

## **Marian Buckwalter Rohrer's Memoirs**

I was born the third child (second daughter) of Freeland N. & Florence M. (Huber) Buckwalter on December 5, 1928 on a farm at Center Square (near Talmage). My parents had moved to this farm the previous year. At that time there was no electricity or running water and of course no telephone on the farm. I remember the kerosene lights. When we went to bed someone took a small one upstairs. On Saturdays one of the rituals was to clean the kerosene globes as they got very black in a week's time. I don't have a lot of recollection of my life before the age of about 5 years. At about that age, some remodeling was done to the house and electricity was installed. Before that time we lived in a summer kitchen during the summer months. The remodeling involved removing the back stairway and preparing the summer kitchen for year round living. A pipeless furnace was also installed in an attempt to heat the rest of the house. I remember it was difficult to keep warm even in the house during those rough winter months. It was a family joke that there were times when we felt we almost needed to sit on the stove to keep warm! There was no heat in the bedrooms except what might get up the stairs and that sure wasn't much. Dressing warm was a necessity and even that was difficult. No warm slacks for girls!! We didn't really have winter clothes – just be sure you were wearing the required long johns. When the weather on washday was bad, mother would place a wooden rack around the register of the pipeless furnace to dry the clothes. The kitchen was where we lived year round. We did not have a bathroom at the farm and none was ever put in the entire time we lived in that house.

I had most of the usual childhood diseases before I started school. The ones I have the most vivid memories of are whooping cough and measles. Three of us were in bed with the measles at one time. Mother made makeshift beds for us in the living room to make caring for us easier. The shades were drawn to protect our eyes and we all had bronchitis along with the measles. Strangely my oldest sister did not come down with them nor did the youngest sister.

I was the middle child of 5; three sisters and a brother. Leon was born in 1923, Ellen in

1925, Kathryn in 1932 and Mary Evelyn born in 1937. A week after I graduated from high school, in 1947, the youngest of the clan, Jay Clair was born.

My early school years (grade 105) were spent at Stormstown a one room school and 1 ½ miles from where we lived. The usual mode of transportation was shoe leather. We cut through farmers' fields if the ground was not too wet. We had Amish neighbors, the Stoltzfuses, also another Mennonite family, the Horsts. We walked to school with the children in these families. When the weather was bad, Dad and the other 2 men took turns taking us. They each had their week. When it was Levi Stoltzfus' turn, we piled into the horse drawn market wagon. We didn't give it a second thought – we just did it. A few times we used the sleigh in the winter! In those early years, when it snowed, it really snowed! We missed a fair amount of school from these storms. After Leon completed eighth grade at Stormstown and Ellen the 7th, they went to Leola to the school that had all 12 grades. Kathryn and I went to Stormstown another year. Everyone should have the experience of attending a one-room school. How you learn things—and how you learn discipline. The next year Dad said we were all going to the same school. I went to Upper Leacock for the next 7 years. We often drove to school-as long as there was a licensed driver. Our '37 Ford was in the school parking lot a number of years. For the most part school was a good experience for me. I had some interest in becoming a nurse but during a freshman science class, the teacher said he feels if he can't flunk 1/3 of the class he is not a good teacher. I knew I would need to pursue science courses if I wanted to be a nurse and the sciences were difficult for me. Right then and there I knew he wasn't going to flunk me 'cause I wouldn't be there. Instead I pursued the commercial course. (Often wondered what my parents would have said if I had told them I wanted to become a nurse). I was in the high school during World War II and that caused some embarrassing moments for those of us who wore Mennonite clothes. I graduated from high school on May 28, 1947. One thing about that night I'll never forget. My mother was pregnant with my brother and was soon due. But I assumed she'd certainly be at my graduation – she never said a word to me that she wouldn't be there. But when we were sitting on stage, I saw my Dad come in alone. Guess those were the days when a pregnant woman was not to be seen. I know I was very hurt and it still hurts when I think of it. No one ever did say a word to me

about that. My brother was born a week later. I stayed at home that summer to help with the new baby at Mom's request.

