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Interview with Mary Bebout

Mary Bebout

Lisa M. Groesz

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Researcher's name: Lisa M. Groesz

Event: Interview with Mary Bebout

Place: Her Home, Utica, 10:00am

Co-workers present: None

LG: This is Lisa Groesz interviewing Mary Bebout

MB: Right.

LG: February 17, 2001. And, um, how long have you been preserving.

MB: Hm, let's see. I guess I've been married about 20 years. So, probably 20 years. I didn't do it before I got married so after I got married I started canning like my mom did.

LG: Okay. So had you learned from your mom.

MB: No, I didn't really watch mom can. My ball cook book is what I use.

LG: Uh huh.

MB: And a neighbor across the street from where we first lived. She taught me how to do green beans.

LG: Okay.

MB: So that's where I mostly learned it from was just the neighbor across the street.

LG: And I notice you have a pressure canner so do you primarily pressure can.

MB: Yes, yes. I pressure can everything. What is it? Hot water bath?

LG: Uh huh.

MB: I don't do that at all. Pressure canner is much faster. Um, like green beans take like 25 minutes in a pressure canner and a hot water bath is like 2 hours or something. So I prefer the faster method.

LG: Uh huh.

MB: Okay.

LG: Oh, and so had your husband grown up with it too?

MB: Yeah, his mother cans too. So, we just always did it because it was cheaper than buying everything at the store. Plus, and you know what goes in it because we grow all of

our own vegetables so we don't put preservatives or chemicals or anything like that on it. We know what's in it that way, and I prefer that. We grow our own meat too but, um, this year was the first year I canned meat. I had never done meat before because I was just iffy about meat. I wasn't so comfortable canning meat but somebody gave us a whole bunch of chickens, I think a dozen chickens, and I didn't have room in my freezer so I didn't have any choice but to can them. So I tried it and, um, worked real good. The chicken all sealed. I used whatever it told me in my canning book.

LG: Uh huh.

MB: But my broth didn't do very good and I don't know why my broth didn't. Most, say about half of them didn't seal. I don't know what happened to my broth.

LG: Yeah.

MB: I was going to ask Ella May Bard, the Knox County Extension Agent, why that, you know, that happened. Every once in a while you'll have a can that doesn't seal but that was a lot of the broth that didn't seal and I was really counting on my broth. So I was disappointed in that but for the most part everything seals so I prefer the pressure canner.

LG: Uh huh.

MB: So, but I enjoy canning. It's fun. Takes a lot of time but it's fun.

LG: Uh huh. And, do you ever dry food.

MB: Yes, I've got a dryer. And I've tried apricots, and bananas, and apples, but wasn't real thrilled with it so I haven't done a while of that. Don't dry, I do a lot of freezing. Um, I freeze lima beans, corn, peas, broccoli, and cauliflower. I freeze all of those.

LG: And is that preference for taste?

MB: Much rather have frozen corn and peas and limas than canned. Much better taste. Much fresher taste, so I prefer those frozen but they are all right. Green beans, I can, I don't think I have, I don't think I've ever bought tomato juice out of the store, I have never bought green beans out of the store. And I guess the other things I've probably bought out of the store but I've never had store bought tomato juice. If I was at a restaurant or something but for me, no, we usually do our own. I usually put up oh maybe 150 quarts of tomato juice every year. So.

LG: Wow.

MB: But that I don't do according to the book.

LG: You created your own recipe?

MB: No, I just do it my own way which isn't the right way to do it. I just heat my tomato juice and, uh, get it boiling, and, uh, just do it my own way. Put it in the jar and seal it up and put the lid on and the ring and then I turn, I do a strange thing, I turn it upside down, I turn my jars upside down like this and I cover them with towels to keep the heat in.

LG: That's awesome.

MB: Ha. And I seal them that way. I don't pressure cook them and I don't hot water bath them. Everybody, you know a lot of people do it that way. It's the old fashioned way of doing it. It's not the right way to do it as, you know, an extension agent would tell you that it needs to be done another way. But a lot of people do it this way.

LG: Ella May would shake her head.

MB: Yeah, she'd shake her head, no no no, that's not right. But we haven't died from it.

LG: Uh huh.

