

Jean West Life Story (August 4, 1999)

Darrell West: Good morning. Today, we are talking with Jean West. Jean was born October 26, 1925. Today is August 4, 1999, and Jean has agreed to sit down and discuss her life. The first question I would like to ask is how would you describe your early childhood?

Jean West: I was an only child for nine years. We didn't have TV to entertain us so we had to make our own entertainment. I liked to play ball, generally by myself. I played ball at school. When I had company come over like Jean, the first place we would go would be the creek. That seemed to be my favorite spot.

Darrell: What did you do down there? Why did you like it?

Jean: It was a peaceful place, to hear the water running. It still is. We would get crawdads, which I would not do now. My first eight years I went to Fairhaven School. From 9 to 12, I went to Dixon. From there, I went to work for four years and then got married.

Darrell: What was your father like?

Jean: He was a hard-working man, a farmer. He had to farm with horses. I would go out and ride the horse half a day at a time while he was working the field. I also rode the binder to help cut wheat. I would help trip it with my foot. At that time, we also thrashed wheat, we didn't bail like we do now. They had those big thrashing rings. When it came our turn, there was a lot of men there for dinner so the women around had to cook this big meal. I would have Jean come over when we had this. There was always this big haystack coming along. I always got the warning don't you dare jump into that straw stack. If you did, you could smother because you would just go down, it was so soft.

Darrell: Did you ever jump in?

Jean: I never did. I always wanted to, but I didn't.

Darrell: What was your mother like?

Jean: She was a very warm person. Devoted. She certainly helped me take care of the kids. She would baby sit the kids when we would go somewhere. Sometimes when Bob and my Dad were working together, where ever they were working, that is where they would eat their dinner. Lots of time, she wanted to come up and help cook. If I did not get down that right at a certain time because she did not drive, there were times that she walked from her house to mine across the fields, up the creek and across the fields. So I soon learned to say if I was going to be there, I better be there because I didn't want her to do that. That was a hard walk.

Darrell: Why didn't she learn to drive a car?

Jean: She didn't have any desire to drive. Some women didn't drive then. Some learned later. She never had the desire to drive.

Darrell: What was your favorite subject in school?

Jean: Probably music was one. I liked shorthand and typing. I always got As in those. From high school, I went straight into a job at Wright Aeronautical in Cincinnati. I had got enough training that I could go right into a job.

Darrell: What was your least favorite subject in school?

Jean: Chemistry. We didn't go very well together. Chemistry and me.

Darrell: What was the problem?

Jean: It was hard. I want to go back. There is one thing I want to say on music. My Dad used to take me, I would take music lessons in the summer only because the room the piano was in was cold. We just had room heaters. I could only take them in the summer time. Jean and my Dad took turns driving each week. He would leave the field to do that, which I was very impressed with that, that he took time out to do that.

Darrell: How did you meet your husband, Bob West?

Jean: He had a sister Helen who worked for Grace Kline for awhile. Helen had a Halloween party up there one year. She had her family and asked me to come and I did. That was the first time I saw him. But he did not know I was there that night. It was several years later before we got together. We started going together after he got out of the service then.

Darrell: How would you describe him?

Jean: A very hard worker, dependable, dairy farmer. We milked cows for 35 years. We also along the line had chickens, hogs, some beef cattle. His teacher had always said don't put all your eggs in one basket, so we didn't. But it ended up we were mostly dairy and grain farming in the later years. I think his biggest job was baling hay because then we would have to hunt up boys to bail. He would send me to Fairhaven to round up some boys. Sometimes, that was hard to find. That was a hot and hard-working job. He was a church-goer, which I am thankful for that.

Darrell: Early in your marriage, you moved from Indiana to Ohio. Why did you make that move?

Jean: My Dad heard that there was this farm that was going to become available, right around the corner from him. A man named Peterson owned it. We went to talk with him and got together. We decided here he could go into dairy so we came over there, over near my folks. We lived there for 35 years.

Darrell: What is your favorite memory of your husband?

Jean: We got lots of good memories. In the early years, milking cows, you couldn't get away. But eventually we started taking trips and enjoyed that. He was a good father and a good husband.

Darrell: You had four children: Ken, Joanne, Shirley, and Darrell. What was it like having four kids?

Jean: Chaos! Busy! From morning to night, it was a 24 hour a day job. We had a big garden, Bob liked to garden. I did lots of canning and later on freezing after we got a freezer. As far as

milking, the kids helped out, taking turns carrying milk. We fed silage to the cows, throwed it down and feed it. It was a big job. But I have no regrets anyway of anything that we did.

Darrell: What was Ken like when he was growing up?

Jean: All you kids were different. Each had their own personality. They were all were good kids.

Darrell: But what do you remember about Ken in particular?

