

Esther Ruth Lajoie Grace Transcript

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Wilmot Historical Society

presents

Memories of Wilmot with Esther Ruth Lajoie Grace

Lindy Heim: This is a chance for us, Charlie Thompson and myself, Lindy Heim, to interview Esther Grace, today, August 5, 2011, at her home with Tyler, right here up on Cross Hill.

Lindy: So, Ruth was a formal given name?

Esther Grace: Um-hum.

Lindy: You were Esther Ruth...

Esther: Lajoie.

Lindy: And what year were you born?

Esther: 1929.

Lindy: So that makes you a very youthful...

Esther: 81, soon to be 82.

Lindy: You were born right here?

Esther: Up in North Wilmot.

Lindy: What street?

Esther: Well, it's Lajoie Road now.

Lindy: How about your parents' names?

Esther: Lillian Caroline Lajoie and Frederick Joseph Lajoie.

Lindy: Do you have any idea where they were born?

Esther: Mother was born in Wilmot, up by Stearns Road, up there somewhere. Daddy was born in Haverhill, Massachusetts.

Lindy: Do you have an idea when they married?

Esther: [Long pause] August first. It was August 1, 1918.

Lindy: That's really good.

Esther: Yup.

Lindy: That's a lot of dates to remember.

Esther: I don't know how I figured it out.

Lindy: You got it. You worked it out. What were your parent's occupations?

Esther: Well, Mother did teach, but she was home most of the time I think, because there were four of us; two sisters and a brother.

Lindy: Where did you fit in the lineup?

Esther: Youngest.

Lindy: Youngest? You were the baby?

Esther: Yup.

Lindy: Any of your siblings still alive?

Esther: My brother just died last November and my one sister lives in Georges Mills¹ and the other one is in Ashland, Massachusetts.

Lindy: You have some good genes in your family.

Esther: She's 90. The one in Georges Mills is. She was born in 1919, so she's 92.

Lindy: Do you remember any of your grandparents?

Esther: My grandmother was Lillian Fowler. Her house is the oldest in Wilmot, which is below the Kearsarge School of Practice. And my grandfather was Edgar.

Lindy: I missed that.

Esther: Edgar Fowler. He was born, well it says Springfield, but I'm wondering if it's the Springfield-Wilmot line on 4A.

Lindy: Or anything to do with Fowlertown [in Springfield, NH]?

Esther: I would trust, I would think that was where it came from.

Lindy: That's pretty exciting.

Esther: Because my uncle was born in Fowlertown.

Charles: What are your best memories of your father?

¹ Georges Mills is an unincorporated community located between the north end of Lake Sunapee and the south shore of Otter Pond, New Hampshire.

Esther: He was a great dad.

Lindy: [laughs] Charlie already told me that!

Charles: When we were coming over, I said to Lindy, “Your father was a great man.”

Esther: He was a great guy...

Charles: Yeah, a nice man.

Esther: Yeah. He was just a good guy.

Charles: Yeah. He [inaudible]

Esther: He was chubby. He didn't care where Mother went as long as she let him stay home [laughs]. You know, he went to a lot of Grange meetings with your [Charles'] mother. You know Daddy, he wouldn't holler. He'd just say, “Let me stay home.”

Lindy: [laughs] He was a homebody.

Esther: Yup, but on Sunday morning when we'd go to church. I used to go to South Danbury, and I used to go to Sunday school down there and then the Bible School in Danbury. He'd stay home and he'd listen to the church service on the radio. He always did, you know.

Lindy: What was his business?

Esther: Just a farmer.

Lindy: Oh, he was a farmer. Well, just a farmer – it's a big job!.

Esther: Right.

Lindy: So that's why he enjoyed his leisure I'm sure.

Esther: Yup.

Lindy: So, what did you do for fun growing up in the country here? Maybe you weren't even aware you were growing up in the country? You know, when you're kids your just used to [inaudible]...

Esther: We just had to make our own fun. We just played out and around and in the winter. We slid. We had nice hills to slide down. Just played. We had a nice playhouse, as I always called it, out in a big group of lilacs. Of course, I was alone. My brother went in the service, and I was the only one.

