

Dorothy

Interviewed by Tara McConohy, May 2010

Dorothy Barbara Chambers Usiak was born September 9th 1932 to parents Thomas and Anna Chambers. She was one of seven children. Her siblings are in order of birth; Margaret, Agnes (Aggie), Thomas (diseased), Anthony (Tony), Dorothy (Dot), Elizabeth (Bettie) and Barbara (Bobbie) The family lived in Hobart, WI (Brown County) on two farms that were conjoined 7 miles from Green Bay.

Dorothy recalls her memories as a child and especially during the depression as “still like heaven as a child even when no one had any money.” On their farms she kept herself entertained with all of her siblings with the 250 acres of land that included 2 creeks to play in and an apple orchard. She especially says “In the winter time the creeks were fun to play and slide on, our yard kept us pretty entertained.”

On their family farms they had a large garden with beans and vegetables and numerous other food items. The kids all had to help with the daily chores of the garden. The picked bean and sold them to pay off the debt the family incurred. Here time growing up on the farm she said all the kids did “whatever was necessary to her family’s livelihood us kids were required to help and after chores then we could play.”

Because they lived in the country on a farm there were not close neighbor kids to play with so Dorothy said that “all us siblings had to get along with each other if they wanted to play games, especially when we would play a game of ball.” T.V. was not available for kids to pass time by and in her family they did not do such things as shooting rifles so as Dorothy puts it “us kids got creative on the types of games we played.”

When Dorothy was around the age of 2 she became sick with Scarlett Fever. She remembers “All the while I was sick my father carried me around everywhere.” Eventually it went away on it own time but then it relapsed and now she says “I have on the back of my neck a scar from when I had Scarlett fever.”

Her Family was Catholic and on Sunday’s her family observed that Sunday was a day of rest but they would go to church every Sunday, which was a 3 mile walk, because no one had cars at the time, walking was the only way to get places. “she said that the walking got boring and long sometimes.” By the time she would get back most of the kids were too tired to play so they would just sit outside, or engage in an activity that required little energy.

When her family would go into town it was very exciting because as she puts it “we were able to see friends and mull around the local shops.” Dorothy’s favorite place was to go to the general store and if you had 2 cents, which was a lot of money back then it could buy you a few suckers, which could last all week. Dorothy has always been a sweet tooth, and she still has yet to get a cavity!

When Dorothy was younger she said that she loved her elementary school. “everyone played together, and even when we got older boys and girls played with each at recess, which was 30 minutes.” When she was 12 she attended catholic school. She says “I didn’t like the catholic school and it was a 4 mile walk to school which I did with my younger sisters.” When she was in school her favorite subject was geography, she said “when she grew up she wanted to travel.”

Once she reached high school she went to West high school in Green Bay. Dorothy further told me that “there was no way for her to get to school so she stayed with a family in town as a live in nanny for two kids.” She would go to school then she would watch the kids when she got back. “I liked the job very much and in the summer I enjoyed going home to see my family.” While she was in school she was involved in choir. “I was a senior in high school and there were 150 music upperclassmen, I enjoyed choir a lot.” During her time in high school she did not have any boyfriends but in middle school she did. She did say though “there was a school, Central Catholic boys high school, they had an ROTC program and I was invited to the balls that they would put on.” As for fashion back then “bangs were becoming popular and straight long hair was the cool thing.” Her time at high school was good but everyone was still poor because families were coming out of the depression.

Dorothy lived through some wars. The first one was WWII. None of her brothers were old enough to serve so none of them were drafted. During the war Dorothy said that “lots of stuff was rationed, gas was a big item that was rationed and we only had one pair of shoes a year.” “we had to watch everything that we were spending and doing because we had to make things last.” Later when the Korean war came Dorothy had one brother who was drafted for the war but he was sent to Germany instead.

While the Korean war was happening she worked at the Red Owl Supermarket. “it was one of the 1st supermarkets in Green Bay, I made 16c an hour or sometimes less, and I worked 6 days a week 8 to 10 hour days.”

Dorothy has had many wonderful experiences in her life and she is continuing to have them. She has had some fascinating stories about her life and I thank her for sharing them with me. I hope you have and has much fun learning about Dorothy’s life as I have.