Jean: He was a studious kid. He has been very school-oriented. When he was in college, he wanted to go to Luxembourg, He and Sharon and Amy went over there for six months. He seemed to want to learn all he could about everything.

Darrell: What do you remember about Joanne when she was younger?

Jean: You all wanted to go to college and you all did. The girls didn't get to finish, but they quit of their own accord. They both went two years. She went to Kansas to school for two years Her dad didn't want her to go that far away. But she did. That's where some of the others had gone and she wanted to go. It was a church school. She came back and worked at Wright-Pat at Dayton for awhile. She tried Baltimore for about six months, then came back and worked at Miami University.

Darrell: What do you remember about Shirley when she was younger?

Jean: Shirley was a little homebody. She didn't leave home until she got married. She did work in Eaton for awhile at the courthouse. I remember when she was going to bible school when she was little, she didn't want to go. She cried. She wanted to stay home and help her mother. But I think she did go. She was a little home body.

Darrell: What do you remember about Darrell when he was younger?

Jean: Darrell got to milk cows. Sometimes in the later years, we did take off for a little while. He did the milking, with everybody else's help too. But he wanted to go to college too and did. One summer, he worked at the Palladium-Item in Richmond. He had this room and just about had a bed, table, and chairs, was about all he had. That was all he wanted and that was what he lived in that summer. He worked hard, he did his four years at Miami. He went to Bloomington for his PhD and now is at Brown University. So it all paid off. He is a professor up there.

Darrell: Why did you decide to go to work at Miami University?

Jean: Because we needed the money. He wanted to buy a tractor. He wanted me to help pay for that tractor When I started, I had no idea how long I would work. I thought it probably would be a few years, but it ended up 25.

Darrell: What was your favorite thing about that job?

Jean: Meeting people. It was a good place to work. I enjoyed it. Secretarial work was what I always wanted to do.

Darrell: What was your least favorite thing about your job?

Jean: I can't say there was anything that I disliked. They were good to me down there. It was a good place to work. I don't have any regrets.

Darrell: What has surprised you the most about your life?

Jean: I don't have any surprises. I am just thankful God has given me a good life and a family. The kids have all been good kids. They have given me grandkids. The family goes on. I guess the worst thing is when you lose your spouse, it is not as easy. You have to go on anyway.

Darrell: How did you handle that adjustment?

Jean: You have to have faith that God will see you through. And he does and is. And your friends and family.

Darrell: At what age in your life where you were the happiest?

Jean: Probably the best years was when we were all at home and the kids were growing up. We were all together.

Darrell: What made those years happy?

Jean: It was a good family life.

Darrell: At what age was most difficult?

Jean: The first years after Bob passed away. You have to do everything for yourself. Or you have to call on somebody to help. I don't like to do that if it is not necessary.

Darrell: What is your best personal trait?

Jean: I have no idea. I don't have any.

Darrell: There must be one.

Jean: I enjoy my music. That is a good relaxing thing to do, sit down and play something.

Darrell: What would you say is your worst personal trait?

Jean: Probably procrastination. Sometimes I put things off longer than I should.

Darrell: Of all the vacations that you took, which one was your favorite and why?

Jean: I have enjoyed all of them. I went to London twice, went to Romania with Jean once. Went to Hawaii on our 25th with the McCormacks. We went to several places in the U.S. and I enjoyed all of them.

Darrell: Does any one of them stand out?

Jean: They all do. They each have their own special place. They were all different. You better go when you are able.

Darrell: Do you have any regrets about your life?

Jean: No, no. God has been good to us. We have our health. Sometimes, we get sore bones, but we are able to get up everyday.

Darrell: Is there anything you would have liked to do that you didn't do?

Jean: I would have liked to go to Grand Canyon. We were planning that for the next year, but then he passed away, so we never got there.

Darrell: Now that you are in your early 70s, what advice would you offer to the next generation?

Jean: First of all, take your faith seriously. After all, God put us here for a reason. We have a purpose. Study and be faithful to him. Work hard. Be honest. Play hard too.

Darrell: You say people were put here for a purpose. What do you think your purpose was?

Jean: I guess to raise a family. But also to witness for him.

Darrell: How would you like to be remembered 50 years from now?

Jean: Oh, I am going to let the kids testify to that.

Darrell: But if you had any say in it, how would you like to be remembered?

Jean: I hope I was a good mother. I am sure I failed lots of times, but I tried.

Darrell: What did you like most about being a mother?

Jean: Watching your kids. Seeing your grandkids and watching them grow up. There are lots of temptations out there for them now. I hope they can withstand all that, the bad stuff.

Darrell: Now that we are nearing the end of this interview, is there anything else you would like to say?

Jean: I don't think so.

Darrell: Thank you for joining us.