Lindy: So, when you were in school, in your earlier grades, you took the train for high school, but when you went to school locally in the one-room school...

Esther: North Wilmot School...

Lindy: North Wilmot Schoolhouse. How many kids were in the classroom?

Esther: Well there was...well, Annie Walker taught up there and the Atwells all went there. We went to fourth grade and then they closed. Then they closed, and I went down to South Danbury for the fifth and the sixth [grades]. And then the seventh it opened, because there were eight of us. And then it closed, and I went to Wilmot Center. I lived with my grandmother, and then graduated from down here.

Charles: When you went to High School, you were living on Lajoie Road at the time? Or were you living in the Village?

Esther: When I started to High School, I came down, let me see, I didn't live in North Wilmot. The folks moved down in '47, I graduated in '47 from Franklin. I came down and lived with Grammy.

Charles: Had she lived next to the Kearsarge School of Practice?

Esther: Yes.

Charles: Then you must have gone over to West Andover to get the train?

Esther: [nodding yes] I walked to West Andover and walked home from Potter Place – at night.

Charles: You walked all the way from Potter Place?

Esther: Yes, because we had a school... Mrs. Paris started a school bus and then she stopped at the Thanksgiving vacation, so then there was none. Wayne Atwood had a car and so Ella (Ella Phelps now) and Dorothy Gold, they would ride with him. But, I didn't have any way.

Lindy: So, how far did you get with your education? Did you have any...

Esther: I graduated from high school in Franklin, and I waited a year, so I could earn some money, and then I went to Concord Commercial College for the year, and I graduated from there.

Lindy: What do you do to graduate within that kind of school – is it a business school?

Esther: Business, yeah.

Lindy: So, it's a general business degree.

Esther: And then I work for Associated Grocers, which was a big grocery chain.

Lindy: What did you do for them?

Esther: I ran a bookkeeping machine. And they moved to Manchester, and I moved to Manchester. I mean back and forth by train. Well my girlfriend's father lived in East Andover. He worked in Concord, so I'd go down to his house, and he'd use my car. He worked in Concord, and I'd take the train to Manchester. Then I'd come back at night and he'd pick me up, and we'd go home.

Lindy: I heard Tootie Fleury reminisce about riding the train to Franklin to go shopping. Did you do that too?

Esther: Well, I went to Franklin High. Afterwards my sister lived down there, and I lived with her. But that's where Mom and Daddy went.

Lindy: Was that the shopping destination for this area?

Esther: Yes, Franklin. Mother sold turkey's at Christmas time or Thanksgiving time, like Solomon's Store and Keegan's [Store], and the people in all the stores down there, and she used to sell turkeys to them.

Lindy: She raised them...

Esther: She raised them, dressed them, and she'd sell them to them.

Lindy: So, was that the outlet for most of the home businesses in your time? Probably because that was the big town.

Esther: Yes.

Lindy: The train didn't have a special name did it?

Esther: It was the Peanut in the morning and the Peanut that came up at 7:00 at night, and it was at 3 o'clock that I came home. It didn't stop in West Andover, it stopped in Potter Place. That's why I had to walk from Potter Place home.

Lindy: Would West Andover been any closer?

Esther: Oh yeah.

Lindy: So, when did you get married for the first time?

Esther: September 1949.

Lindy: So, you were about how old?

Esther: Twenty-one.

Lindy: How did you meet?

Esther: Well, his folks lived right up there...

Lindy: Oh! [Laughs.]

Esther: ...and I was friends with his sister.

Lindy: And his name?

Esther: Was Raymond Clarke, Jr.

Lindy: And how long were you married?

Esther: Eleven years.

Lindy: Any kids?

Esther: Oh yeah [Lindy and Esther laugh]. There's Kenneth, you know – Kenneth Clarke. Joanne, and we had twins: Raymond and Rita, and then Deborah.

Lindy: Oh yeah, So, you were busy.

Esther: Five.

Lindy: Five kids! Where are they all now?

Esther: Raymond is in Brooksville, Florida. Kenny of course is here. Debbie [Fowler] lives in Branson. Joanne lives in Pensacola. Oh, and Rita lives with her daughter. Well, she babysits between her two daughters and son, but Manchester's where [she lives] with her daughter.

