

MEMORIES FROM DOROTHY PENKAVA

April 19, 1921

Interview by Sharla Sitzman at Colonial Acres Assisted Living.



Background. Dorothy was born in 1929. Her parents were Edgar & Mary Aylor Gilbert (1890-1983, 1895-1975). She had brothers George, Kenneth, Elmer (Pete), and Dwain. She married Elmer Penkava and they had one child, Rick. Dorothy is going on 92. She was born in 1929 and will be 92 on April 27 of this year.

Something she remembers her dad talking about, drought

“I was thinking about that dry year, 1924 I think it was. Dad had to go to Rulo to get feed for the cattle and then he sawed down trees in the pasture so they could eat leaves. It was so dry.”

Country school

She went to District 49, Hillcrest. There probably a dozen students at most. Her favorite teacher: “Blanche Hall, I liked her real well. She drove a horse and buggy to school. She lived east several miles. She left her horse at Mr. Miller’s on the

north side of the road from the school.” Dorothy didn’t like school, “not very well. I didn’t.” She didn’t go on to high school after graduating from 8th grade at the country school.

Life at home

“I stayed at home after country school. I helped Mom all the time in the garden, mowing the yard. All we had was the push mower and it was a big yard. I helped her do that.” I asked about her mother’s flowers, which are well know. “Flowers? Ooooooh, beautiful, beautiful flowers. I’ve almost cried when I go by there now [where they used to live]. Ooooohh.” She talked of a return visit after the house was eventually abandoned “For several years I went out there and got some evergreen stuff to decorate at Christmas. One time, I thought, ‘I’ll go upstairs.’ I went in and I went upstairs and then I thought, ‘What am I doing up here?’ Some people had lived in the house. It was all a mess up there. I wished I wouldn’t have gone up.”

Laundry:

In earlier years, her mom used a scrub board but then got a gas motor washing machine and sometimes that motor didn’t start.” With a foot pedal for starting the motor? “Yes. And it just wouldn’t start.”

No dryer? “Just clotheslines. But I liked to hang clothes, it’s kind of fun. It smells awful good.”

Cooking

Her mom was a good cook, “real good.” And the boys were, too, all but Dwain. “Dwain, he didn’t take to doing stuff like that, but George and Kenneth and Pete could cook just like mom.”

Special meals on Sunday? “I don’t remember what we had. We always had lots of mashed potatoes, and I still like them. Lots of times a roast. And she always made pies.”

Chickens

“We raised chickens, and dressed chickens all the time. Oh yeah, we dressed a lot of chickens! That’s one thing, the boys did to. They could dress a chicken just like mom and I. But Dwain would only go to the inside and then he’d quit.”

Eggs? “We had the eggs, too. We took eggs to town on Saturday night and bought groceries then. Went into Table Rock. Freemans had a place. We took the eggs there. Edwin and Cloyd Freeman.” If they had a lot of eggs, they used a pasteboard cotton that held 30 dozen.

Noodles? [She is famous for her noodles]. “I learned from mom. Oh my gosh, I’d hate to think about how many noodles I’ve made!”

“After we were married, I had so many eggs I couldn’t keep up!” Elmer farmed but at night he had a shop where he repaired small machine, chain saws and such. “I told Elmer, put a sign out in the shop homemade noodles for sale. Oh my gosh, I had so many people buy them. I sold them for \$1.75 and they’d take all I had, people would.”

“When I made noodles, I did 4 eggs. That would roll out to a couple of sheets this size [gestures about 2’ in diameter]. I rolled out a couple of sheets, let them dry and cut them.”

Ever save your egg money for something special? “No.”

“I sold my eggs for 50 cents a dozen. I had red hens and they laid big brown eggs. 50 cents a dozen! Lyle and Mary Sturgeon would always come out and wanted eggs.”

“I give lots of noodles away. Oh! My brothers, I gave them so many noodles. And there was a family – I made 3 dozen eggs and that was a LOT of noodles for one family.”

