Ellen Carrier
Tape: 12.24.00.3
Starts: 2:03:55

Named after her mother
Born 1932

Q: You also have early childhood memories of coming to this house. Could you describe those memories for us?

A: Following Uncle Carl around was a lot of fun because he knew the names of everything. Everything. And anything that had any fruit or anything on it, it was like a buffet. A living buffet to walk around. And he was just so proud of everything and, like I was saying about the beautiful gardens in England, you can't get a picture of this now, but coming into this yard was really like a royal garden because it was just pathways of grass and everything...Even his flowers were in bans; tall ones in the back and he had it so that something was always blooming, always blooming. Always. It was just beautiful.

Q: He was chief foreman at Fairchild Tropical Gardens. So that influenced him, obviously. He found time to do this same thing.

A: He was a farmer, I think, when he married my aunt. He was already a farmer.

Q: Tell us about your aunt.

A: Aunt Mary. She was my father's oldest sister and she was such a good cook. She was a task master,though. But she was a very good cook. And one of the things when...We had such a big family -- I have 18 first cousins and all these aunts and uncles, and all this. We used to have Christmas' at each others houses and one year it was ours, one year it was Aunt Mary's, one year it was Aunt Elizabeth, and so forth. And everybody had favorite things they wanted them to make. My mother always had to make her slaw. Aunt Mary always made ambrosia, and it was beautiful. A bowl like this. And most of the fruits came from here. Really. and everybody made that kind of thing. So those were wonderful days. Also, once a year the women; my mother and her sister-in-laws, Aunt Mary, they would get together and

they would spend the whole day making chutney and all those corn relishes and pickles and all those things. And we would think “Gee, we can’t ever get any ‘store-bought’.” Now, what do you think I want. I wish I had some of that. It was delicious.

Q: Did they do the cooking here?

A: When they came here the did, yes. Or they did it at our house, or Aunt Betty’s, or, you know, wherever they went.

Q: You mentioned that she was a task master. Did she put you to work helping to chop and do all this stuff?

A: I don’t remember much of that, but she probably did.

Q: What was it that she made you do, the task master part?

A: Well, she was bossy, Uncle Carl was not bossy. Aunt Mary wanted to tell you what to do. Uncle Carl, he didn’t care what you did when you were here. Aunt Mary wanted you to...yes, probably set the table. Do things like that. You know. Help with the dishes. Probably peel the apples, or whatever. But, Uncle Carl just wanted to enjoy you. Walk around, show you. And he knew the name of every snail that was on this property. Everything.

Q: I’d like to know what the kitchen...how the kitchen was configured. What kind of stove they had? Did they have an icebox? What did they do?

A: I remember it being an icebox with a motor on the top. And I remember when it was an ice box icebox. Ice box. With the doors on the top and the doors on the bottom and the ice, yes. It seems to me the sink and the drainboard, that was wood. That was all wood and the cabinets were wood. The floor was wood. I know there was a rug on the floor. Probably a braided rug, because they all braided rugs. My mother did too. She made a lot of the stuff that was in the house; the curtains, the bedspreads, the pillows, everything. She showed me a table cloth one time. In the kitchen they had a big, round beautiful, probably oak, table. Big round table that sat, I don’t know, eight, ten people, maybe more. And I was here one day and I was admiring the table cloth that was on there. It was crocheted and it was just so delicate and so beautiful. And that table cloth was made by my

grandmother -- her mother. Who even spun the flax. So that's what they had to do to get what they wanted. And of course they all knitted. They all crocheted and they had chickens, and...They really were self-contained. All of my family that lived down here in this south end were self-contained. In fact my parents always said that Aunt Mary and Uncle Carl didn't even know there was a depression. Truly. They were so able to support themselves off the land. Cause they had chickens and geese and turkeys and...

Q: There's not much acreage, actually.

A: Well, it seemed like a lot when we were little. Actually, this house is small enough that one acre makes it look like its got a huge yard. I remember the...my grand parents house, not very much, but only by stories, but I remember my mother complaining when she first came down here, cause she was from the city, she had come down from New Jersey, I think, a cow stuck his head in the window. You know, that kind of thing. So she was always, like, in hysterics the first couple of weeks she was here. And, of course, mosquitoes and bugs.

Q: And what did they do about that?

A: They had screens on some windows. The way my mother talked, they didn't have screens on other windows, and that's where the cow head came through the window. You know? They used to go from here to Miami Beach. They used to take...we have wonderful beach pictures taken at that time. You know, with the old bathing suits. They used to go up Old Cutler Road and through Main Street and Bayshore Drive and that's the way they went. That's the way they went to the beach, and that's the way they used to shop. Now my Uncle Jack I think is the one that had the motorcycle and he used to go in town to get staples, but they also made their own bread and other things. But when your feeding a lot of people, especially men...And my mother also said that grandma always had a pot on the stove with soup in it. Everything got thrown in the soup pot. Leftovers and everything got thrown in the soup pot. There was always a pot of soup going. They brought recipes with them from Canada, like the salmon pie, which my sister and I make today. It's wonderful. If you like salmon I'll give you the recipe. So easy and so delicious. And also pork pies. That was their thing at Christmas. That was traditional with them at Christmas was the pork pies.

Q: So when you came here for Christmas, when it was Aunt Mary and Carl's turn, you said you had eighteen cousins, it must have been quite a scene.

A: It was, it was.

Q: What did you all do?

