

GLORIA J. MILLER

- Wayne: This is Wayne Summers and Myrna VanEpps. Today we're interviewing Gloria Miller at her home in Watertown Township. Today is September 18th, 2019. Gloria, could you start out by telling us when and where you were born?
- Gloria: I was born in Sparrow Hospital [in Lansing MI, to **Donald W. & Helen B. Miller**] on July 27th, 1925, and I guess I was not pleasant to my mom. It took a long time to squeeze me out.
- Wayne: Were your parents living in Lansing at the time?
- Gloria: No. My mom and dad lived here on the farm with my grandpa and grandma [**Claude J. & Cora M. Miller**] since the time they got married in 1920.
- Wayne: The reason I ask is, back in that time, my understanding is going to a hospital, if you were in the country, was somewhat unusual.
- Gloria: It was. My father was in the hospital in St. Johns at the time having an appendectomy and my mom was in the hospital in Lansing giving birth to me.
- Wayne: Quite an experience! So, you said your parents, they lived here. Were they born in this area?
- Gloria: Well, we go way back to **Jacob Miller**, who came to Michigan in the early 1800's and had ... Millers. So my family has been in the area for a long time. In fact, my cousin **Ronald Miller**, who just recently passed away, did some research on the Miller family. It was quite interesting because we go way back to **Benjamin Miller** and they're not sure whether it was Miller or Mueller or Mollar. In fact, my claim to fame is that he carried the mail for George Washington during the Revolutionary War.
- Wayne: Where did you attend school? I assume you started at a one-room school around here.
- Gloria: Yes. I did. I started out at Clark School [NW corner of Francis & Howe Rds.] but when I was in fourth grade--and I wasn't in that district. Actually, I was in the Wacousta School District, but my mom didn't want me to go across the [Looking Glass] River twice to get to school unless I went the back fields. When I went to fifth grade, I went down to Wacousta School [E. side of Wacousta Rd. N. of Herbison Rd.] Then in-- let's see, must have been about 1938--our school, Wacousta School, had gone through the 10th grade up till that time--they consolidated with Grand Ledge schools. I was in the first class that went to Grand Ledge. I was a freshman.
- Wayne: So you actually graduated in Grand Ledge High School.
- Gloria: Right.
- Wayne: Do you have any particular memories of either of the Clark School or the Wacousta School?

Gloria:

Oh yes. I can remember in Clark School--the teacher had to get there early to get the fire furnace going—and I can remember, sitting at the desks and one of my classmates, **Erdine [Lorraine] Millar**--she lived in Riley Township but she went to Clark School. She had long braids and I must've been a little devil because she sat in front of me and her braids hung over on to my desk. I dipped her braid into my inkwell and I got in trouble. I can remember playing on the swings and it seemed like they were quite a ways from the school but when I drive by there now, I think we must have been awfully close to the road. Of course, the road was just a little two-track then. One of the things that we liked to do was to get swinging so hard that we could go up and over the bar, which was dangerous. You know, as a kid, you love danger for some reason. Kids today still do. That was one of the things.

I remember when the lady from the [Clinton] county came and had us practice songs because I think all the county grade schools gathered in St Johns in the spring and we sang songs as a group. I couldn't sing. I still can't carry a tune, so I think I just opened my mouth and pretended.

I walked to school and often times I would get a ride with my dad. He was a milk hauler and if I got up in time and was ready, he'd take me part way. I'd meet with my cousins, Ron and **Jack [Miller]** and **Violet [Miller]** at the corner of Howe and Forest Hill. Of course, the roads didn't have any names back then, and we'd walk on up the hill and meet with the **Boss** kids. They were also cousins. We went to school and it went through the eighth grade so there were all sizes of kids. We didn't have kindergarten. There was no kindergarten at that time, just first grade. One of our teachers had a boyfriend that drove a milk truck. It wasn't my dad. It was a different man and they would meet out in front of the school every morning and chat, I guess.

Another memory I have is--you know, as you get older, I think your brain adds something to the stories. I can't remember if it's a hundred percent pure, my story, but my cousin Ron had a disagreement with a teacher about a bird, whether the birds flew south or flew north or which bird it was, I don't remember. Anyhow, Ron was getting a little irritated because the teacher was telling him he was wrong and he said to her, "You got a bug on your eyebrow." I don't know whether he made that saying up or if it meant something. Well, he went to the cloak room. There was a cloak room in the front of the school and it was cold out there. It didn't get heated because we just had a wood-burning furnace right in a corner of the building inside. So he had to stand out in the cloak room until she decided he could come in. I loved Clark School 'cause it was mostly my relatives. We played ball against the Riley [District] kids' school. It was fun. Then I went to Wacousta School and that was an interesting experience too, through eighth, three years.

