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Pamela Gutshall interview for Wright State University History Course 485

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Katherine Gutshall
Hst 485
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The first interview I did was with my mother, Pam Gutshall. She grew up on the family farm and I was interested in her memories growing up on the farm.

I did the interview in the evening when my Mom would have wanted to go to bed. But, she stayed up and did the interview. We sat on the couch with her holding the recorder in her lap with one hand and the other hand was on Maggie, our dog. To me watching her hand pet Maggie was sometimes even more interesting than the answers to the questions. During the time she was talking about Teddy,

“Teddy was our first dog and he was a Border collie. He came I think from Indiana. They went over and got him from a breeder. He came before I went to first grade I’m sure. And Border collies are known for instinctively knowing how to herd to cattle and gain he had no fear he did it. That was his job and he loved every minute of it.”

her hand was stroking Maggie more lovingly, and firmly than when she was talking about college. Another thing that struck me was how she would smile during certain parts such as her college experience. Such as when she talked about what she did in the dorms.

“We had two senior girls who were in lieu of house mothers, and then there were twelve of us who were living there. And it was phenomenal because we really, really bonded. And those were friendships that stayed throughout the four years. Even though, again, we joined different sororities, had many different interests. It was the first time that I learned that your best friend doesn’t have to do everything just like you. You could still have a best friend but you had many, many friends

for many different things. Truly an eye opener. But more likely a life changing experience. That is what really education was all about. It wasn't just from the books. It was to get you to know your world better."

I knew that college had been a special time in my Mother's life but until now I did not know special.

I was somewhat surprised by the answers that she gave in response to the "good life" questions. I always knew she wanted to be a housewife, but the material aspirations surprised me. It's such a departure from what she grew up with and what she has said she wanted from as early as I can remember.

I am glad I did this interview. I was worried about it somewhat, because my Mother has lost a sister in the past few years and I did not want to bring up any memories that were painful. I do feel it was worth the time and energy to put these memories on tape.

Transcript of conversation with Pam Gutshall

This is Katherine Gutshall on February thirteenth at Pam Gutshall's home in her family room.

Where did you grow up?

Zanesfield, Ohio. But actually, out in the country because I grew up on family farm.

What was it like?

Probably the best of times. Simply because it was the values of traditional mid-America. People cared about other people and when they cared, they took care of other people. I remember multi-generational family gatherings which were the norm. Probably at least once a month. Also, when I grew up, it was a multi generational house. I was the oldest daughter of three and we lived in (on) the family farm. And the house was built in 1889 but it was on the farm that was deeded to the family (by a) military grant in 1818 and the house was my grandparents. I remember then vaguely though my grandmother died probably when I was three or four. And my grandfather died by the time that I had started to first grade. Kindergarten hadn't been invented up there yet. So consequently, the multigenerational belief was still there. And it was true of a lot of different friends that I had. But even more than that, the sense of community and taking care of other people, people looking in on them, sensing their needs and doing something about it was why it was probably the best of times. *When you said multigenerational, and your grandparents were not alive, what did you mean?* They were alive. My grandfather Taylor did not pass away until I was ready to go to first grade. *So, he lived with you?* We lived with him. It was his house.

You said you lived on a farm. What kind of animals did you raise?

When I was preschool, it was a little bit of everything; cows, hogs, chickens. My Grandfather Curl had sheep and we would inevitably get one or two sheep that more like pet sheep that we would keep but we didn't do that big time. My Dad would not have horses. He had them when he was a kid and did not want to have horses again. They are a lot of, high maintenance. They can get going things wrong with then very, very quickly. As time went by, by the time I started school, the hogs had gone by the wayside so that it became a dairy farm. And because it's a dairy farm that meant that you had to the things, the crops that would support that operation. So it included the grains, the corn, hay, that's about it.

What kind of mechanics did your Dad use?

Old fashioned tractors were what I first remember. And we've got the old fashioned sixteen-millimeter movies that would show that kind of tractor. And then up to 60's things were done so much by hand with minimal machinery help. In order to bale hay or straw, it came out of a baler, but then you had to load it onto the wagon that would follow behind and that was physically do that. That inevitably meant that some high school guy was hired to load straw or hay. And then after it was on the wagon, had to take it to the barn and reload it because it had to be moved to the hay loft. When you took it up to the second story, there would be a conveyer belt that would take it up. But it was still loading it and... There is no way I could even budge those hay bales or straw bales. They were so heavy. *Maybe fifty pounds, hundred pounds?* At least a hundred. *What size were they?* Three feet by two feet.

