



Connie and her two dogs under a tree on the Claycomb farm.

## Connie Rose Combines Farm Life With Singing

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BEDFORD (Bedford Co.) —

Not all of Connie Claycomb's days have been sunny, but she's always found something to sing about.

Known throughout Bedford County and much of Pennsylvania as Connie Rose, the female singer in the John Topper Band, Connie grew up singing.

Her parents were Jim and Jane Claar better known as "Jim and Jane and their Western Vagabonds". They were the forerunners of country music, rubbing elbows with such stars as Gene Autry or Roy Rogers, brightening up the lives of country folks everywhere with their morning radio show.

Jim and Jane grew up together, singing. And, when eventually they joined hands in both show business and matrimony, along came Connie Rose. The little blond girl immediately joined her parents in their show business ventures. "I didn't know any other life," she said. "I never lived one place more than two years. But, I was never afraid of a microphone. It was a wonderful life."

But, those days of wine and roses also had their down sides. Somewhere in her travels, Connie picked up the polio virus, only a few years prior to the Salk prevention. It was a traumatic time for the Claars, which now included sister Audry and brother Ricky.

Connie eventually recovered, but the disease left her with a paralyzed leg which would forever require a brace.

Today, Connie notices the effects of that tragic disease more and more. "Everyone loses muscle elasticity as they age," she comments. "But, a leg damaged by polio loses it much faster."

Eventually, Connie married one of the Vagabonds, Buzzy Brant, and the two continued to enjoy show business. But, the marriage was not destined for longevity. Buzzy was killed in a truck accident while Connie was pregnant with her first child.

"It wasn't easy," she remembers. "For awhile, I quit singing and pretty much stayed to myself."

A sunny disposition isn't destined to stay down long and, Connie soon met and married Fred Claycomb.

Fred was not a musician, instead, farming had been his life-long dream and Connie was willing to help him achieve it. The couple bought a farm near Bedford and soon, Connie had two more children, making a total of three in less than five years.

"I didn't stop singing altogether," she remembers. "I couldn't. I still sang in the Lutheran church choir and two of my old friends and I formed a trio. We sang at weddings and for other social occasions. It was an outlet."

The Claycombs still live on the farm although they lost some acreage recently to the new Bedford airport. Including leased ground, they farm about 600 acres and raise a mixed beef and dairy herd of 100 head.

"I could never do a lot of work on the farm because of my leg," Connie says. "But, I've always

enjoyed being a farm wife. I like to keep house, cook, can, and have vegetable and flower gardens. Really, I never expected to sing professionally again."

It was John Topper, a local high school history teacher who also had a love for country singing, who gave her other ideas. He had started a band and was making a recording when he realized he was missing from female harmony.

Remembering Connie from an early local TV show that the "Western Vagabonds," had done on a weekly basis, he gave her a call.

"Fred was all for it," Connie remembers. "He had always loved my singing and thought it was time for me to get back into it. So, I agreed. It was about that time that one of John's band members had asked for a leave of absence. I was to fill in for a year. That was

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Connie Rose Claycomb, a Bedford County farm wife, performing with the John Topper Band at Old Bedford Village.

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