Then I went to high school at Grand Ledge, rode the school bus, which covered I don't know how many miles. We went all the way up to Jason Road and picked up kids. The kids that lived far north, they must have been on that school bus for two or three hours at least every day. Of course, they were all high school kids. Well not all, I think eighth graders too.

Wayne:

You didn't get to drive yourself to school?

Gloria: Oh no. Who had a car? No, we didn't. One time, the roads were pretty bad and we were going down Wacousta Road, south of Grand River. There was a railroad track—there still is—a railroad track down there and there was no signals but the bus driver--his last name was Howe. I can't remember his first name, nice man. He drove our school bus all the time I rode, that four years. There was snow on the road and it was hilly going right downhill. There was a train coming and he steered the bus off so that we slid into the ditch. So we didn't hit the train or the train didn't hit us. Yeah, that was a fun experience!

I didn't really like the fact, going to high school, you couldn't do things. You had to get on the bus and come home but there were some things like they had band after school, sports. They didn't have any sports for women or girls when I was there, just for a boys. You had to take Home Ec. and the boys had to take Shop.

Wayne: You weren't able to participate in any school activities?

Gloria: No. The only thing they had for girls was cheerleading. I thought, well, maybe I can do that. Well, I couldn't do that because they practiced after school. When I was in high school--I graduated in [19]42--and by the time we graduated, quite a few of the boys were gone to war.

And then, when I went to college--I went to Michigan State College, it was--my mother took me by the hand and dragged me off to college. Heck, I was only 16. I didn't have the slightest idea what I wanted to do with my life. I'm still climbing trees and playing out in the barn.

Wayne: So you graduated from four years of high school at age 16?

Gloria: I was 17 on the 27th of July but I graduated in June. I was almost 17 but I was pretty immature.

Wayne: When you got to Michigan State, I assume you stayed on campus?

Gloria: No. The first year—and I don't even know how this happened--but I worked for my board and room by taking care of a child for two of the professors. One was in Home Ec. and one was in Ag. that lived quite far from campus because I remember I had to go home for lunch. I don't remember how much babysitting I really did, to tell you the truth--too long ago to remember. I do remember this: that I had to go home to eat lunch because I couldn't buy my lunch. I was always late getting back to my first class in the afternoon and it was in one of the buildings that's no longer there. There was an elevator but only the professors could use the elevator and the janitors. It was my German class and I'd get to my German class and Dr. Steinmetz would always give me dirty looks. He just thought I was being late. Well, I was late because I had to go so far to get back to class. I didn't do too well in German. I couldn't roll my R's right.

Wayne: The next year you moved on campus to a dorm?

Gloria: The next year I moved to--I can't remember what. I think it was East Mayo I lived in first. I lived East Mayo at one time and West Mayo at one time; and I lived in Campbell for a year; and I lived in Williams for a year. That was the only dorms there were except for the men's dorms. They were occupied by Air Force and all the different armed forces.

When I went there, they had me assigned to a counselor and he asked me what I wanted to take and I had no idea. He said, "Well what was your favorite class in high school?" I said, "chemistry," 'cause Mrs. **[Ilma L.] Piepenburg** was my teacher and she was a nicest lady. She was like a grandma. She was just a nice lady and I liked chemistry too. That's what they signed me up for and so I was in the chemistry program. One by one, 'cause there were not many girls in chemistry or math and all the other classes, German, all those classes we had to take. Every day there'd be another empty seat in our class so there weren't very many people left, mostly girls. I liked it but I was like a fish out of water. I can remember moving into the dorm that year. I had one suitcase. I had one pair of shoes and one coat, a couple of skirts, and a sweater. My roommate--she was from the Morton Salt family--came in with her several suitcases. The room we were in was supposed to be a single room. It had bunk beds so that they could put another person in because a lot of the dorms were used for the servicemen that were there, marching mostly. Yeah, that was a quite an experience too.

Wayne: At what point did you decide to become a teacher?

Gloria I didn't decide to become a teacher until--. After I graduated in 1946 and my first job was at Seagram's Distillery in Lawrenceburg, Indiana. One of my friends that I knew from college, she was a chemistry major also and we were interviewed. I think they still do that now, have people come in and interview graduates. [They] interviewed us from this company, Seagram's Distillery, and because we were chemistry majors, we got hired. Our job was to count the number of federal stamps and state stamps and make sure that everybody did their job. There was nothing about chemistry they needed. They just needed somebody that could be bonded, I guess, or could count anyhow, 'cause any bottles that were broken we had to get them out of the garbage can at the end of the line, take the stamps off, and account for all this, especially the federal stamps and the state stamps. That job lasted one year. That was not exactly what I felt I wanted to do with my life.