So when you said the high school kids, did your dad have seasonal help, or year-round help?

Seasonal help. The first one that I can remember was Gordon and he lived in Zanesfield. He was a town kid. But he helped out for a few summers. Then, David. And then somebody with the last name of Reames for maybe a summer or two. And after that I would have been going to college. And I don't know what, who all was helping then. *So the seasonal help didn't start until you were in junior high or so?* No, seasonal help started when I was in second or third grade.

You were saying that your Grandpa Curl gave you sheep. What were the names of those sheep?

Don't remember. I don't know that they had a name. They were just the lambs. *Did you sell those off or did they stay until old age?* They would stay in the summer then they would go back over to Grandpa Curl's barn in the winter. And he would give us a check for the shearing of the wool and I cannot for the life of me remember how much those checks would have been. But that was a really nice gesture. He didn't have to do it. And I'm sure that I saved it. I saved my money.

What other pets did you have?

Teddy was our first dog and he was a Border collie. He came I think from Indiana. They went over and got him from a breeder. He came before I went to first grade I'm sure. And Border collies are known for instinctively knowing how to herd cattle and gain he had no fear he did it. That was his job and he loved every minute of it. And then we had the assorted cats, always had cats. When I was in high school, I had a white bunny rabbit. His name was traditionally Peter. Peter lasted until a dog got him. But he lived in the back porch in a cage. We could take him into the kitchen which was tiled and then there was an archway that went from the kitchen to the living room. And Peter knew that he was supposed to stay in the kitchen on the tile but Peter also knew that the living room was better place to be and so he would sneak and soon as he hit the carpet, he would thump, thump, thump. And it's like, "I got it! I did it! I did it! He was just hop, hop, hop; happy to be there. He could be, instead of a lap dog, he was a lap bunny rabbit.

During the summer time, he went outside, and he stayed in the yard. Just nibble, ate on green stuff. *And that's when the dog got him?* The dog got him when he was, it was coming onto wintertime, in November, and he was in a crate in the cow barn. And at that point Teddy had died and we had a new dog. This dog was another Border collie and apparently she had been beaten. And she just did silly, skittish things. And she got the rabbit, killed it. *Did you have any chickens as pets?* Never. We had chicken, but never as pets. We had baby chickens. Back in the 50's you could go to the dime store then known as JC Murphys and before Easter they would bring in dozens and dozens of baby chicks that had been dyed pick, blue, green, lavender; anything but regular yellow fluff. And you could buy them. We always bought, I don't know, four or five chicks and then they would come home and stay probably for a month or so in the back porch. And then as their growing older, their getting rid of their baby feathers and their regular white ones would come in. And then they would move from the back porch to the regular hen house. But they never developed personalities.

Were there any truly memorable on the farm that has stayed with you?

Cockly Lockly was a rooster which attacked me. *Did he meet a demise, a unnatural death?* I can't remember how he died. I don't know. He may have been Sunday dinner for all I know. *Anybody else?* Our first kitty that we had, that we played with was Snowball. Snowball was white except he had a yellow ringed tail. And we, this was preschool time, we dressed him up in doll clothes. He'd take it. Stroll him around in the baby buggy, he'd take it. *Did you form any relationships with the cows?* We had one called Ada. She had South America on her side. She was an unusual cow because she really had a personality. Every once and a while, my Dad would buy a new cow. He was always upgrading bloodlines and so forth. And apparently she was one he to then breed and so forth. And make his operation more profitable. But anyway, Ada had South America on one of her sides. And she was one in which she would come up to us and we'd pet her.

Where did you go to school and whatnot?

Went to a consolidated school in Zanesfield. It was a consolidated two townships school. But it consisted of all twelve grades in one building. And there would have been one first grade, one second grade and so forth. When I was in ninth grade, our school was forced to consolidate with a neighboring school that again that had been two townships put together. So my graduating class had a grand total of sixty five kids in the class and that was four townships put together. And yet everybody knew everybody else. Everybody knew where everybody lived. Everybody knew everybody's family and the history of everybody's family back at least two generations. And if you didn't you were an outsider. Outsiders really had a hard time of adjusting because no matter what even if you moved there as a kid, you were still considered an outsider and never quite to be trusted.

Who was your favorite teacher?

Francis Stewart. Mrs. Francis Stewart. She was my third grade teacher. She was creative, fun, and did not have a four-year bachelor degree at that point. She was still going to summer school to get her degree. That was back in the good old days when you could start teaching before a bachelors. And she was the best.

You graduated from high school, where did you go to college?