Elmer

How did she meet him? Elmer’s family moved up in the country from west of Pawnee and they came to my school. So we went to school together. We didn’t think nothing about each other in school.

Years later, I was in town one Saturday night. IO had come with my folks with cream and eggs. We came on Wednesdays to trade, too, but we brought cream and eggs in on Saturdays. He was parked up the street. I went over to his car to talk and then that’s how it started.”

How long did we go out together? “We went together lot of years, probably 8 years, a long time. One night in town, he give me a diamond ring for my birthday. We didn’t set a date then, not till later. “

In about 1953, we got married. It wasn't in a church. We went to Falls City. The Justice of the Peace wasn't there, we went into a place there and they said just go upstairs. So we did. We hadn't brought any attendants. Elmer said we don't need any, we're old enough we don't need any. We went up there and that guy said where's your attendants? When we told him we hadn't brought any, he said, just go downstairs and get the barbers. We go down and get them all the town. So we went to the barber shop and brought up a couple of barbers."

Honeymoon? "No. We didn't have a lot of money them days."

"Our first home was south of Table Rock, on the west side of the road. We lived there until my brother Pete – Pete lived north of Table Rock and was going to move to Kansas. That was wonderful farm ground up north, so after Pete left we moved up there."

"We lived there for years, until we bought a place south where Harry Wilcox lived. We bought that place and lived there until we moved to town. The house was a great big square, a big old place. It was in bad shape. We tore it down."

"We bought a double wide and moved in there. It was the first bathroom we ever had! Oh my goodness! What a change! We thought we had heaven!"

"Course it was a change from a round tub to a long tub. Before that, we had the round tub sitting bedside the stove, you'd be warm on one side and cold on the other. We didn't have running water before then. For a long time, had to heat the water on the stove. In the summer, we put the tub in the yard. We were off the road a little ways. I put the tub on the north side and put water in it and it would warm up in the sun. We took a bath outside and hoped nobody drove in. And another thing -- one person took a bath after the next person, in the same water. And nobody died."

Young people now, if they had to live like we did, I believe they'd have a heart attack. We didn't know any better!"

Elmer farmed all the time, and worked on small machines at night and when it rained. He worked on chain saws especially. Oh my goodness. After we moved to town, more chains saws and all that. Everybody brought their chains to him, said he did the best job sharpening. He was busy all the time. Some of them didn't pay their bills, though. After he died, Rick was on the phone calling people that owed. Some paid and some didn't.

Milk cows

Snow and ice? “Many times. Snow drifts, you know! Doing chores Elmer and I, we milked 12 Guernsey cows, each of us milked 6. Boy that was a job. Then carry it to a building by the house. We separated by hand [a mechanical cream separator] and later got an electric separator. Boy that was better! [Laughs!] Then we carried the milk back to the hogs. We just kept the cream to sell.”

Some of the Guernsey’s would give almost a bucketful, some didn’t. “They had a lot of cream in their milk.”

“We kept the steers, some of them, to go up to butcher. They had the best meat, the Guernsey steers.”

Pets

“We had one dog usually. An outdoor dog. I didn’t have no inside cats or dogs. My mom didn’t either.”

Folks would come to her place.

Televisi

“That came later on.” She and Elmer eventually bought one. Black and white? “Yeah!” [Laughs.] “It was nice!” She surely had some favorite shows at the time but doesn’t remember any right off.

The Reno Inn, run by her brother George in the 1950s

“Helping George! Oh my goodness, oh my land! On Mother’s Day and Father’s Day they had such a business. I helped. They’d say, “Peel some more potatoes and get some more potatoes on to cook, we’re running out. Oh, and wash dishes,” and I’d peel potatoes and wash dishes. Oh! I did a lot of work there! And sometimes if they wanted to go some place, Elmer and I stayed there.” But they still had to go milk their cows.

Kenneth Gilbert her brother. He lived most of the time south of town, where Cumro lives no. “He had such a beautiful place there!” “When he married Ida, he moved down where she lived.” “Kenneth had one boy from a first marriage. She was from California and after they split up, he never knew anything about his son. [When he was old] some of the girls said they could get on the computers and look

to see where he was, and Kenneth said he didn't want to know where anymore. The son could have found him if he was interested. He never knew where the boys was or nothing."