When the North Wilmot Church was open, we used to go there. We used to have our Christmas parties over there. Lots of years. They had a stove...well I think they had a big one that was up on the stage or downstairs. They had a kitchen. They used to put suppers on over there—the Nimble Thimbles Club.

Lindy: What's a Nimble Thimbles Club?

Esther: It was just a group in North Wilmot...

Lindy: A sewing group that would host social things?

Esther: Yes.

Lindy: So, the church hosted things other than church oriented...

Esther: Yes, well that's where they would have their suppers when they had supper. And that's, well he [Tyler] and I got married up there at that church.

Lindy: Nice.

Esther: They called it the *Church in the Wildness*. Now, *Wilderness*.

Lindy: Oh, is that right?

Esther: You've seen it though – haven't you been up there? They had Old Home Day there last year, was it?

Lindy: Yeah. It's a wonderful place.

Esther: Yeah.

Lindy: So, let's get it straight—you married and had five children, and then what happened?

Esther: Then I was divorced, and I went to work at New London Hospital. [She spots a bird flying by] That's a green Hummingbird! I went to New London Hospital to work. I worked in the office, and then I took a medical records course and became a registered medical records person.

Lindy: Was that a difficult course? Stuff that you didn't know already, I assume.

Esther: Well I didn't know a thing [laughs] when I went into it at New London, but I loved it!

Lindy: Did you?

Esther: Yeah and I loved the medical record course. And then we had to go Boston to take, there was a couple of girls from Manchester and different places, and we went to Boston to take our exams to become...

Lindy: Wow, it's a licensed position.

Esther: Yuh.

Lindy: And you did that for a long time, right?

Esther: Yup. I retired the first time in 1933, then I went back to work in 2009.

Lindy: So, how did you meet Tyler? Tyler sounds like he wants to weigh in on this.

Esther: Oh boy!

Tyler: We met a long time ago.

Lindy: Yes, you've known each other a long time.

Esther: Well, yeah...I didn't...

Tyler: We stayed away from each other.

Esther: I didn't know...his daughter and my daughter were best friends. He lived in Elkins, and we lived over here. My daughter Joanne [Sawtelle], who lives in Pensacola, she used to go with them snowmobiling.

Lindy: So, you got married in North Church?

Esther: Right, he and I did.

Lindy: Very nice.

Esther: Yup.

Lindy: The hurricane of 1938 - do you remember it?

Esther: The hurricane of 1938 – I do, and we lived in North Wilmot at that time. It flattened Daddy's hen coop with all his hens in it. We had a big house, you know. I wasn't home. We went to school, Daddy walked with us, and we got to this bridge, down below Clayton Nowell's, and the water was up there pretty high. And we went across there, and then we got out to the school, and where the Garnet Mine was, in back of the school, that was just like a river coming down there and going down Davenport's hill.

So, I went home with the Sargent's, my cousins that lived across the way, well, through the woods, it wasn't that long. So, I went up and I stayed with them and Freddie, my brother, and my father went back home. The girls had gone down to Walker's to go to school, but they had walked back home. But Mother had driven down there to get them and she couldn't get back, so she stayed at Walker's and the girls walked home.

Charles: Where it came through on the Shindagan Road, by where the beach is, it washed all that out, opposite the (Soldiers') monument and up on Chase Pond.

Lindy: And of course, the blow, knocked all the big trees down at the campground at the end of my street.

Esther: Oh, that was the end of the Campground. That was kind of the end of it and that was a fun time to go there on Old Home Day; we always went down there. And they had a whole store out. Everyone would go, because then we could go buy ice cream or candy. It was a fun day.

Lindy: It was a one-day thing? The Old Home Day at the campground?

Esther: Yes, as far as I know. Wasn't it?

Charles: Well, yeah. Earlier I think it went for longer periods,

Tyler: A week.

Charles: ...but at that time it went for a week.

Tyler: A week. I know, I've been there twice.

Esther: It was a week then?

Tyler: Yes. I'm just a little older than she is.

Charles: What do you remember of the Garnet Mine?

Esther: We were right in the schoolhouse right there, and I remember the buckets going up and coming down.

Charles: On a cable?