MB: So, uh, I don't see any harm in it. I think the acid, something about the acid in the tomatoes, but I don't know all the scientific things about it, but hey it works and, it works fine for us. You know, I'll have a few of those jars pop but no big thing.

LG: Right.

MB: Do you know how to test to see if things are sealed.

LG: Um, is it, is it the pressure in the lid. Like if there's

MB: Yeah, if it bounces back up it's not fit to eat. And I always smell my food. You know, I just always smell it before I, because it will have a smell to it that isn't it right if it hasn't sealed and, you know, that can happen. But it's just life, it's just something that happens. No problem.

LG: No, and do you appreciate the ease of it too?

MB: Oh.

LG: Once it's all canned and if you want to cook, you don't have to go to the grocery store.

MB: Oh yes. Yeah, I've really liked. Like I said, the first time I ever done the meat was the chicken and I can just go down and open up a can of chicken and make homemade noodles and, you know, you have your meal real fast. Or you can make chicken sandwiches real fast. I've really enjoyed that much more than I thought I would. I'm like, I will have to try beef somewhere down the road.

LG: Uh huh.

MB: But, um, it's been nice. I enjoy it. I make a lot of my own, I make my own chili sauce and, um, spaghetti sauce, they kind of like the store boughten over my homemade but I, we still make a lot of spaghetti sauce too. I got that recipe from a friend and chili sauce, I got that from my husband's aunt in Gambier. She gave me her chili sauce recipe. And it makes real good chili. It has a lot of different, depending on how much hot peppers you put in it, flavors different and you can get a real, you put too many hot peppers in, you can get a real hot batch of chili. He he he. I don't know if that would be texas chili or what but you can get some heat to it if you use. But it's fun to experiment that way. It's fun.

LG: Yeah. And how many children do you have?

MB: I have three girls.

LG: Okay. And do they help you with the preserving?

MB: Heck no.

LG: They don't?

MB: They are just like me. They probably won't do it until they have to. And, I didn't do it until I had to. And, they will probably be the same way. They will probably do it when they have to. Um, Becky, my middle children, she takes more interest in gardening than the other two. Sarah's my youngest, she's about 6 foot, she's more interested in basketball in the summer than gardening but. Becky kind of likes to garden and stuff. I suspect that she'll get into it more. But, they help me pick the beans and, uh, get them ready to can, but they really don't can. So. They just don't seem to be that interested in it. But they have their part in picking and getting things ready like shell beans have to be shelled out and green beans,

LG: Yeah.

MB: the ends have to be snipped. So they do a lot of that, especially since I went to work full time last year. They, they helped a lot more with that last summer and picking it when I was at work and getting it ready, then when I came home from work, then it would be ready for me to can.

LG: That's nice.

MB: That helped a lot.

LG: Where do you work.

MB: Um, I work at Licking County Vocational School down in Newark.

LG: Okay.

MB: I'm a secretary, receptionist there. I've always worked at jobs that were just nine months and I had my summers off

LG: Hm hmmm.

MB: But, um, with kids facing college and stuff, I needed more. It would be nicer to have more money to put away for college.

LG: Right.

MB: So I went to work full time last summer for the first time. I didn't think I'd like it but it wasn't too bad. It wasn't as bad as I thought. So, it worked out okay.

LG: And with your children's help, you were able to keep up with the garden?

MB: Yeah.

LG: And.

MB: Kept up with it pretty good. So that helped a lot. Cause my kids are 15, 17, and 19. So, so they are old enough to really help now. So I enjoy that. They helped quite a bit last year. The weeds kind of took over more than normal but we still got stuff out of it.

LG: Uh huh.

MB: We managed.

LG: And was it kind of bonding too? Though they did a lot of it while you were at work but?

MB: Oh, yeah, um I would say we worked on it together more when I wasn't working full time. Because, uh, they are in Knox county 4-H programs so they would go down at 4:30 in the morning and work their live stock and I would work in the garden weeding and stuff and when they got done working their live stock they would come and help pick, you know. And, you know, we have a lot of fun together in the garden. Um, let's see. What's some crazy things we do? Throw tomatoes at each other. Ha ha ha.

LG: Ha ha ha.

MB: Well you might as well have fun.

LG: Uh huh.