Dawyne – He married Delores Tupa. After the folks moved to town, they lived where the folks lived.

Life now

How's your life gone so far? "Pretty good," she says. These last years she has not been as happy because she doesn't have good balance anymore. She has to worry about falling. She has fallen in the past when younger. "My middle name should have been 'Fell' she laughs." But now that she is older it is scarier.

One time in the past: "There at home, I went to take the garbage out one day, I was walking out backwards and I missed a step about that much. I fell down. I stayed down I counted and said ABCs before I moved. I laid there a while, then got up and went in the house, then went back out and took the garbage out."

Miscellaneous

Son Rick was born in Humboldt, in the brick house on the west side.

She didn't belong to any of the clubs or organizations.

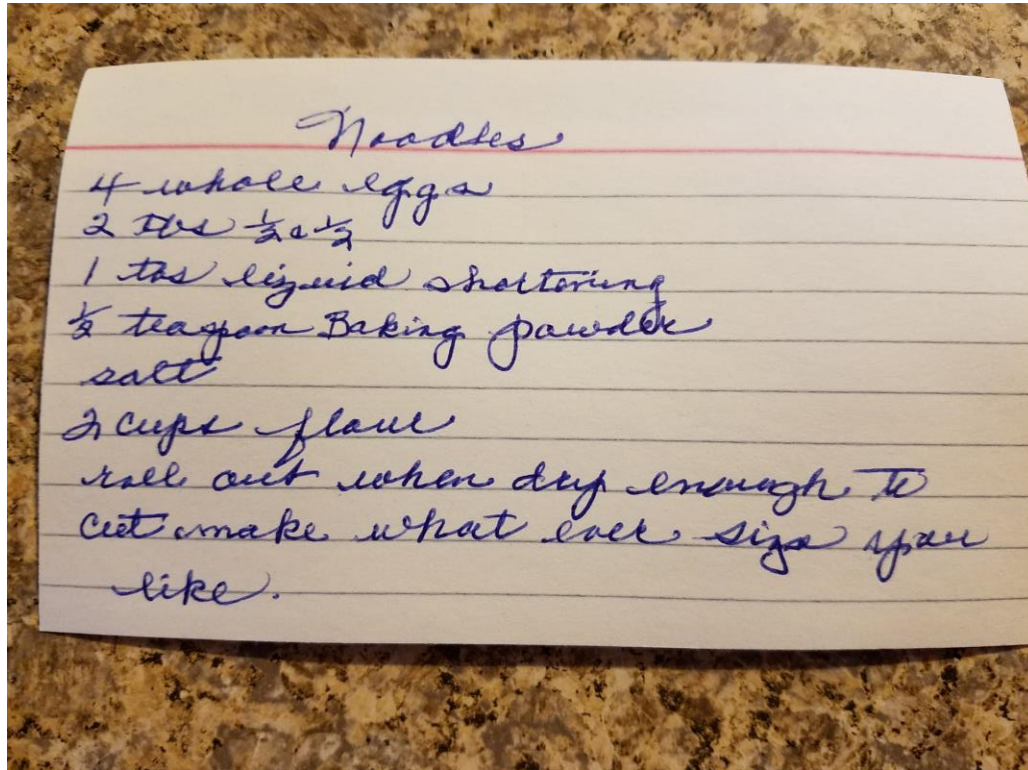
Elmer was not a veteran. He went for the exam but didn't pass for some reason.

End of the interview but not of the visit. About an hour of memories, and then some old-fashioned gossiping.