Otterbein, it's in Westerville Ohio. *Why there?* I'm Methodist, it was a Methodist, one of the four Methodist colleges in Ohio. I liked it better than I did Ohio Wesleyan, certainly better than Ohio Northern which was up in the real boon docks and Mount Union was too close to Cleveland and too far away. So it was really between Ohio Wesleyan and Otterbein. And Ohio Wesleyan was probably snobbish enough to make me feel uncomfortable where as Otterbein was just Middle America.

How did college work for you? Did you enjoy it? Did you have regrets about going to college?

It was the four best years of my life. I was like a butterfly, coming out of the chrysalis. It was marvelous. I finally was around people who were like me. Could think and enjoy more academic type things plus there were so many wonderfully nice people I met. I did the sorority thing, and yet my friends were in every single different sorority. My freshman year I had a very unusual experience because we were the first wave of the baby boom and Otterbein had admitted more freshman than they actually had bed space for. And their solution to that was the college had a guest house, for visiting people to stay at and they converted it over to a freshman dorm. We had two senior girls who were in lieu of house mothers, and then there were twelve of us who were living there. And it was phenomenal because we really, really bonded. And those were friendships that stayed throughout the four years. Even though, again, we joined different sororities, had many different interests. It was the first time that I learned that your best friend doesn't have to do everything just like you. You could still have a best friend but you had many, many friends for many different things. Truly an eye opener. But more likely a life changing experience. That is what really education was all about. It wasn't just from the books. It was to get you to know your world better.

What did you go to college for?

I knew from the get-go, elementary, I wanted to be a teacher. Specifically I knew I wanted to be an English teacher. *Why?* I love that subject and in the early sixties, there were really only two job options open – nursing and teaching. And flitted with nursing a bit, but I really knew that I loved teaching. I just, always had the idea of watching the light bulb come on in somebody's head and me being the catalyst for that. It was what I wanted to do.

What are the things that you remember the most about being at Otterbein? What did you do for fun?

Talking. Talking was the big thing. Talking with people. As far as activities, were there things to go do? Absolutely. But it was just being with people. Sitting and talking in the dorm on dateless Friday nights or Saturday nights with the other girls. When you did have dates, going to a fraternity house and being with the guys and their dates. But it was talking, it was not about spending money. Very, very few times did dates involve spending money. Otterbein provided on campus activities which were free. That was part of the tuition. The tuition, room and board when I started was about two thousand dollars and by the time when I graduated it had risen to the grand total of three thousand dollars. But that provided you everything. There was a little movie theater in town, and I'm sure that cost a buck to get in. But other than that, since you could not have a car on campus, you stayed on campus and did things there.

Do you have any memorable students?

From way back then, just in general? I had one group of really, really smart eighth graders. And they were wonderful to try to expand and do different things with. This was in the very early 70's and I tried to combine poetry slash song lyrics with brand new technology which at that point was super eight movies. And they had to create their own little movie with the song lyric in the back ground and we add afterwards. And when first started teaching, cassettes still hadn't been invented. They were still the reel to reel tape recorders. And we put the music on the tape recorder and then we would have the action on the super eight movie. And as far as the kids' names, I don't have a clue. I can remember faces, and I've often wondered what happened to those kids because they were ones that could have really been movers and shakers. They knew where they were going and they were a fun group to be with.

When you moved to Miamisburg, why did you choose it?

Your Dad and I were teaching at Carlisle. And we knew we didn't want to live in Carlisle and we knew we really didn't want to live in Middletown. And so we were house hunting for something that was in our price range and lo and behold we found this plat on the west side of Miamisburg and there were just a few empty spots left and we talked with a builder. And we found that we could build a ranch house and it could within our budget and we could have a brand new house. And that's what made us choose that because it was ten minutes away from the school system.

How has Miamisburg changed since you have lived here?

It has become a lot more yuppie-ish. And there is a big division between the old times who been here for at least a few generations meaning they graduated and their parents graduated from Miamisburg versus the new people who have come in because of the attractive housing coupled with the school system. And I see a big division between the two.

What was your idea of the good life when you graduated from college?

The word hadn't been developed invented but that would have been it. And my idea of a good life was to not use my college degree and live in a fairly large, rather impressive house on a fairly large, rather impressive lot with big trees and have a husband who was a professional and take lovely vacations. Because I fully intended to have gone to Europe soon and know I have no desire to go and never got there.

Is your idea of the good life the same now? How has it changed?

Down scaled a bit, but instead of trying to impress other just being comfortable. Practical and comfortable I guess is how I would classify myself at this point. The good life included having family, many memories, and hope for the future.

Thank you.