So then I came back and I had stopped in to visit friends at Michigan State. One of them said, "Gloria, Dr. Quill is asking about you." He was the head of this chemistry department. I said, "Oh gosh, maybe I didn't graduate after all." He said, "No, it was about something else." So I went over to see him. Sure enough, there were no graduate students to take over the lab classes and the recitation classes so they were hiring women because the men are all off to the war or coming back, some of them; a lot of them, no. So I got a job teaching the lab classes and sitting in at the lectures, taking roll, and that kind of thing. I did that for three years.

One day I thought I'd like to see something besides Lansing so I took my last paycheck and my golf clubs and I got on a train. I went to California to visit a friend who I had known at school and she had gone to California. You know, how everybody runs to California when they want excitement. I had no job. My money didn't last long. I actually was there kind of incognito because my friend and her friend, who lived in like a boarding house, just took me in. My friend was working at a pharmaceutical lab. They were going to move to St. Louis, Missouri. "Would I like a job?" "Heck yeah! Why not?" So I went. Well, it wasn't built yet so I came home for a while and then, about six months later, they were ready to open up. So I went to St. Louis, Missouri, and worked in this lab. That lasted a couple of years but it's hot in St Louis! I mean, it was so sweltering hot and my friend, that was living in California that was working, also went to

St. Louis and she dropped a big glass vessel on her leg. The bottom of it broke off and it was sharp and it hit her leg and it cut the tendons in her leg so she couldn't work. She was going to move to Chicago where her parents lived and so, "Heck, I'll go to Chicago."

So I went to Chicago. I can't imagine what my parents were thinking through all these escapades that I went through. I worked in Chicago at a hospital. I worked at Presbyterian Hospital and then I moved. The doctor that I worked under was one of the first doctors that did heart catheterizations and he was going to move over to Children's Hospital, University of Illinois Children's Hospital, which was just across the street practically. "Would I go with him?" "Sure." So I went over there and worked with him for quite a while. I don't know how long I was in Chicago, a few years, and one day I said to myself, "Teaching might be fun."

So I came home and enrolled at Michigan State in grad school. My timing is kind of mixed up--it feels like I've been around about 140 years--following things I got crowded into my life. I did get a scholarship to the National Health Institute. I was there on scholarship and I took all the education courses, which I think they've improved on immensely since then 'cause they were pretty boring. At the same time I got my master's in science teaching.

My first job was at Vandercook Lake in Michigan and I taught there for four or five years. One of the women that I taught with said, "Gloria, you'd love it in Grand Haven. You should go there, get a job." I said, "Oh, it sounds good. OK." She knew the principal and people in Grand Haven 'cause she had taught there, but she came home and got married so she had to stay in Vandercook Lake. I got hired at Grand Haven and I taught there for five or six years.

Again, a friend of mine there said, "Let's go to California." I said, "Oh, I have friends out there." So we quit our jobs and we went to California because we were going to go on the Alcan [Alaskan] Highway. We didn't know it hadn't been built so we got to California and we ran out of money. We got robbed in Las Vegas. All our cash got stolen. We did have travelers' checks so we managed to live for a while, but not long because we didn't have much money. So we both got jobs. I had a job in a department store. I was in "notions." I didn't know too much about notions. Not many people would know what notions are: stationery and paper and sewing stuff. Anyhow, that's what I was selling. One day--I think it was maybe about November and she had a boyfriend still back here in Grand Haven. It was before cell phones but they'd call each other almost every day and she was running out of money. We were not having fun. It was not what we anticipated so we said, "Are we having fun? No." I said, "Boy, I'm gonna miss being home for Christmas." The next day--we didn't even quit our jobs--we packed up. We were in a Volkswagen bus. We both sold our cars, bought this Volkswagen bus. That's what we went to California in and we got in that bus. She drove while I slept and I drove while she slept and we got home in a hurry. I came home, home right here.

I knew I had to get a job. I couldn't just freeload from my parents. They'd put me through college. You know how much it cost when I went 'cause I could work for my board and room? I think, at the most, \$4,000. Now, you can't even get through a semester for that now.

Wayne: For a year?

Gloria: No. It was \$4,000 for four years 'cause I worked for my board and room. You could wait tables and I delivered newspapers. I usually forgot to stop at President [John A.] Hannah's house, leave his paper, and I'd have to get on my bike and ride back over there and leave his paper.

