

Clinton County Historical Society

Oral History

Marilyn Coin

August 23, 2018

- Wayne: [00:01](#) I'm Wayne Summers. I'm here with Julie Peters and this is August 23rd, 2018. Today we're interviewing Marilyn Coin in her home in Dewitt, Michigan. Could you tell us maybe where you were born and a little bit about the house that you grew up in?
- Marilyn Coin: [00:18](#) I was born March 9th, 1932. The first house north of the cemetery. At that time it was the first house and the second house was at Cutler Road. So that was a half a mile between houses and there was no houses or any buildings down the west side of the road. The house that I was born in was very, very old ninety years ago. It originally, the name on the mailbox was Peach Hill and there was a lot of fruit trees around the acreage that my folks bought. The house itself was two small sections that had been put together and nothing was a good carpenter corner. It was angles and bumps. There was no inside electricity. There was no inside water. Well, there was no central heat. It had a coal furnace that can remember getting coal out of the coal bin and pouring into the furnace when it needed to be. There was a small pump in what we call the back room and we could pump water there and then carry it maybe 25 steps into the kitchen area. The house, the property had a barn that had a chicken coop. Many chickens that I had to feed and I did not like it at all, especially in the winter when the water froze over and I had to chip the ice out.
- Marilyn Coin: [02:33](#) There was a smokehouse. Oh, maybe two feet by four feet, maybe a little bit bigger than that. Not much, but any city person that went by thought it was the outhouse and it was not the outhouse. It was a

smokehouse. The outhouse set farther to the north and that was quite ugly. It was an outhouse.

Marilyn Coin: [03:08](#)

The yard itself was maybe, well, maybe a quarter of an acre. Garden was large, weed free because as I got older I was responsible for keeping the garden weedless for my dad. It had a lot. The property had many, like I said, fruit trees. There was cherry trees, there was apple trees, there was peach trees, plum trees, pear trees, a lot of pretty flowers. My father had a green thumb. Huge lilac bushes. The barn was kind of a, it had at one time probably room for a horse, but the barn was, ah, had an open big doorway where the car could be parked in there and then the back side of the barn was my daddy's workshop. And the barn had a little narrow door between the two sections and when we played hide and go seek, I didn't tell anybody how I could get from one side of the barn to the other and I could just sneak around and win a lot of games of hide and seek.

Wayne: [04:41](#)

What do you remember about what downtown DeWitt was like at the time. What kind of stores were there? Maybe ones that you went to?

Marilyn Coin: [04:48](#)

Well, downtown DeWitt when I was little I don't remember much about when I was real small, but I do remember it as I started school.

Marilyn Coin: [05:05](#)

We would buy, my mother (?) the chickens, she would collect the eggs and take them to the store, it was Mr. Lietzke's, and trade her eggs for merchandise and usually there was bread, cookies, dried food. Who do I (?) now, they would call them staples and there was a great big barrel in the north part of the store where you could buy vinegar by the quart. So when mother was busy canning or something and she needed more, making pickles, needed more vinegar, she'd send me to the store to buy a quart of vinegar. Town store was on the North East corner and that store had dry goods. On the south half of the store was dry goods and some clothing you could buy ready made and had needles and sewing needs, thread. And I, I remember shoes a little bit there. And that store sold good candy.

- Marilyn Coin: [06:26](#) Uh, we didn't shop in that store very much. And Reed's store was on south Bridge on the east side and that's where we bought meat.
- Marilyn Coin: [06:40](#) And that store had a lot of energy in it. The people were busy, there was meat cutters, you could see them cutting up the meat for whatever the customer wanted and it was an older store and quite narrow and kind of squeaky floors. But the people were just happy people in that store. The other store just west of Mr. Lietzke's store, which is now or was just a catering store, catering place, that was Mr. Moon's store and we didn't ever trade there and I don't know why. I'm just guessing and I don't want to comment any further on that. They just didn't shop there. But, so it was kind of the three stores. Just west of Mr. Moon's store was the post office and that was a very old building. And on the east
- Marilyn Coin: [07:51](#) side of that was a wooden walkway where we walked to the back part of the store and you turn to the immediate left, walk through a woodshed and then through some curtains in the doorway and that was where the library was. Well that was my first introduction to the library after I had started school and I become addicted to reading. I so enjoyed reading.
- Marilyn Coin: [08:23](#) The library was dark. The lady who worked there was kind, often wore dark colored clothes and I was always very glad when I got out of there, but I was always happy to have a book or two to carry home to read.
- Wayne: [08:45](#) How about school then? I assume you went to the old Fuerstenau school for your whole K-12. So what was it like there?**
- Marilyn Coin: [09:02](#) It was very scary for me because I said in a half a mile there's only two houses and we, I never had other playmates other than my older sister. So it was very scary for me to go to school and to know that there would be things that I didn't understand and people I didn't know. I enjoyed school. I was very shy, quiet, wondering what was gonna happen. The

