

Pete Watson: Bryson School

ECS: And Bryson had how many grades?

PW: Six when I started, and then when I got to the fourth grade, they cut two of them out.

ECS: Oh, OK.

PW: And I had to come to Elkton in my 5th Grade.

ECS: Was it a, were there individual grades or were you grouped together, how was the school setting?

PW: We'd have a class we'd have six grades here. Have a class, we'd have a bench up here, where, the class would go up and sit on this bench, and the other children would take care of themselves, or the older children would help them read. This one particular class would go up and sit on this bench and they'd have there class there. And Miss Birdsong was my first teacher.

ECS: Miss Frances Birdsong?

PW: Miss Frances Birdsong.

Pete Watson: Egg Money

PW: Well, in the 40's we had no electricity and we had no water except for the spring water.

ECS: Spring water.

PW: We had to bring water from the spring to the house. And the electricity, it didn't come through until about '48. We just had a lamp at night, that's all we had. And I'd set the lamp on the molasses bucket, where it would be up higher, where it would shine when I would study. Study my classes.

ECS: Did your parents ever say, why don't you study before it gets dark?

PW: No, we were milking before it got dark. [laughter]

ECS: That was another way of life, wasn't it? You lived, basically off of what you produced on the farm.

PW: Yes.

ECS: Cattle, hogs.

PW: Yes, and when we needed money in school for something, a quarter or something, I'd either carry some eggs to the store, or a chicken, and get the money.

ECS: If you could catch the chicken.

PW: We'd feed it a little bit, and catch them that way.

ECS: It's important how eggs played such an important part. It was a money maker.

Pete Watson: Farm Life

PW: We raised cotton and corn. Of course, in the fall of the year, summertime you always had to chop the cotton, to thin it out. I don't know why they planted so much. You'd go there and you'd chop half of it out.

ECS: You planted one for the birds and one for the worms and one for you.

PW: And then the corn, we'd have to gather the corn, usually. That was one of the things we was doing on Thanksgiving holidays from school. And then you had to milk twice a day. And that's what I did after I got big enough, or old enough.

ECS: I want you to explain to the people that will read this, why you would milk a cow twice a day.

PW: You'd get more milk. [laughter]

ECS: Well, that wasn't what I was fishing for. That old cow is going to fill up again.

PW: Yes, she'd have more room to put more milk in there.

LRW: Tell them where you milked them, didn't you milk them out in the lot?

PW: Yes, we would milk them in the lot, because we didn't have the feed to feed them, you know, while we were milking them. And then we got to where we was milking them inside. Daddy would milk in one stable and I would milk in the other. That cow we'd milk first, she'd always come in first. And then, when she got through, we'd call the other one's name out and she would come in. . . When I was going to school, me and my daddy milked, we was milking 23. I would milk 10 and go on to school and he would milk 13 of them.

Pete Watson: Family Farm

PW: I'm the only one, all the way around Bee Spring, that has their parents' farm.

ECS: The parents' farm, isn't that something.

PW: And I still have the family farm there at home. But we sold the house that we lived in.

Pete Watson: Family Visits

PW: Every Sunday, all of Paul Watson's children would come to their house, the kids would play out, the men would get under the shade tree and the women in the house, talking. And he had a big family, it was, Paul and them had twelve people in there, twelve children, and they'd have enough to have a ball game.

Pete Watson: Blacksmith Shop in Bryson

PW: And when we'd be going to school up there, they'd be shoeing horses and you could hear them hitting that old anvil you know, to straighten the stuff out.

ECS: Right enough.

PW: Get some hot coals in there, you could hear it just clanging just like it was out side.

Pete Watson: School Bus Rides

PW: Our first vehicle for school, Mr. Baxter Stevenson drove it. Had the seats one up the side and the back, I mean, up through the middle of the bus, and up the side of the bus. . . The last bus we had with those seats up the side and down the middle, we were coming to school one morning and there were so many people on there, something happened to the brakes, or he couldn't get his truck in gear, the schoolbus in gear, and at Baugh Road, up here, where we come out of Long Lane and hit Baugh Road, we turned over there.

ECS: Turned over.