When I got back from California the second time, I had to find a job. It just so happened there was an opening at Eastern [High School] in Lansing because the woman who taught phys[ical] ed[ucation] was promoted to Dean of Girls and they also needed a chemistry teacher. So that worked fine because I was a chemistry major and a Phys. Ed. minor, so that worked fine. So I went to Eastern and worked there for the rest of my career. I retired, I think 1980, somewhere in there, and have lived a nice life ever since.

Wayne: After you retired, you obviously had to have something to do. Is that when you started getting involved in, like the river and things like that?

Gloria: Oh, yes, yes. I decided that I should do something for my community. So I volunteered to be on the Parks Department in Watertown Township, which we no longer have. We've got a lot of parks though. In '80, I ran for Trustee because we are having a dump fight. Remember the dump fights? So I ran for Trustee. I was on the board for about 12 years, I think, somewhere around there. Then a friend called and said, "Gloria, I think you should try to get on the County Conservation Board." I did that and I was on that for, I don't know how long, probably a year. I can't remember how long.

In between there somewhere--well, I know. In 1990 they had the first trip on the Grand River, the first expedition--Verlen Kruger and his second wife. He finally married his first wife again, which was nice of him. There were two in between, but yes, he was a good friend, a good man.

Wayne: You didn't go all over the world with him though?

Gloria: No, I didn't go. I was invited to go on his last trip to Alaska. Anyone that owned a Verlen Kruger's Sea Wind Canoe were invited to go but I couldn't afford to go. It's a long trip. I think they were gone, like a month.

Wayne: I used to follow along in the *[Lansing] State Journal*.

Gloria: Yes, and when he went all the way down the Amazon to the cape, WJR, the Detroit station, had him on.

Wayne: I think they followed him. In 1990, where did this trip began and end, the Grand River trip?

Gloria: It started in Liberty, which is down near Jackson.

Wayne: Grand River wouldn't be very large.

Gloria: No, and we didn't actually put in there because it wasn't navigable. We put in at Michigan Center and paddled all the way to Grand Haven, 13 days, and it was great. We were funded by GM, by Oldsmobile actually, when there was an Oldsmobile, It was the year

the workers were laid off so they volunteered these workers to drive the big car. It was like a van, can't remember what they were called--

Myrna: They carried the provisions?

Gloria: --and carried all our gear so we didn't have to take it in our canoes. It was canoes at that time. I don't think anybody was in a kayak. Everybody was in canoes. To go on the trip, you had to have a purpose so I got in touch with some people at Michigan State, [I said] that I would like to do it and I would be happy to gather samples from the river that could be analyzed along the way. That's how I got to go on that trip. We learned a lot. It was a very interesting trip. The second time was to kind of see how things had changed.

Wayne: When was that?

Gloria: 2000.

Wayne: What did you learn from the water samples about the quality of the water?

Gloria: It wasn't as bad as people think 'cause, if most of the people at the time lived in a town, like in Lansing, all you saw was a dirty place where they dumped everything. Upstream, it was pretty pure until we got to Jackson where there was no river. It was underneath cement. It was cemented over. During the war they had cemented over the river. People actually had been killed, drowned, 'cause the river just came along and all of a sudden there's a cover over it and they'd get sucked into that. It was not a pretty sight, that river. From there on it was not very good until you got downstream a ways and there was even trout in the river. It was not what you thought when you drove by, especially in Lansing or Grand Rapids. By the way, that first trip, it poured rain and the river was high. The wastewater treatment plant couldn't handle all that water so they had to release the sewer. Well, there were things floating in the river and it smelled bad. The next 10 years, it had been changed quite a bit. It's getting better and better and we've seen it. For one thing, people are more aware now. They know that we can't just let our rivers become cesspools and disposal places.

Wayne: Along the way, during these 13 days, are you saying in tents?

Gloria: Yes. We tented.

Wayne: So the tents are being taken by the vehicle to wherever the next spot is, parks or something along the way?

Gloria: Yes, and there aren't very many public campgrounds, but now we're getting more and more places. In fact, an organization that I belong to called, MGROW, the Middle Grand River Organization of Watersheds, which includes the Grand River from Eaton rapids to Lyons; also includes the Red Cedar, the Looking Glass, and the Maple. That organization, MGROW, which grew out of these expeditions that we've had every 10 years, we have applied to the state as well as the Upper Grand and the Lower Grand to have the Grand River designated as a "water trail." It would be a designated water trail. To do that, there are certain things that you have to supply, like signage along the river, camping areas along the river, et cetera. That's in the process right now so people who like to get on the river, will have--

Wayne: The Friends of the Looking Glass, I understand you had something to do with that getting started?

