. Then I married, and my husband was killed in World War II. So, then I went back to school and finished up, before I married again and started teaching.
- McIntyre: So you married when you were in college?
- Carter: Um-hmm, because the war was coming on.
- McIntyre: Was he a student there?
- Carter: At Monmouth, um-hmm.
- McIntyre: Then what happened? He got drafted or joined or..?
- Carter: He was a ninety-day wonder. You're probably too young to remember that, but he went for ninety days, and then he was a second lieutenant. He was a pilot in a B-17.
- McIntyre: In Europe?

Carter: Yes.

McIntyre: And how long was he in?

Carter: Until he was killed.

McIntyre: Which was...?

Carter: Almost a year. He had twenty-three missions.

McIntyre: Where were you living then?

Carter: I was living with his parents or else my parents. And I was working then.

McIntyre: Where did his parents live?

Carter: In Earlville, Illinois.

McIntyre: And your parents were still back on the same farm you grew up on?

Carter: Right.

McIntyre: So, when he was in the military, you stayed with one or the other parents?

Carter: Right.

McIntyre: You said you were working. What type of work were you doing?

Carter: I was working at a hemp mill, in the office.

McIntyre: When the war started, do you have memories of that?

Carter: Quite a few.

McIntyre: Pearl Harbor itself, what do you recall about that?

Carter: Yeah. We were in school then, I remember when the—

McIntyre: In college?

Carter: Yeah, in college. I remember when the word came to the dorm, and everybody was done in.

McIntyre: How soon after that did your husband go in?

Carter: Well, quite soon. The men all cleared out of school, because everybody went and drafted, not drafted, they—

McIntyre: Enlisted.

- Carter: A lot of them were drafted and then enlisted.
- McIntyre: After his death, you kept working at the factory?
- Carter: Yes.
- McIntyre: How long did you keep working there?
- Carter: Till I got married again, because I married his first cousin.
- McIntyre: And when was that?
- Carter: Well, that was in '45. He was a farmer, so then we lived on the farm. All of a sudden, the school didn't have a kindergarten teacher, because the woman went to join her husband. They came out for me to take it, and I did it. I hadn't graduated, but I had to take a test. And so I taught. I started in, to finish out the year for them.
- McIntyre: So in '45 you got married and moved onto the farm.
- Carter: Right.
- McIntyre: And that was the farm you stayed on until...?
- Carter: He died.
- McIntyre: When was that?
- Carter: Ninety-seven.
- McIntyre: What type of farm operation was that one?
- Carter: Corn and beans, and he would go out west every fall and buy cattle and fed cattle.
- McIntyre: How was his operation different from the one you grew up on?
- Carter: Because he had much more machinery. But aside from that, he didn't like to milk cows. We had two boys, and we'd take the boys out, and my dad would say, "It is **terrible!** Here's these **farm boys**, and they don't even know what end of a cow the milk comes from." (both laugh) But we still didn't get it, because he didn't like to milk.
- McIntyre: What was your involvement in the farm, from '45 on?
- Carter: I helped wherever I could, you know.
- McIntyre: What type of things would you do?

Carter: I would drive the tractor sometimes, and it was fun. (laughs)

McIntyre: How large an operation was that for you?

Carter: Well, it was, 220 [acres], wasn't it? I don't know. He had other land too. I would go and help sometimes, but I wasn't real good with tractors, because I never drove tractors at home.

McIntyre: As a child, you never drove tractors?

Carter: No. So then, he would motion for things for me to do. He was on the tractor too, but I couldn't understand him. You know, (making hand signals) when you go this way or this way, what does that mean? I never learned that. (laughs).

McIntyre: Did you grow food for yourself on that farm too, like you did growing up, or was that different?

Carter: Yes, when we were first farming, we had a big garden and a big strawberry bed.

McIntyre: So, in the late '40s you're talking about, now.

Carter: Yeah.

McIntyre: And that changed over the years?

Carter: Well, after I got to teaching, I just kept on. It worked out, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. So, I kept on. But I got kind of busy, so I didn't have too much garden, because I had to keep going to summer school and stuff to get my degree.

McIntyre: When did you start teaching?

Carter: I started teaching in 1953, and I quit in 1984.

McIntyre: So, from the time you started teaching onwards, you grew less of the food for yourself?

Carter: Right.

McIntyre: During the late '40's were you still doing the canning, that type of thing, that you did growing up?