My growing up years consisted of school, work and more work. Dad had a few cows. Early on he had some pigs, and steers. We raised hay, corn, barley, wheat and tobacco. We went from tobacco to tomatoes in the 40's. Tobacco work stretched almost year around. When the stripping was finally done, it was soon time to sow seed for the next crop – then pulling plants, planting, weeding, suckering, topping, worming, cutting, spearing onto laths, hanging it in the wagon and then hanging it up in the barn. It was work. All this was done by the family. Anyone big enough had to help! Could we pick what we wanted to do? No, we did what we were told to do. We did haymaking the way everyone did at that time. It was brought in on a hay wagon, loose, then taken into the haymow with a hay hook. At the appropriate age, we all took our turns riding the horse to take the hay into the mow. We usually had 2 horses but did get a tractor later. Once when I was riding bob, an older horse, on the hay hook there was a too heavy load and he slipped and fell with me on him. Dad came running out of the barn. I wasn't hurt but I sure was scared. The same neighbors that shared the rides to school on rainy days also worked with Dad in haymaking and harvest. They all helped each other. When I was 10 the barn was remodeled to accommodate 18 cows. A very small herd by today's standards. Stanchions were installed along with lots of concrete and windows. We also built a new milk house. I was about 11 when I started helping to milk (by hand). That meant getting up at 5 o'clock and of course the chore was repeated in the evening and weekends were no exception. Most of the time there were 5 of us doing the milking. About 1946 we got a milking machine. That was progress!

I remember there were many thunderstorms. Probably no more than now. We had a creek running through the meadow. When we had a storm with a lot of rain, lots of water came from the neighbor's farm, our creek would go over its banks and our meadow and lane would be under water.

During the summer-or anytime, there was little time for play. I helped with the laundry,

ironing, cleaning eggs for sale, garden work, cleaning the house and yard work. And there was no allowance. Mom liked her chickens – that gave her eggs to sell. There wasn't much she didn't do. She was a really hard worker, often running from one job to another. She did not work in the fields, however. When I was 12, Mom decided the time was right for her to start her longed-for vegetable route in the east end of Lancaster. Leon was the driver and I went along to help to go from door to door to sell the produce. Mom was chief. Pop was home doing the farm work and Ellen was home doing the baking and cleaning with the help of Kathryn and Evie. We did that for several years. We sold beets, onions, carrots, corn, beans, strawberries plus sometimes Mom would dress several chickens to sell. Much of this had to be cleaned and prepared the day before.

When I was very young our family attended Stumptown Mennonite Church near Monterey. At about 11 years of age, the little church, Carpenters, just across the fields from the farm was opened after having been closed by the Church of the Brethren a number of years before. Our family attended there for many years. Since it was so small there was a limit as to the activities we could get involved in plus it was quite conservative. When I was a young teen-ager, Groffdale Mennonite started Thursday eve. Bible School in the summer. Surprisingly we attended. We all enjoyed that.

The girls in the family did all the mowing and yard work. I don't remember my dad or my brother ever mowing the lawn and we did it with a push mower. Mom did a lot of canning when we lived on the farm – even the beef that we butchered each year. The last several years on the farm we did some freezing. We took it to a local "locker" for storage in a freezer. Vacations were practically non-existent. The only vacations I recall were drives we took on Ascension Day. The one I remember the best is when we went to the Delaware Water Gap. But even then we milked the cows before we left and after we came home. I do remember we had a yearly excursion to Holloway Beach in Maryland. We would go with several other families, take our lunch and enjoy the day. Later when there were enough teenagers to do the work, our parents and the younger children went on several trips. When Kathryn and I were quite young, we usually spend several days with our cousins who lived in the city. That was quite a treat-they had a bathroom. Also Kas and I would spend a

few days a summer at our grandparents in Witmer. I remember enjoying when the farmer fed the pigs there.

The summer before my senior year in high school I worked at our neighbors 2 days a week helping with the children and housework for \$2.00 per day. I never spent a cent of it. I also helped to pick tomatoes a year or two at the Kling place nearby. And I did not spend that money either. I think I got 2 cents a basket. The summer after graduation I started work at Martin's Butcher Shop in the office at Bridgeport. I worked there for a year. I traveled with Fred Ibach who lived in Brownstown and also worked at Martins.

The farm was sold in 1948 and we moved to Bareville. There Mom had a roadside market. How she worked at that!! She had more chickens and sold eggs at her stand along route 23. In the summer and fall months, it was expanded to strawberries, veggies, apples, peaches, corn and pumpkins.

Backing up a few years, Abe and Luetta Leaman who were friends of my parents invited us for a Sunday dinner. They lived in Leacock. Mrs. Leaman asked me if I would help her serve the meal. Lester Groffs were also invited and their daughter Marion, a good friend of mine, was also asked to help serve. When that day came Peter and Bertha Rohrer were also there along with their 16 year old son, Earl. We went for a walk – all of us young'uns and also played some games. That's how I met the man who would become my husband. About a year and a half later we began dating and we dated for 3 ½ years.