teachers were good teachers and I was very blessed. I think it was the fourth grade,

Marilyn Coin: [09:52](#) ten of us were moved to another room where there was another grade. So all through, maybe fourth grade to eighth grade we just kept moving with the same classmates and that really helped me learn what friendship was within your 12, 10 people the same year after year after it was the same 10 people that we just moved up a grade and the teacher was an excellent teacher who, her name was Mrs. Sharp and she had a life. Well, I don't know the word I want. Life license for teaching you oft help me with that word. I don't remember it. It was good to have her for a teacher and of course then going into high school, that was something I was not prepared for. I didn't really like the

Marilyn Coin: [11:04](#) moving from room to room. Room to room. I'm laughing. There was only two rooms, but that's dumb, two classrooms and a study hall and in my class there was 26, but I got adjusted to it and then I began to enjoy it very much and I was, and during the war some of the teachers, of the younger teachers, were not available to teach in DeWitt school system and some of the teachers were retired teachers who the school board brought in so it was kind of a different teaching method that they had, but what was one that we learned very well. Yes.

Wayne: [11:54](#) **What kind of games or activities did you do on the playground?**

Marilyn Coin: [11:58](#) At School?

Wayne: [11:59](#) **Yeah, school. Yes.**

Marilyn Coin: [12:00](#) Well, the chains were the best. The monkey chains, if anybody knows what that is. Uh, there was slides, there was teeter totters, but usually just a best time was a pickup game of softball and that was good and enjoyable. Not much tag. No, we didn't play that. It was a.

Wayne: [12:27](#) **Did the softball games, did you play against other, other grades or was it kind of everybody of all grades or**

Marilyn Coin: [12:35](#) Usually the person that owned the bat and the ball brought it to school. They chose who played and where they played and when they played. So yeah.

Wayne: [12:48](#) **Did you get involved in any activities like in high school? Any sports, any other clubs?**

Marilyn Coin: [12:56](#) Well, I was in the glee club. Not a good singer, but I was in it and basketball I dearly loved. And again, Mrs. Sharp was our coach and taught us some real nifty plays, but now you gotta remember that was half court for the girls then.

Marilyn Coin: [13:19](#) And

Marilyn Coin: [13:22](#) I enjoyed that very much. There was a softball team but it wasn't very good, didn't last very long either and I would like to make comment that somebody wouldn't understand today, when there was the basketball game and DeWitt was the home team, another team came in, we girls **had** to give up the girl's locker and shower room for the visiting boys' team. And we had to change our, into our uniforms in a classroom and they were kind enough to paper the windows so nobody could peek in, but we did not have any showers and that didn't set real great. But we had a pretty good girl's team.

Wayne: [14:18](#) **So you said they, you played half court, does that mean you only played on one half?**

Marilyn Coin: [14:23](#) Yeah.

Wayne: [14:24](#) **And as I remember the old Fuerstenau gym, it wasn't a full size gym.**

Marilyn Coin: [14:29](#) Probably not, however

Marilyn Coin: [14:32](#) it was the best gym and auditorium in the

Marilyn Coin: [14:37](#) area at that time. Yes. Yes.

Wayne: [14:43](#) **Are there any particular, uh, people that you remember that kind of stand out when you were younger? You know, like town characters.**

Marilyn Coin: [14:53](#) Oh, characters in DeWitt?