Carter: Oh yes, always, uh huh.

McIntyre: And that kind of stopped when you went to work, I guess?

Carter: Well, I still canned quite a bit. I've canned up until just a few...I still did some, but nothing like at home, because we just had the two boys. We didn't have so many people to eat.

McIntyre: Did your husband work outside the farm or only on the farm?

Carter: On the farm, until one day he bought half of a locker plant that was in town. He worked there, as well as farming. Then he bought the other man out, so we owned it for several years. Every small town had a—in the days when they used to ship cattle from the west—every place had a... What do you call it? Stockyards, so that the trains could leave the cattle off. Sometimes they had to be left off to feed and water and then load up again.

So he bought that, because it was there, all going to wrack and ruin. Somebody had a couple of horses in there they never fed or watered. That made him so mad he bought it. He cleaned that all up and then put up buildings. One building he put up was for a man that had corn shellers and things like that, and then he put up a building for a man that sold corn, and then he put up another building, because it was close to a golf course, and everybody had golf carts they wanted to put in. So we had those. He was busy.

McIntyre: You mentioned growing up, how the farmers helped each other during the harvest and planting times. What about from '45 on in that type of operation, was it same?

Carter: Same thing. They had five people that had interest. There were five of them all together. They had a hay baler they'd buy, and they'd go around and do everybody's hay, for several years. That was big meals for dinner and big meals for supper.

McIntyre: So the wives would be involved in that part?

Carter: No, just the one wife, where they were. But some other wives took them to town. Men didn't like that, because the other wives (laughs) wouldn't cook. My husband had a deal. About every time, if you drove in our yard at mealtime, he would say, "Come on in and eat." I got a little perturbed sometimes, but he did it. (both chuckle)

McIntyre: And you taught where, during all those years? From '53 on, where were you teaching?

Carter: In Earlville.

McIntyre: At the same school the whole time?

Carter: All the time at the same... Well, not at the same building. They finally put another one up.

- McIntyre: How was that school different from the one you grew up in?
- Carter: Well, (laughs) I don't know. I find that, a lot of times, I didn't pay attention to different things, but I learned. It was bigger and more equipment and more everything.
- McIntyre: How did it change from '53, up to the time you retired? What changes did you see in education? You always were in kindergarten, you said, right?
- Carter: I was always in kindergarten. Pretty soon, you got kids that had not been taught even the basics. Then you would call people in and tell them, and they would say, "Well, that's your job" or something. Then they would complain to the authorities. It is not fun to teach now, I'm sure, but it was then.
- McIntyre: But in the '50's it was fun, or you enjoyed it then?
- Carter: Yes. I enjoyed it thoroughly, yeah.
- McIntyre: And it started changing, somewhere along the way?
- Carter: Well, the government stepped in. You can't touch them; you can't do this; you can't do that. Well, kindergarten, they want to be held and loved, you know, because they're away from Mama. It just got worse and worse.
- McIntyre: What about discipline? How did that change over the years, when you were teaching?
- Carter: Well, I pretty much stayed on top of that, but—
- McIntyre: But you had the little kids, which is a little different at that age.
- Carter: Yeah, uh-huh. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I hear some people that can't stand to go to work; they hate it so. But I really loved it.
- McIntyre: During the years you were teaching, how much time did you spend still doing farm work?
- Carter: Well, in the summer time, I did. I'd go out and help start a tractor. You were supposed to pull this tractor and get it started, you know, different things there, but not a lot.
- McIntyre: How did your husband's farming operation, or yours, change over the years, as far as how much was invested in equipment? Did you get involved in that part?
- Carter: Oh, yes.
- McIntyre: How did that change and affect you?

- Carter: Well, quite a bit, although he was conservative, like I was. He fixed up and used his old equipment. Toward the end, when we should have been replacing, he fixed it up, and we used it. He said, "When we pull this in the shed, it's paid for." And this \$50,000 or \$80,000 tractor that's going in the field next to, you know, it's different. So I was glad. We are conservative people, or we used to be.
- McIntyre: But a lot more was invested in equipment each year, more of the—
- Carter: More than Dad had, yeah.
- McIntyre: And even his operation, more in every year than the—
- Carter: Than there was—
- McIntyre: When you started in '53, there was a lot less tied up—
- Carter: Yes.
- McIntyre: ...in supplies and equipment than it was later on, probably, right?
- Carter: Right, um-huh.
- McIntyre: Do you recall any about yields, how they increased over the years?
- Carter: Oh, yes.
- McIntyre: Do you remember numbers at all, or what he was—
- Carter: Well, I remember when the first 100 bushel-an-acre corn and—
- McIntyre: Do you recall when that was?
- Carter: No, and 32 or 35 bushel [of] beans.
- McIntyre: Uh, huh.
- Carter: Because he always used fertilizer and stuff like that. Well, they didn't have it when my father was farming.
- McIntyre: During the years you were on your Father's farm, they didn't have the fertilizer?
- Carter: Unh-uh.
- McIntyre: Do you recall what yields were back then? Did you ever hear your father discussing it?