PW: Of course it went up on its side, it didn't turn all the way over. He was going to miss this tree on the other side, a big oak tree, and Mr. Marvin Weisser was driving, and when he turned to go up the road here, on Baugh Road, he went over on the side.

ECS: Well, was anybody hurt in the incident?

PW: Rebecca Stevenson, I think, was the only one I could remember. Had a little bruise on her leg. We were stacked so tight, you couldn't throw.

ECS: Couldn't fall on each other, could you? [laughter]

Pete Watson: Dad Drove the School Bus

PW: Getting back to the school bus, when my daddy started driving, they had to leave their bus at school when they made their route in the morning time. And they'd come back and pick the bus up that evening and make his route. Of course he was only in the route where he lived, so he got to keep it at home. But he would walk from Elkton to . . . He'd finish his route up in the morning, of course he couldn't carry the bus back home. He'd walk from here to home.

ECS: And that was a long walk.

LRW: 5 miles.

PW: About 5 miles.

ECS: And you know, probably there was not that many people that had transportation. I would think that people would pick somebody up walking.

PW: He would cut across the Bryan's up here, when you go across the bridge. Cut across them fields and come up. And then I don't know, Mama, she learned to drive, or Dorothy got old enough to bring the car down for him, but that's the way he first started out.

Pete Watson: Snake in the Rafters and Hog Killing

LRW: Tell about when you were a little boy and sleeping upstairs and you'd see a snake crawling.

ECS: Yes, childhood was different from what it is now. I imagine we slept where it would be cool.

PW: Yes, I slept upstairs. And just like a barn roof on there, there's nothing between me and the tin except the rafters. And that, we'd go to bed before dark, you know. You'd sit up there and you'd fan.

ECS: Yes.

PW: Until you'd go to sleep, you know. Of course, you was tired anyway. And this one particular time I was laying there and I saw this chicken snake going over the rafters. Somebody said, what did you do? I said, I just lay there and looked at 'em. I said he wasn't going to hurt me. [laughter] But we liked chicken snakes to be around because we had rats. We really had the rats at home at that time, had no poison or nothing, but as, and then when we'd kill hogs, and salt this meat down, those hams down.

ECS: Describe a hog killing.

PW: Well, first thing you do is you take a 22 and go to the lot wherever they're at, and they kind of pride themselves in shooting them where they wouldn't squeal. They shoot them behind the ear and they'd just fall over. Sometimes they would squeal but most of the time they wouldn't. But they'd bring them out and they'd have a scald, full of water.

ECS: Hot water.

PW: Hot water. And they would take their hand and run their fingers through it and see how hot it was. That was their temperature gauge. And they would get that out and they'd pull the hog out, then they'd scrape all that hair off.

ECS: Yes, they would immerse that hog in that hot water, wouldn't they?

PW: Yes. Then they, when they'd pull them out they would scrape that hair off with a knife. And they they would gut it and take the entrails out. Well, they'd hang him up

first, and they'd take all the insides out. They would put this meat in a box, cover it up with salt.

ECS: To cure it.

PW: To cure it, for so long. Then after that, they would hang it up somewhere. Daddy and them would always hang ours upstairs. Come from the rafters. And that way the rats couldn't get on them. I'd be sleeping there and there would be two or three feet from my head to a big ham. People talk about meats, you know, that was what we lived on.

Pete Watson: Polecat Hides and Trapping

LRW: Tell about your daddy trapping coons. Trapping polecats.

PW: Yes. Daddy would go out in the morning, early, when there would come a little shower, or something, kind of warm. He had a Shepherd dog and that dog would get that polecat's attention. Daddy would knock the polecat in the head with a stick. And I started to get off the bus, there at home, when they opened the door I could smell them polecats. [laughter]

ECS: You could tell the dog and Daddy had been at work.

LRW: He sold the skins, hides, didn't he.

PW: Yes, he sold the hides.

ECS: Oh, did he?

PW: Yes, they would come by and pick them up. And that was another way to make money.

ECS: Yes, because people did trap didn't they?

PW: Yes, my granddaddy trapped up and down the creek all the time, until he was an old fellow.