Gloria: Yes. I came back from the 1990 trip. I said, "I got a nice river. I'm gonna see what I can do to protect it. I need to know more about it." In the 1970's, my neighbor and I--she also taught at Eastern with me--we started the canoe rental business.

Wayne: In Wacousta?

Gloria: Yes, mostly Wacousta area, 'cause not many people went on the river. Nobody thought it was clean or would think much of it. I had already been involved with a river, somewhat. I grew up on the river. I mean, when I was a kid, I spent a lot of time down there unbeknownst to my mom. She'd usually know because my cousins would always come up and go with me down to the river and my dog would go with us. If he came back wet, my mother knew we'd been in the river.

Wayne: It's about a half-mile from here, isn't it?

Gloria: Yes, half-mile, and there was a nice trail that went right along the river. You know, growing up, even though you owned property, everybody's property was shared. You'd go to your neighbor's back 40 and walk around. I mean nobody cared. Everybody knew each other for one thing. Probably, we're all related too. When I came back from that trip, I realized that the Looking Glass River was important. It was important, but "What can I do to keep it that way?" So that's when I started the Friends of the Looking Glass and the people in Grand Rapids that were part of that trip, the West Michigan--I can't remember the name of that organization. It's an environmental organization. They helped me, got me started on how to organize it.

Wayne: Legally?

Gloria: Yeah, so they got it started. I put a couple of letters in the paper saying, "Anybody that's interested in forming Friends of the Looking Glass organization meet at the township hall." There's one other person that's still a really good friend--well, there's more than one--but he came to that meeting and he was interested and he and I have been running it ever since. I've tried to get other people involved but nobody wants to be president. I've resigned from it twice and then it always comes back. We're not very active anymore, unfortunately. [We] trying to get younger people because, I'll tell you, there's not a day that goes by, like today is, that you don't find somebody in a kayak going down the river. People have finally discovered the Looking Glass River.

Wayne: Does your organization help to keep it navigable?

Gloria: We try. We hesitate to actually be in charge of log jam cleanups, because liability could be --, but we ask for volunteers and "bring your own equipment." So we're not saying, "You do this." We just say, "we need some help here." The city of DeWitt actually hired a company called--I don't remember the name. Sorry. It's a big machine that can actually go down the river and take some of the debris out because several places the river's been jammed up so bad that people's yards are getting flooded. It's affecting their sump pumps. I feel, if I've accomplished anything in my life, I think one of the things is

that people have to realize that our river is important. We should take care of it, not let it be dumping ground. People are much more aware now, I think.

Wayne: Didn't you become involved in some of the recycling efforts?

Gloria: Yes. I started recycling in Wacousta with my old Dodge pickup and I went through the subdivisions, picking up their recyclables and took them to Grand Ledge. This is when we were "dump fighters" because, you're gonna bitch about something, you better have a solution. That was trying to get people to not throw so much stuff away. Then through the squabble with the people who owned the landfill [Granger], we came to a settlement where we now have recycling in Wacousta. People come from all over to use it, fortunately. Unfortunately, we just throw so much away. Of course, you can't buy anything that doesn't have about five different wrappers on it. They always want to put everything in a plastic bag for me. No, no, no!

Wayne: Do you take your own bags?

Gloria: I do. I take my own bags unless I forget that I'm going to have to buy something that day and stop and I don't have a bag. I usually carry them in my car though.

Wayne: I understand you also are involved in the garden club.

Gloria: Yes. We started a garden club 10 years ago. I didn't start it. A woman who lives in Wacousta started it and I'm one of the founding members. It was 10 years ago. In fact, we had a birthday party last Monday because we were 10 years old and we had quite a celebration.

Wayne: What are some of the projects that your garden club does?

Gloria: We have four bridges in Watertown and we have eight planters on each bridge. The lady that runs a little garden spot over on Cutler Road helps us get planters planted. One of our members made the planters out of drainpipe, that big plastic, corrugated-like drainpipe. He made the planters out of that and the lady puts the dirt and mixes up the soil and the vermiculite or whatever it is. Then we all go over and plant in April. In May we put them out on the bridges. We water and volunteers water. Now DeWitt, they have their Board of Water & Light, or whatever you call it, their people--

Wayne: --their employees.

Gloria: Yeah. They have a truck and they go by and water all the flowers for them. We haul it ourselves and water. In fact, we're getting ready to take them down because they didn't hold up well this year. They were either drowned or they were just drying out. It was not a good year for our planters for some reason. Also, our garden club takes care of the garden in the cemetery. It wasn't a garden. It was just a pile of weeds and we tilled it up and planted it. It's heart-shaped and we have perennials and then we also put annuals in. In fact, I probably should go down, check-it, pick off the dead blossoms. **Sue Miller**, which no relation to me, and I usually take care of that, pretty much that garden.