Carter: Well, where's Don? (voice from the background, "Probably 35, 55 bushel an acre.") Yeah, probably, um-hmm. Of course, the land was better where we lived in Illinois too, more productive than it was out in Iowa. (voice from the background, "And you would have had hybrid seed.") Yes. Yeah, because I remember Dad bringing in ears of corn and then figuring out his corn and then putting two or three seeds in these little things to germinate the seeds to see what would grow best. So then, when we were in Illinois, you'd buy good seed corn, expensive, but you didn't have to check it yourself.

McIntyre: You said your father had taught for two years. Did he have a degree?

Carter: Uh, hmm

McIntyre: Which was probably unusual too, at that time.

Carter: Yes, it was, four years. He was the coach, and they would go everywhere. He would go by train, take his group and go. They went down into Kansas and everything, his baseball team. Did they play football then, I suppose?

McIntyre: That was from a school team or just a—

Carter: Yeah, um-hum. But they always went by train, because they didn't have buses, and they didn't have transportation.

McIntyre: Growing up, were you involved in any farm organizations, like 4H or anything like that?

Carter: Girl Scouts, but not...I guess 4-H too, very involved in Girl Scouts.

McIntyre: In Girl Scouts? Who was sponsoring that?

Carter: My aunt.

McIntyre: So it was at her house, then, or was it at some church or school that sponsored it?

Carter: Well, I don't know. It just was. We'd have Girl Scout camp, and we had to get badges, you know. I was encouraged to get all these badges, so I did get my Golden Eaglet pin [Girl Scouting's highest honor from 1918 to 1939], which was stolen from my house in Illinois. My son tried to find another one, and he got in touch with somebody in Washington. They saw my name in 1939, and so they sent him a replacement. I was so surprised.

McIntyre: From '53 on, was your husband involved in any farm organizations?

Carter: Oh, yes.

McIntyre: What was his...?

Carter: Well, the town elevator. He was on that.

McIntyre: On the elevator board?

Carter: Uh-huh. And he was on the school board, and he was on the church board. He was on a lot of boards.

McIntyre: Were your sons involved in farming at all, growing up?

Carter: The youngest son had polio before he was two years old. He was not able to farm. His right arm was gone, right side was damaged. So we knew he'd never be able to farm; he didn't have the strength for it. So he went to school and got his medical technologist [training]. Then he was a physician's assistant, and he decided he would go on and try to be a doctor.

So he put his application in six different places, but when he went to Northwestern, they looked at everything and decided it looked pretty good. But they said, "We're sorry, you're not the right color, and you aren't from the right country. We can't take you at all," which was a good thing for him, because he went into insurance, and he had all this health information. So he has done very well with that.

McIntyre: What about your other son?

Carter: Other son taught school, and was a counselor for years. He's retired now.

McIntyre: What happened to the farm you and your husband had?

Carter: When he was killed... It's rented out. The younger son, we had given him land off of it, and they had built a house. So he oversees that.

McIntyre: What about the family farm that you grew up on? What became of that?

Carter: Well, that's sad. It was sold and wasn't taken care of. Well, I guess it's still farmed. This gal (deferring to someone else in the room) can answer that, because she lives right beside it.

McIntyre: So it was sold to—

Carter: Somebody from Omaha, that wasn't interested in it. Was he? That wasn't interested in it, really, I never did feel. (voice in the background, "Not for very long, but they still own it; they rent the land.") They do still own it? Oh. They let the house go; it's terrible. It's very sad to go back and see.

(another voice in the background, "Margaret, on your farm and Earlville, who kept the records? What did that entail?") Hours. Well, unfortunately, he didn't like to, and he paid everything. So the old girls finally learned how to do bookkeeping, and so we got it evened up.