Esther: Um-hum. Yup. They had that big, I guess it was waste, wasn't it? That big pile of...

Charles: Yeah. It smelled vile.

Esther: Yeah. It was right across from Davenport's.

Lindy: And you, were in a little small-gauged train car – wasn't it?

Charles: Was it a train?

Esther: No. I just remember the cable cars.

Lindy: Oh, okay...

Charles: Was there a doctor here in town?

Esther: Not that I know of. We went to Doctor Mitchell. He was in Grafton and that's Dottie Lowe's father. He's the one that delivered me. I don't know about my sister's, but of course my grandmother delivered a lot of children. So, I just know that he delivered me, and he lived over in Grafton.

Lindy: But otherwise you were pretty self-sustained. Right?

Esther: Um-hum.

Lindy: Did you share food or [did] somebody grow one kind of thing and somebody else grew something else? Or did everybody...

Esther: No, but every fall they'd have huskin' bees [cornhusking]. We'd have one at our house and then the Sargent's would have one, and the Braley's, where Clayton lives. So, we'd have three. And while huskin' corn the women would be getting supper, so when they were all done, ten o'clock or so, they'd all go in and eat.

Lindy: Sounds fun.

Esther: Yup.

Lindy: I heard a story about, blue corn?

Esther: Blue corn?

Lindy: Or, something about if there was a blue corn...

Esther: It's a red ear [of corn]. If it's a red ear!

Lindy: It's a red ear?

Esther: It's red ear [of corn] then you can go and kiss somebody.

Lindy: That's great! I heard that on a [inaudible] Rose tape, I think. It sounded like a lot of fun. So, they were big social occasions – the husking bees?

Esther: Oh yeah.

Lindy: But you also got something done.

Esther: Yup, right. They all helped pitch in.

Lindy: Was there much contact between North Wilmot and the Flat? Or were they really considered separate towns when you were growing up?

Esther: Pretty separate.

Lindy: Just because of the distance.

Esther: Yeah. I mean when we came to Wilmot, Mother belonged to the Grange down here and daddy was a supervisor of the checklist,² which was held at the town hall. So, that's where we came most of the time.

Charles: You must remember the fire that burned the Methodist Church?

Lindy: In the Center?

Esther: Yes. I was living over there, and the kids were going to Benson's Animal Farm. Did that burn in the daytime...

Charles: It burned in the nighttime. At nine o'clock at night.

Esther: It burned at night.

Charles: Yeah.

Esther: Yup. Yeah. Because Tavey, I think she said, Tavey and Dana Aldrich were down in the dooryard just visiting, I had forgotten what had gone on, and it got struck by lightning. That was a pretty church. Ralph and Florence Stolford are the only ones that were ever married in it.

Charles: Um.

Esther: Yeah.

Lindy: You mean it hadn't been built long before it burned down?

Esther: Oh, no, it was an old church.

² A supervisor of the checklist is a position held by the person in charge of voter registration, the list of eligible voters.

Charles: It was an old church. It's interesting it was an old church and they were the only ones married there.

Lindy: Yeah, it's kind of a strange statistic.

Esther: They were the only ones.

Tyler: Just the bell.

Esther: Yeah, the bell sits there. [Laughter]

Charles: Did you go fishing in a brook?

Esther: Yup. I came to a brook right over there by the Town Hall. Yup. Then when we used to have our Fowler reunion, there were two or three of us we'd always go and walk the stones in the brook. We always had a ball doing that.

Lindy: How about songs that you remember? Are there any that your mother used to sing you or that you're familiar with it?

Esther: Daddy used to sing "K-K-K-Katy, over the moon shine." whatever that's called. He used to take the girls to school in the winter with a sleigh, awesome sleigh, and I'd go with him, and we'd sing that.

Lindy: Well you're very nice to share your time with us. We sure appreciate it. Thank you so much. Thank you too Tyler.

Tyler: Yup.

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CREDITS

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MUSIC

Ascending the Vale by Kevin MacLeod (incompetech.com)

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K-K-K-Katy

Lyrics and music: Geoffrey O'Hara; 1918

Singer: Billy Murray

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Billy_Murray_-_K-K-K-Katy.ogg