Wayne: Getting back to these canoe trips down the Grand, there was one 1990, one in 2000. Has there been any since then?

Gloria: 2010.

Wayne: Were you involved with that?

Gloria: Oh yeah. I've been involved with all of them. This year, in 2020, this year coming up, it's gonna start in Vandercook Lake 'cause the river does go through there but before it was not navigable but our water levels are up we so we can actually paddle.

Wayne: You're gonna paddle down from Vandercook Lake through the little stream there? I've been on that stream.

Gloria: Oh, have you? Fishing?

Wayne: Canoeing.

Gloria: Good, good! You should go.

Wayne: 13 days!

Gloria: You don't have to go 13 days. You can go one day or two days or any number of days. We're going to have it so people can go when they can go because it's right during working days. A lot of people can't just say, "Oh, I'm going on a little trip today, this week."

Wayne: So you're planning on kayaking next year?

Gloria: Yes.

Wayne: You still kayak regularly?

Gloria: I'll tell ya, I only kayak when I'm with somebody that can put me in my kayak and take me out. I'm having problems with my hips and my knees and every other joint. I'm the bionic woman. I have two new shoulder joints and one new hip joint which isn't working real good. So I can't get down in the kayak but once I'm in the kayak, I can paddle; got my arms back so I can paddle. I can't stand up because my knees are higher than my behind. I can't raise up so somebody has to help me up. Usually what they do, I paddle up to shore and they'll pull my kayak up on shore and then I just roll out and then I get on my hands and knees and then I can stand up.

Wayne: How often do you still get out?

Gloria: I've only been out once this year. This summer, so many log jams it's hard to get on the river.

Wayne: If you have to portage a lot—

Gloria: --especially when you can't get in and out.

Wayne: Even if you can, it can be a problem.

Gloria: Because they have the handicap ramp in the downtown [DeWitt] and they have one on Herbison Road, you can't tell people, "This is handicap-accessible," and then they can't go anywhere. That's why they had that "Wombat." That's the name of that machine, Wombat, the one that came in, cleaned the river out from that launch to the next one. There's liability, I think, because they got those grants. They are ADA. That means they're handicap-accessible. If you have handicap-accessible anything, you've got to take care of it. You can't just say, "It's accessible," and then, if it collapses, it's on you.

Wayne: I see here that two years ago you got a special honor by Watertown.

Gloria: Yes, I did. Well, I'm flabbergasted, I guess, because usually people wait till somebody's dead before they give them that kind of a-- .

Wayne: It's not the Gloria Miller Memorial Park!

Gloria: Right, right. I said, "Now I have to behave myself," because if they named something after me, they can't name it after somebody who is not a good person.

Wayne: If you have these secret vices, you've kept them pretty secret.

Myrna: What was the issue with the Granger Landfill?

Gloria: It was supposed to be a township disposal place, 'cause it used to be in the park down here, Heritage Park. That's where we had our township dump. That's what we called it. When Granger bought that land and then turned it into this municipal disposal place, there were no rules or regulations. We found out there was stuff coming from Greenville that was going in there. There was dichloroethylene(sp?) and perchloroethylene(sp?) and all kinds of other chemical names that is not safe. There were very few rules and regulations for anything then because they didn't know how dangerous some of that stuff could be. In fact, when we finally had our final resolution of the whole thing, one of the persons who worked at the DEQ, Department of Environmental Quality, said because of PAL, the Peoples Action League, living so close to Lansing (and we did all kinds of things to get attention to the fact that that landfill was taking in stuff without any protection of the ground. There was stuff that people didn't even know what was going in) was the reason that they got rules and regulations because we were like a dog on a cow's back leg. Grrrrr!

Myrna: It went on for several years, didn't it?

Gloria: Well, several. I don't know how many. I still have a tee shirt. Remember that the logo was the Indian with the tears running out of his eyes and it says, Peoples Action League? PAL it was. We fought that hard and we have that landfill over there as well. Look what they've done. They've taken all the methane and turned it into electricity. I mean we were probably not well liked by a lot of people. A lot of people are behind us too but good things came out of it. We have the agreement with Granger and they've been very good about holding up their end too. They have. Very generous. We have recycling because of that. They pay for the recycling and the "Dump your Junk Day," they support that so the squeaky wheel gets greased.

Myrna: Who was your teacher at Clark school?

