



Trudy Bard



Nancy Shoemaker



Isabel Ferree



Elma Maule

Farm Women Society Members Reflect On Growing Up And Life Today

Family Life — Then And Now

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—Stories are often heard about the "good old days" when parents and children worked side by side on the farm, and many of the social ills of society seem to slide by without affecting the lives of most families.

Several members of Lancaster Farm Women Society 15 have lived in "the good, old days." Some are now retired, their sons and daughters grown, and their grandchildren and great grandchildren are now experiencing family life in the '90s.

Since 1994 has been designated "The Year of the Family," there is a renewed interest in family. How do the good old days compare to life today?

Recently Nancy Shoemaker, Isabel Ferree, Elma Maule, and Trudy Bard took time to reflect on family life as they saw it while growing up and how they see it today.

Although family life is known to have undergone many changes in recent years, it is apparent that even in the good old days, family life could not be stereotyped. Families learned to live with the good and the bad. They survived — often happily — despite hardships.

Nancy Shoemaker

While some people blame today's ills on broken homes, Nancy Shoemaker doesn't believe that is the total problem.

She grew up as a child of divorced parents in the 1930s. "And, believe me, that was almost unheard of then," she said.

Although Nancy got almost everything she wanted in possessions, she said, "I missed that feeling of family."

Her grandfather helped fill that void and, Nancy said, she had a nice childhood, was active in church and school, and had lots of friends.

Unlike today's teens, Nancy said that it was quite an event when a boy got to borrow the family car. "There were only two boys who had a car when I was in high school," she said. "And, believe me, they (the boys) were very much in demand."

After college, Nancy taught school, met her husband to be, quit her job, and came to the farm.

"Everybody said it wouldn't work," Nancy said of her transition of going from town to the farm.

"It was rough adapting, but I survived," she said of the isolation she felt in not having even a phone for the first four years of married life.

"What really helped me was the advice my mother-in-law told me.

"There were only two boys who had a car when I was in high school," she said. "And, believe me, they (the boys) were very much in demand."

I never forgot it, and I bless her everyday for it," Nancy said.

The advice?

Never go near the cows.

"I didn't," Nancy said. "But I saw other women start helping in the barn and they soon ended up working there everyday."

However, Nancy did learn to can and freeze and "do all those things a good wife should," she said.

The couple had four boys, who are now grown. Now that there are seven grandchildren in the family, she observes the different lifestyles.

"Fathers today spent a lot more time with the children than my husband was able to spend with ours," she said. "My boys sometimes forego business to do something for the kids. Things pretty much center on the kids. I think it's great that fathers take more interest in the children and are able to do so."

Nancy thinks mothers today are more interested in careers because fathers help out more in the home.

"There's more responsibility put on the children when mothers work outside the home, but children seem to be happy and that's the main thing," she said.

Nancy and her husband Kenneth still live on their 300-acre farm, but two of their sons now operate it and milk 80 cows.

All four of the Shoemakers' sons live within a ¼ mile radius. "So the children know there is always someone around — they have a good support system," she said.

Isabel Ferree

Isabel Ferree grew up as an only child. She never married, but she has plenty of experience with children. Isabel taught school for 43 years and then worked part time

as a teacher's aide until five years ago.

"Children today are more mature than when I first taught in a one-room school," Isabel said.

"That has its good sides and bad sides. It's good to be mature but

sometimes they get thrown into things that they aren't mature enough to handle such as teen pregnancy."

Isabel said that she believes there is a big difference in the peer pressure children feel today compared with when she was in school.

"When I was a child, everything centered on school, church and family life at home. Now both parents work. There are so many things — good things to be active in — but it results in a different family life. One family member is

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going this way and another that."

Isabel said that she was fortunate that her dad was very much a family man. On the whole, she believes fathers today help more with housework and children.

"But it was definitely better to be a child in my era," she said.

"When I was growing up, we walked to school. We'd take our sleds to school and sled for one hour during lunchtime and during two 15-minute recesses during the day."

As a teacher, Isabel felt sorry for students who did not have free time at school after third grade.

Since elementary children have so little unstructured free time, it puts too much pressure on them. On the other hand, she believes high school students need structured activities instead of being allowed to hang out on street corners.

Parents, she said, are sometimes

unaware of what children are doing, the lyrics to the music that they are listening to.

"My dad thought that it was really important to get in the right thing. He considered smoking immoral. If he knew of anyone whose family did not have good name, I was expected to be nice to them, but not allowed to associate with them," she said.

Curfews were unheard of, she said, because they were not necessary. It was just understood that children got in at a decent time.

Isabel still lives on the Century Farm on which she was born and raised. It's been in the family since 1880. Her cousin's son farms it.

Trudy Bard

Trudy Bard isn't retired. She doesn't have grandchildren, but her two sons are grown and Trudy laments the fact that they missed an important part of childhood that meant so much to her — living near grandparents.

"Extended family life has really changed," said Trudy, who grew up in Bucks County and lived near her grandparents. When her brother was killed by a school bus,

suffered by not living near to grandparents," she said.

Trudy feels that she was fortunate to be able to quit her school teaching job to become a full-time mother.

"Today, necessity to survive often required two incomes," she

"I feel that my kids have really suffered by not living near to grandparents," she said.

said. "I can't put myself in that situation. I think that change is hard on the kids."

While two-income families often require the father to help more with the children's upbringing than perhaps their own fathers had helped, Trudy's husband William is an example of men who have always taken an active part in parenting.

"My husband was better with the babies than I was," Trudy said.

Elma Maule

Elma Maule remembers a good childhood, despite the death of a sibling. She lived on a farm until she was 12, then the family moved to Oxford.

Elma graduated from Temple University with a degree in education. She taught five years in elementary school, until she married in 1933. She and her husband adopted three children and then had a birth child who died at two years of age. The Maules now have 12 grandchildren and several great grandchildren.

"They seem to live happy lives," Elma said. "The biggest change I see is that they get jobs at a younger age."

Homestead Notes