Wayne: [14:54](#) **Yes.**

Marilyn Coin: [14:56](#) Oh

Wayne: [14:58](#) **Or interesting people.**

Marilyn Coin: [15:00](#) A lot of them. Well, I, I would have to mention blind Pete who had sold

Marilyn Coin: [15:16](#) booze, beer. I know he sold that and he had the old depot from the interurban. That's where his store, that's where he lived, but for me, being a young girl, it was amazing to me how that blind man could walk down the sidewalk and not get hit or not across the street to get to a place to get a hamburger and he never got hit and I don't know how long he had that. I don't remember at all how long it was. And I remember asking my dad once, I said, how does blind Pete know how to make the correct change when you go in to buy beer? And my dad's comment was, any person that would cheat a blind man is not a very good person. And I remembered that for a long time, still remember. Wonderful.

Wayne: [16:16](#) **I understand that you've lived in different historic homes in Dewitt?**

Marilyn Coin: [16:20](#) Yes, two.

Wayne: [16:22](#) **Could you talk about both of those homes?**

Marilyn Coin: [16:25](#) Sure. Um, the first house we bought was on Scott Street and bought it. It was kind of a mess. Oh my it was a mess. The floors caved in and whenever you spilt milk you knew where it was going, to mop it up, because you'd catch it coming down the slope in this floor. It was pretty bad, but learned a lot and made it quite comfortable. It was a salt, it is the salt box house on Scott Street.

Marilyn Coin: [17:13](#) Didn't look like it was very big, but once you got inside it was very comfortable. There was three bedrooms upstairs and a bedroom down. The basement was terrible. But there was a walkout. Ground wise because at before we purchased it and way back when

Marilyn Coin: [17:35](#) I'm mixed up, I'm talking about when I'm married. Oh you asked the question. Okay. I'm with it. Before, the people who had lived there years before could drive their vehicle through a garage, a wide door to the basement so they could drive in and have the vehicle under the house. So it was nice to just run in and out with that with loads of clothes, wash water to dump and I enjoyed, I enjoyed working remodeling, helping to ideas to remodel that house and it had been a, I believe Ken's history is a pharmacy at one time, way back when. And then in later years, we bought the old house on 803 West Main and oh my. There was no running water, no central heat, electricity in one or two rooms, dead mice in the corners, cans, 10 to 20 to 30 cans of fruit in the basement that had not been taken out. Clothes in the closet, some bedding on a bed and that I enjoyed helping get that restored, learn a lot by the errors we had made before and it was a lovely place for two people to live in and retire to. It was a small house and it was all that we needed. There was windows and five doors on the little house and 16 windows, so there's always a cross ventilation and the heating system was put in so that there was three different areas of heat

Marilyn Coin: [19:35](#) and of course the lot to the West was beautiful and to see the deer coming up from the river and the daises that grew on the lawn. And we opened that home to house tour and we opened the home on West, on Scott Street to house tour too also, yeah. I think the house on West Main was a more of a reality of what people, how many people could live in that little house?

Marilyn Coin: [20:18](#) It always surprised me cause sometimes it got too little for two people. But uh, and there was a barn that fell down at that property. There was an outhouse with a sidewalk to it and there was a chicken coop at that house? Yes.

- Wayne:** [20:38](#) **I know that you're really into quilts and quilting. How did that get started?**
- Marilyn Coin:** [20:44](#) I always always loved to quilt and there was always a quilt on my bed. I don't remember sleeping in a bed that was, did not have a quilt on. Mother, well of course quilts were in when I was little and people that know fabric knew that cotton is cool and on a hot summer night I just enjoyed having a cool quilt over me, um, I appreciated the work that was always done in them and I tried to quilt to please my mom, but I couldn't do that. But in later years when I got more time to myself, I thought, I think I'm going to try that again. And right now I realize what therapy that is to have a piece of fabric on your lap and move the needle and thread and have quilts. And there's a story about quilting,
- Marilyn Coin:** [21:55](#) the house we bought at 803 West Main, like I said, had everything in it. Well, I had started to make a quilt. I think the pattern is kaleidoscope, but anyway, I needed some blocks, certain size to go around the piecing and I didn't have enough material
- Marilyn Coin:** [22:21](#) and I went and looked in the closet in the house and there was the exact number and the size that I needed that had been cut out and left in that house and it's still kind of makes my blood run cool. When I think of that, it was just meant to be and right to this day it's one of my favorite quilts that I have for that reason. I just appreciate the people that do that and the work involved and every time you wrap up in a quilt that my or grandma or Auntie made, you just feel their love again. Even though they might not be on the earth with us.