Gloria: Oh golly, I had several. I'm trying to remember. One of them I had there and I think she also went to Wacousta School too. I wish I could remember some names because I don't remember their names, but I can see their faces. The young one, with that the guy outside out by the road, her last name was **Hardke**. She was single and I don't know about the truck driver if he was or not. That was kind of funny. That was one of our teachers and then there was an older lady and she was really nice. I can't remember which one got in a fight with Ron.

Wayne: What kind of changes in Wacousta have you seen over the years, maybe some of the stores that used to be there?

Gloria: Oh, it's amazing. People don't realize that there was a hotel or halfway station, I think it was. I think the Eastern Star or Masonic building was, like when travelers would come through. What did they call them, halfway stations or something?

Wayne: It was like on a stage, like a halfway house between places where they could change out horses.

Gloria: They might've done that. I think it was, but people couldn't go too far because they were only going by horse, especially like preachers used to go from town and town and town.

Like every place, this used to be a vibrant, living place. It's not too vibrant anymore. I'll say though, we've still got our general store. I don't know the new guy that bought it but I'm hoping he makes a go of it. I don't know how he can because I've discovered that people that come out and live in the subdivisions, not all of them, don't know anything about their surroundings. They don't go out of their house. They come home and go in and watch TV or whatever they do. You never see them out in the yard even. The people who have been here long enough so they get to know their neighbors and get involved in the community, God bless them. I've met people who had kids in school down here and didn't even know that we have a Memorial Day program.

Oh, that's something I should have told you about. When I was growing up, we used to have Ladies Aids. There were "circles," they call them. Women belonged to all these different circles. On 4th of July, we always had a big shindig on the island because there's an island. There was a river and there was a mill race so that made an island--now the Girl Scout camp, the Holiday Inn [Wacousta Holiday Haven], I think it's called. That's where the island is. Actually, they have to go across the mill race to be on the island. The river's over here; the mill race is here; Holiday Inn is here. This island over here is where we used to have all these celebrations. One year they had a parade on the river. The Ladies Aid that my mom belonged to, Spring Creek Circle, had a float--maybe I shouldn't have this recorded--well, erase it if you think it's not appropriate. They had a float and it was a barn door on two rowboats, I guess. It was supported on something, barrels maybe, so it was flat like a raft and they had a little stove on there that actually was burning wood and the smoke was coming out. I was on that float and we were in blackface. Somebody was playing a banjo, I think, and we were singing *Old Black Joe*. I mean, we would have been lynched today!

Wayne: It was a different time.

Gloria: It was a different time and it was just something you did. I remember that. I can still see going down that river on that raft. Different circles had booths where they had different kinds of food and we had a ball game going on and just all kinds of stuff.

Myrna: Small town stuff.

Gloria: People came. People in Wacousta now, like I was going to say when the phone rang, the kids went to Wacousta School and they came to the Memorial Day thing 'cause they wanted to know what was going on, all this stuff going on there in the park. It had rained and so we had all this food so we were giving it away. I was talking to this gentleman and his daughter and I asked her if she went to school here. She said, "Yes." I asked where they lived. "and you want to know what was going on?" I said, "This is the Memorial Day parade that we have." That was the first thing. I said, 'Where do you live?' 'cause he didn't know anything about it. He lived on Looking Glass somewhere and I thought, how can you live here and not know what's going on? Yes, things have changed, but you know they're not going back to the old days.

Wayne: You've always had a general store in town?

Gloria: Yes. It's been there since 1837. I think that's the date of it. In fact, I think they could tell you at the store how old that is. We'd have free shows shown on the side of the building on Saturday nights.

Wayne: When was this?

Gloria: When I was about 12 and everybody brought a chair and sat down and watched *Our Gang* or whatever they were [showing] and some cowboy movie, probably. I got a job working in the store dipping ice cream. I got 50¢. It's was a big lot of money to me then.

Wayne: per hour?

Gloria: Before the show started, I'd dip ice cream. Then there'd be an intermission between the comedies or whatever came on first and then the regular show. Then I'd go dip ice cream during the intermission, and then probably after. I don't remember.

That store seems like it was bigger than it is today because, where the beer is, it was a separate room and it had a glass doors that kind of folded. It would be open and that's where the ice cream parlor was. They had a couple of those little tables. Then there was another division. That division that divided the ice cream parlor went all the way back and on the front of that was where the big, long counter was. Behind the counter was where the meat was and cheese and stuff you didn't buy in a package. You bought it and they wrapped it up in paper and gave it to you. There was a pot-bellied stove in there too. The farmers would come in there, sit around that stove in the wintertime and tell stories. My dad told me this that happened: **Bill Strong**--I guess he was an old bachelor--he lived where **Bob Case** lives, right there by the river. He always wore bib overalls. I guess he started putting on his clothes when it started getting cold and he'd just keep adding more. My dad said, "Bill was sitting around the stove one day," and they probably smoked their pipes or whatever there. My dad said, "Bill was going like this [scratching his chest] and a mouse came right out of his bibs." I don't remember it 'cause I wasn't there, but my dad told me that.