After leaving the Butcher Shop, I worked or several years as a secretary for Stauffer Home Improvements on Prince St. in Lancaster. I really enjoyed working there. Betty Breneman also worked there and we became good friends. During the time I worked there I rode the bus to and from town. I helped to milk before I went and after I came home. I rode Ellen's bicycle to Ross Albright's to get the bus. In October of 1948, Dad sold the farm to the Stoltzfuses who lived on the farm next to us and bought a 12 acre property with a fairly large house in Bareville. Leon & Miriam moved to the house as soon as settlement was made. (It was a double house but only 1 bathroom). About that time, route 772 was torn up from

Talmage to Leola and all traffic was detoured. Consequently to get my bus, I had to go about another mile. I moved in with Miriam and Leon during the week. The house was on route 23 so it was easy to get the bus there. On Friday eve. I would go home via bus and walk home in the dark! It was a distance of about a mile.

During our dating years Earl & I usually went to church on Sat, & Sun. nights. We rarely went anywhere else. Most all the young people did that too. I guess that what was expected of us. Earl and I were married on June 4, 1949 in the living room of the house in Bareville by Bishop Mahlon Witmer. We had the reception at home too. The day before the wedding, Mom picked 200 boxes of strawberries and she had a 2 year old. We went to have our pictures taken after the wedding. When we returned Rohrer Leaman's truck was sitting at our house. As it turned out, when the table was pulled out to set for the reception, something broke and could not be used so Rohrer got their table. We went on a 10 day honeymoon to the state of Maine. Earl's family lived in Smoketown and he worked in the family seed business there. We built our first house the first year we were married moving in January, 1950. This house was on Rd. 340 near Bird in Hand on one of two lots owned by Earl's dad. I was really pleased. I really liked the house. We had a huge yard and I took care of it and most everything else. Earl worked in the family seed business, trying to prove himself and he was rarely home. When our children got older I helped in the office at the seed house. I would start about Feb. 1st and continue until school was over and the children were home.

Several months into our marriage we were invited to attend the Rossmere Mennonite Church as they needed a song leader. We were members there for over 50 years. Our first child, a daughter Marilyn Sue was born on May 26, 1950. On October 17, 1953 our son Keith Nelson was born. In May of 1955, Earl's dad died of a heart attack. Several years later, Earl's mother and sister built a house on the other lot owned by his dad. That turned out to be unwise decision.

In 1957 we began housing IW fellows. These guys were CO's and worked at the General and St. Joe's Hospitals mostly. We started out with 1 and through about 10 years had 13

fellows – mostly 2 at a time. This proved to be a great time for us but I wonder now how I ever did all the cooking, cleaning, laundering, etc. by myself. I had always made my own clothes and those of our daughters. And yes I took care of the lawn too. We made a ball field out of our back yard and Grandma's for the guys to play on which I also kept mowed.

Part of growing up in our household for the girls was learning to sew. We all learned to sew on a treadle sewing machine. It was about 1960 that I began taking a series of sewing lessons. I really enjoyed this and learned lots and lots about sewing that I had never known before. I did a lot of tailoring and even made clothes for Earl at one point. Making a well-constructed garment gave me a lot of satisfaction. I sewed for years until I could no longer find fabric or patterns that I liked.

By 1965 we knew it was time for us to sell our house and move elsewhere. When finding one to suit our needs proved fruitless, we decided to build on Meadow Lane near Smoketown. Our house was the 2nd one built on the street. We just loved our house and living on Meadow Lane. On July 13, 1968 our long awaited third child, Coleen Beth was born. Our other two kids were already teenagers. Keith was in high school and Marilyn headed for James Madison University for her first year of college that year. We now needed the 4th bedroom for our new addition so we asked the boys to find other places to live. Having the guys live with us was a good time of our lives but time to call it quits.

The seed business has always been a very seasonal thing. This resulted lots and lots of work in the Spring. For many years Earl worked from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and then 3-5 hrs. in the evening. This would continue for about 3 months. And they were open 6 days a week. After that he would bring work home for a number of weeks. I always hated it and I'm sure our children suffered from his being away so much. He was also very busy with evening meetings re: church. Small wonder I was left with everything to do at home.

All our children attended Smoketown Elementary School. Marilyn and Keith went to Conestoga Valley for middle school but when it was time for Coleen to go, we sent her to Locust Grove Mennonite School. All three graduated from Lancaster Mennonite High

School. All three eventually obtained college degrees. After her 1 year at James Madison Marilyn dropped out of college but later finished by going to night school. Keith changed careers at 30, went to college and seminary for pastor training. Coleen went to Eastern College 1 year in pursuit of social work but switched to West Chester where after 4 years she received her degree in music education.

By now, of course, they are all married and have families of their own. At this writing our family consists of 3 children, 8 grandchildren (6 boys and 2 girls) and 3 great-grandchildren (1 girl and 2 boys).