McIntyre: So you did all the bookkeeping for the farm?

Carter: Yes, I did, and I can't even keep my checkbook now. (both laugh).

McIntyre: Who did the bookkeeping, growing up on the family farm? Do you recall that at all?

Carter: Dad, I think, don't you? (directing the question to someone else in the room)
Yeah, Dad. (voice in the background, "Mom would help, but Dad mostly").
Yeah. What?

(two people talking in the background, "Diaries.") Oh, yeah, Grandma kept diaries. (voice from the background, "from about 1900 to the 1970's".)

McIntyre: You have those now, or where did they end up?

Carter: They've been gathered together and copied. (voice in the background, "Do you remember the entry about when Grandma worked until noon? She got the laundry done; she got the canning done, and she had to quit early, because she wasn't feeling real good. And that night the baby came?). Which baby was that? (same background voice, "Mom.") No, I don't remember that. (more talking in background).

McIntyre: How would you say the farm was different growing up, from '53 on, with your husband on the farm? What were some differences that you saw?

Carter: Well, there weren't so many kids. (chuckles) I don't know. It was different; it was a different locality, and—

McIntyre: You mentioned the soil was better in Illinois.

Carter: Yes, and it was a family farm where we lived there too, but...(voice in the background, "Did you have more free time?")

McIntyre: The labor change? Was it less labor intense later than it was growing up?

Carter: Oh, I don't know. I really can't answer that. My husband's father was a carpenter, and during some bad depression, they fell heir to this farm, and he was not a farmer. He wasn't interested in it. So, when Forrest [her husband] got old enough, he really kind of took it over and got it into a paying proposition.

So, I...(voice from the background, "Sis, you didn't have a kitchen in Earlville, like Mom's kitchen at home. So, there were major changes in that period of time.") I still had the cook stove for quite a while, until I got rid of it, but I did have an electric stove too, eventually. And I had a washing machine in the basement, and I had refrig[erator].

McIntyre: Was there ever refrigeration on the family farm, the one you grew up on?

Carter: Not until electricity came through.

McIntyre: Was that before you left for college or after? Do you remember that?

Carter: Before.

McIntyre: So sometime in high school, maybe, electricity came through?

Carter: Yes.

McIntyre: So you had to generate a before, that you had some power, but you didn't have the—

Carter: Didn't have refrigeration.

McIntyre: ...until, maybe, your high school years.

Carter: And then, my Mother's namesake, the person that she was named for, left her some money. They bought a big freezer, and that was the first freezer that they had.

McIntyre: That reduced the canning, and they did more freezing or how did—

Carter: Yes, yes.

McIntyre: What stopped being canned and was frozen instead?

Carter: Well, corn and peas and beans (laughs) and meat, uh-huh. But that meat, canned meat, was so good. So I canned, back in Earlville, after I was back there. And then we saved our money for a year, and we took a truck camper and went to Alaska. So, I canned fourteen pints of meat to take along, because I'd heard how scarce it was, and my husband liked meat and potatoes.

So, we started out, and away we went. We got up to, I don't know, Lake Louise or somewhere. I thought, oh boy, let's have some good meat tonight. I opened it, and that had shook and loosened the lids. It was, you know, a two-piece lid. Yeah, it loosened the lids, and every jar was spoiled. We had to throw them all out. That was awfully hard.

McIntyre: You mentioned, when you were in, I think, grade school, the dust storms that you had at either the farm, growing up, or the one you lived on with your husband. Were there any other disasters that came through, tornadoes, floods? Did you ever experience anything like that?

Carter: Well, one year we had such a wind that it blew the bean seed out of the ground. We had to replant that, and dust in the house, terrible.

McIntyre: That was growing up?

Carter: No, that was on the farm in Illinois. Then, you know, bad winds that would blow the corn all down. They had to cut it one way and then go out around... They could only cut it one way, when they combined it. That's enough, isn't it? (voice from the background, "There's one more story I want you to tell about fixing lunch and... That's a true story.") That is a true story. That was in summer time.

McIntyre: What's the story then?

Carter: Well, this youngest boy got polio. My uncle was a doctor in Elgin, and he made a trip down, because we had gone to Rockford with this boy, and they had put... It was the most deltoid muscle, and the nurses had fixed a wire out of hanger and had his arm up, like this, all the time. I don't know whether Mother had told Uncle Lee or what, but all of a sudden, he came down. He was a busy man. I can still see him sitting there, and he said, "Margaret, don't you know, he can't have that up there like that. It'll freeze."