There was a blacksmith shop. I remember the blacksmith's shop.

Myrna: Where was it?

Gloria: On Herbison between the Masonic Hall--I think it was there or it might've been right on the corner [Wacousta Rd. & Herbison] where there's nothing now.

Myrna: On the southwest corner?

Gloria: Yeah. Then there was a guy—you know, I'm to the point where you got something here and it goes which, you know like when you delete, it goes through, like that. Well, that's what happens! Ed—it doesn't matter, his name, right now. He could fix anything. And I loved to go to his place 'cause he had hundreds of clocks and he could fix any clock that you'd bring in. Oh, what was his last name?

Myrna: Where was his building?

Gloria: It was west of the Masonic Hall.

Myrna: between the [Methodist] Church and the hall?

Gloria: Yeah, somewhere in there. There was a doctor's office.

Myrna: Doctor who?

Gloria: Dr. **[Rufus D.] Boss**, who was a relative of mine. Dr. Boss fixed this broken finger. See this one? That one. When I was playing baseball when I was going to Clark School, I caught a ball and it hit on the end of my finger and just broke it, that joint. My mom took me down to see Doc Boss. His answer to this was to put a pill bottle in my palm and wrap my finger around that pill bottle. I think he had to wrap the whole thing. I'm not sure. Anyhow, he wrapped it up, taped it up, and I had to leave it there til it healed. Well, it didn't stay that long. My mother said 'cause I played outside all the time, it got to smelling so bad that she cut the thing off. It's [the finger] got a little click in it. Sometimes I have to push it.

You know, the older you get, the more you value the olden days. I have no regrets that I'm this old because I don't want to be here in another 10, 15 years.

Myrna: Wasn't your mother quite elderly when she died?

Gloria: My mom died at 105. She was 105 and one week. She had her 105th birthday and she said, "I'm done," but she wasn't. Her body didn't know that. Well, she couldn't hear, couldn't see too well either and she'd broken just about every bone in her body 'cause she had one leg shorter than the other which happened to her when she's a little child. Life just wasn't--. She was over in the home [Hazel Findlay in St. Johns]. I couldn't take care of her. I couldn't lift her and she said she wanted to go over to the home because that's where a lot of her friends were. They didn't get together too often in the home. She got ill. I went over to see her. I knew she wasn't doing too well and they called me one day. I happened to be on the Grand River paddling. That's when I had that little flip-flop phone.

They called me and said my mom was not doing well and so I came home and they wanted to know if I wanted her to be put on life support. I said, "No." 'Cause she wouldn't eat. She wouldn't drink. They couldn't force her to. They put ice chips in her mouth because she wouldn't open her mouth for them. She just clamped her jaws together and she wouldn't open. I said, "No, she doesn't want life support. She's ready to go." She was in bed. The last day she was alive, I went over and she was just laying there. She could hear enough or she could sense I was there. I talked to her one ear that she could hear fairly well out of and she'd squeeze my hand if I'd ask her a question or told her the answer or whatever. Finally, I just said to her, "Mom, you lived a long life and you've been a good mother and you've taken care of a lot of people," 'cause she did. I said-- Pat wasn't adopted so she wasn't an adopted sister and she wasn't my sister, but she grew up as my sister. She didn't know she wasn't my sister for years and years. She was 13 years younger than me. But anyhow, I said, "Pat and I'll be fine and we'll take care of the rest of the family so you can go." I said, "Now I'm gonna go get some lunch and I'll be right back." She was at Hazel Findlay in St. Johns. I was gone maybe half an hour. I came back, sheet over her, so that was it.

You know what? I had to do the same for my dad. He was in the hospital and the minister, Rev. Peters,--I think it was his last name—was at the hospital and he was talking to me about my dad. He said, "Gloria, you have to give your father permission to die 'cause he's not going to get well and he's feeling guilty about that." I never thought about that. All I thought about was getting him well, but they never said, He's not going to live." When he told me that--oh well, you know, we are going to die sometime and we shouldn't have to have permission to die but maybe he'll feel guilty if he doesn't. So I went and talked to my dad--the same thing. I said, "You know, It's OK; I'll be OK; Pat'll be OK." Then he did die but it's funny how parents feel responsible for their kids even when they're grown up.

Wayne: Never goes away. Well, thank you very much. This has been a great conversation.

Gloria: Like I said, "You can shut me up anytime cause I could talk forever."