A: We were out here, mostly. Or the kids were out here and they were in there. Mostly, we didn't go here very often, because the house is not big enough, but my mother had five children so our house was bigger, and Betty had a large house, and Elizabeth had a big house because she had five children. So it was pretty much divided up among the bigger houses as the more kids came, you know. But we were always together at Christmas, the holidays. It was just wonderful.

Q: Did they set up tables outside?

A: Yeah, they'd set up tables. Make it like buffet, you know. And the kids would...all the kids eat outside.

Q: Tell us about the dinner bell.

A: Well it wasn't just a dinner bell, but when Uncle Carl was working in the field or was a distance away from here, she had that bell on there and she would ring that bell for him. And he could hear it, and he would come. And later in years, she got a whistle which meant this is really an emergency. Come! And I remember being here even when I was a teenager and she blew that whistle, and rang that bell. And I'm going to be 68 in a couple of weeks, so that's a long time ago...I can't believe that bell is still there.

Q: Uncle Carl liked to gab with the neighbors.

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: And she would bring him back...

A: Yeah. Oh, yeah. She was...she had a sense of humor but she was more stern than he was. He was full of fun and he liked to kid and he'd kid her

and she'd finally say "Stop it, Carl", you know. But he just liked to have fun. You never saw him in a bad mood. Never. Never. He was always very happy. He was like an elf. He was a very slight build, very thin, wiry. And a red head. And he had real bright blue eyes. He was just always hopping around. He was cute. He was a real favorite. Everybody like Carl. Big teaser. Big teaser.

Q: Would you like to go ring the bell.

A: I sure would.

PAUSE

A: Here's the famous bell.

RINGS BELL

A: Sounds as beautiful as ever. Oh, would I love to have that. I can't believe it. I wish this bell could talk. I wish this whole place could talk. It would tell so many stories. I think these trees in here are the original. I mean the big trees and the palms around the side. I haven't seen this house, probably, in twenty-five years. I didn't think it was here any more. And we just, like, sad about it, but what are we gonna do about it. And I wish they could save it. I wish they could preserve it because they worked hard to handle this property and they had a lot of faith in the area, coming down here sight unseen. And when I think that my grand mother left civilization in Montreal, at least the had gas light in the house and everything. She left that. Can you imagine how horrified she was when my...when they landed down here and...and this is the house. You know. Where's the light, where's the toilets, where's the street car, where...nothing. Nothing. And she had civilization. but you know the men don't have the same trouble, and she had two young daughters with her. I think my Aunt Alice, the baby, was only thirteen years-old. So, your talking young kids, and Lena was probably 15. But, you know, boys like rough stuff. They don't care about anything but I'm sure the girls suffered. Like my mother with the cow sticking his head in the window. Oh, and they also told us, one time, that they shot a big panther on this property, that was threatening the cattle and stuff...livestock or whatever, the chickens and stuff. And, I forget how tall my father said he was, how big he was, I mean they stretched him way up. I think they shot him out of a tree. A big Florida

panther, and today I think, wouldn't want you to do that. But that's the way you had to live then. You know.

Q: And this place here represents what's gone.

A: Yeah. It's gone. Florida, it's gone. This is like "Little House on the Prairie". You know. This was a prairie then. Really was. Like I told you about the men coming by here in the tin lizzies at night and upsetting when they went around the corner on Ludlum and Kendall, and turning over and then, in the pitch black of night, and then the next morning my father and his brothers would go out and pick up all the tools. It was a windfall. And they used to go to the beach on the motorcycle. Or if they had somebodies old truck. I mean it was really...I wish I had had a tape recorder years ago when they all used to come and talk...talk to, all the stuff. I mean, they just keep us hysterical all day long.

Q: Do you have a favorite story you remember?

A: Oh, God. I'm sure I'll think of one.

Q: Did they talk about the hardships, and the fun of it? Was it kind of a black humor of making fun of it?

A: No they didn't complain about it. They really didn't. This is the way it was then. So this is the way it was. You know. They accepted it. Just like in a hundred years people will probably have things that they thing "what, you didn't have a jettison." Or look at even kids that say "you didn't have television?" Didn't miss it. We played with marbles and paper dolls and neighbors kids and had a scooter and...what do you call it...hop scotch in the street and we played church and we played school and...really make believe. I don't think the kids today know how to make believe. It's scary. It's...I never thought it was roughing it. I never thought of it as roughing it. I thought it was fun to come down here. Another one of my father's brothers, Wilfred, he was a lot of fun too. He was so much fun. He was a lot of fun. It was amazing. And my father. My father had a good sense of humor too. But, ah...All of them, really. So, I could see they had a good time down here. They didn't...We have letters that my father wrote my mother in 1913, and he never complained about any hardship. He was all excited about the tomatoes. And building the chicken coup all day long. And how sun-tanned he was. All that. And the the fruit. How wonderful the fruit was. And, he had

come down, apparently, in the winter. Because they had also gone back and forth a few times. Before grandma died she went back to Canada one more time on the train. I think it took here a week. And she nearly...she was sick then. She nearly died after that. But...they had gone back and forth a few times but they never complained about about ‘maybe I should stay up there’, you know. But, they just never complained about it. This is what they were gonna have and this is where they lived and...In those letters, he’s very happy in those letters. He’s...he didn’t complain about a thing. Even the out house.

Q: The land was bountiful.

A: Yes. Yes. Yes. So, they...You’ll see the letters. I’ll show them to you. They were fun to read.

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