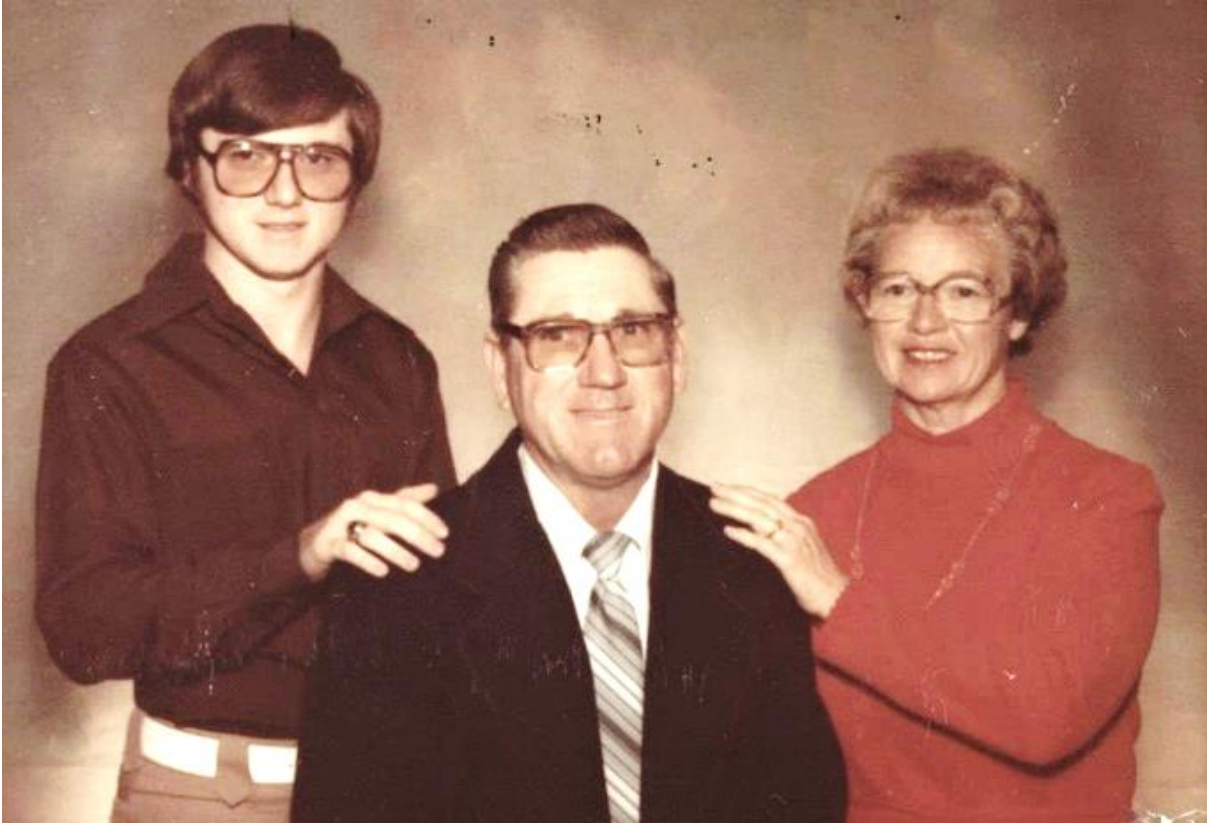
Sharla, transcribed 4/19/21

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Dorothy's noodle recipe, from her cookbook



In 1980, Dorothy with son Elmer and their son Rick.



Dorothy is in the back, holding niece Patty. Photo 7\

493, shared by Ronnie Gilbert. Ronnie is center front, with siblings Larry and Diane. In back are his mom Irma, his aunt Dorothy Gilbert holding his sister Patty, his grandpa Edgar Gilbert, and his dad George. Diane Gilbert Senft confirmed who is who and said that her grandma (Mary Gilbert) must have been taking the picture.





Edgar (1890-1983) and Mary Aylor Gilbert (1895-1975) with their children. Back row: Kenneth (1918-2011) and George (1915-1995). Front row: Elmer ("Pete")(1921-2018), and Dwain (1925-1998). Dorothy wasn't born yet!



Dorothy's grandparents John & Lilly Harman Aylor. Dorothy's mother Mary is believed to be the girl in the back and the other is her sister Alma. (The photo refers to Mary and Alma but does not say which is which.)