Well, the doctor in Rockford was supposed to be a specialist, and my Uncle was old. I thought, "Oh." He said, "You bring him up to Elgin, and I have a woman that will work with him." So, three times a week, I drove to Elgin. During a time when there was men—paid time and so forth—you would get a big dinner on for them, and then you would drive to Elgin, 60 miles, and you'd drive by home. Then here's the men there for supper. We did that for several days. I couldn't do it now, but I did then.

But the end of the story was, after about a year of that, Miss Moseman said, "I want you to come in this other room," in Elgin. She said, "I just want you to come and look." Here was a boy that was... See, Craig was only two when he got it, or wasn't [yet] two. But this boy was seven or eight years old, and here he sat with this arm, up like this, frozen. She was trying to loosen that enough, so he could get it down, because that same doctor had put a brace on it. So I was so grateful to Uncle Lee.

McIntyre: I know you kind of want to stop. Are there any other particular memories that stand out, from growing up on the family farm?

Carter: Many (chuckles). No. One time, I was driving a—Oh, what's the name of that?—it was a hay conditioner, and the tractor had a torque or something on it. I didn't understand it, but I was told what to do, so away I went. But something happened, and it went "clunk", and it was all tied, with hay around.

My husband was doing something else. He saw the tractor stop, so he came over. He had to lay down on the ground, with his pen knife, and cut all this hay out of each deal (laughs), and he said, "Now, do this and do this." So I did, for quite a while. But then it went "clunk" again. He came over and cut it all out. He was a very calm man with me.

Finally he said, “Why don’t you take the damn thing, and go to the house.” He **never** swore. I think that’s the first time I ever heard him say damn. (both laugh) “Why don’t you take the damn thing, and go to the house.” So I did.

McIntyre: Growing up or when you had the farm with your husband, do you remember any injuries on the farms?

Carter: Yeah. He was hunting foxes from an airplane, and it went down. So, he laid with a broken back and a broken leg and a brain concussion, for quite a while. Those were bad days.

McIntyre: What about growing up? Was anyone hurt on the farm there, during farming accidents that you recall?

Carter: I don’t remember, do you? (addressing others in the room) (unintelligible talking in the background, then, “The tractor that rolled over. Do you remember that?”) No. I remember hearing that Dad’s tractor went back, and he was sitting up like this, on the...I don’t know. So, anyhow. It wasn’t serious, too serious, anytime. We all made it, you know. (voice in the background, “Farming is a dangerous profession, any time. Back when or today, it’s still a dangerous profession.”)

McIntyre: Your father had one tractor. Do you recall what other equipment he had?

Carter: Was there only one? (voice in the background, “For a while, only one.”) Yeah, cause it was still using horses. You know there was horses, Dan and Prince. He hayed with horses.

McIntyre: So, when you were growing up, some of the operations were being done by horses—

Carter: Oh, yes.

McIntyre: ...during part of the time.

Carter: In Iowa.

McIntyre: Right.

Carter: Yeah.

McIntyre: Up to—

Carter: When Don was in college, he came up to see me at Earlville—he was at Monmouth—and that was the first time he had ever seen a combine. You see, Dad didn’t have one; nobody around there had one then.

McIntyre: Did your Dad always have a tractor and use that, plus the horses, or was it originally just horses.

Carter: Originally it was just horses. I can't remember when he got the tractor. Do you? (addressing someone else in the room) (Voice from the background, "I'm going to say, very early '30's was his first tractor.")

McIntyre: Would your Dad have been in charge of the horses then, or who took care of them? Was it one of the kids?

Carter: Oh, yeah. Dad was in charge of everything.

McIntyre: Who had to do the work to take care of the horses, though, the kids or your Dad or—

Carter: Well.

McIntyre: ...or everyone?

Carter: Everybody, but Dad called the turns.

McIntyre: Is there any other thing you want to mention about, particularly the Iowa farm, growing up?

Carter: No. We were taught to work, and I'm so glad we were. But it was quite a burden at the time. (chuckles). (voice in the background, "We were given responsibilities and were expected to carry them out.") Right. And we did.

McIntyre: Why don't I stop it at this point then, okay?

Carter: I think that would be a good idea.

(end of interview)