MB: And you know, we just, oh, usually try to plant something new each year in the garden. And, and that's something we kind of pick out in the spring together. Well, we decide, let's print this different type of squash. Becky likes pumpkins, pumpkin pie. She usually is the pumpkin girl. She takes care of a lot of the pumpkins and, when the girls were smaller, we raised gourds, oh Jack!, go lay down. And the kids would sell them in the fall.

LG: He's persistent.

MB: Yes he is. They would sell their pumpkins, you know, for Halloween pumpkins, and the gourds, you know, as decorations and stuff. And that doesn't have anything to do with canning but that would get them to the garden and get them interested in it so. They had to weed out the beans and things along with their gourds and pumpkins, so. Yeah, we usually. Let's see. This year the new thing we tried was ... squash. And that was really neat. I used, my mom used to raise that, and I never raised it with the girls. I had trouble finding the seed but then I found it in the seed catalogue so we raised that this we year. We had, we made a pumpkin pie out of it and stuff. It turned out, you know, we, it was fun. Sometimes I can pumpkins but I don't have any of that right now. We're out right now.

LG: Yeah.

MB: But, uh, we usually do a lot of things together in the garden. So. I don't know what else.

LG: When do you begin your garden?

MB: When do I begin my garden? Whenever my husband gets around to getting the garden ready.

LG: Uh huh.

MB: Usually, um, about the end of May, middle end of May. Except for the peas. He really likes peas so we try to get them in by St. Patrick's day.

LG: Okay.

MB: We usually try to plant them middle of March. The cold weather things: peas and broccoli and cabbages and things you can plant, things you can plant, you know, in March and first part of April. You can get them going sooner.

LG: Okay. And you don't have to worry about setting up the solar heating?

MB: No, no. They're fine. They'll take it.

LG: That's wonderful.

MB: Yeah, and then you can pull the peas out and plant a second crop of something. So, we usually do that. Keeps things busy.

LG: Yeah.

MB: So, uh, and then, I can't raise sweet corn where my garden is because the coons get it. So, I don't have much luck raising sweet corn but everything else does pretty good. Rabbits enjoy taking their part of the things but we usually get, we usually get enough even though we share with wild life. We still get our share. Ha ha.

LG: Do you feel that people are preserving less than in the past?

MB: Oh, yeah, yes. I imagine so. People are. Too many families, you know, both parents are working. So yeah I think people probably preserve less. Yep, because it does take time and you have to have space for a garden. And, uh, yeah, I would say, there's probably less and less people doing it. It takes too much time. And it does, it takes a lot of time.

LG: And do you feel fewer people are gardening too? Or just preserving? Because I know if you're not gardening there is not as much reason to preserve.

MB: Right, um, boy, I would say the majority of people don't garden. Um, but I've always done it. I've always grown up with a garden so I just do it. Um, I would miss it if I didn't have it. I would miss it a lot. But probably less and less people. I think a lot of people. And my husband is a Columbus fireman so, uh, a lot of people that he works with have no idea where the food comes from. Um, they just don't have a clue.

LG: Right.

MB: Don't have a clue that, you know, somebody has to grow it. How long it takes to grow. You know, they just don't have a clue what's involved in and, you know, the cost of growing food too. Now, I save a lot of seeds like kidney beans. I can replant them. I can save them for seeds. Um, we have a family bean

LG: Oh.

MB: Um, it's been handed through our family, I don't even know the name of it.

LG: Okay.

MB: It doesn't even have a name. I figure it came from Scotland.

LG: That's really interesting.

MB: And we save the seed from that. Nobody has the seed. So it's kind of neat.

LG: Yeah.

MB: It's different tasting than anything you can buy. There is nothing like it. But I've never been able to figure out a name.

LG: So, so does it taste like a bean. Just different flavoring?

MB: Just different flavoring. I mean, it doesn't taste anything like a kidney bean and it doesn't. We tried, um, we got like seed savers catalogue and we've tried to match it up with uh with our shelling looks like but we didn't find anything there and we tried this one kinds, jacob's cattle bean but, no, I have no idea what that bean is and, you know, I don't know what it is. We figure, like I said, we figure it came from Scotland with my dad's family.

LG: Uh huh.

MB: And as far as I know, my mom and I are the only ones that have it. Um, my dad was an only child so he had no brothers and sisters and my mom just had two sisters. And neither one of them ever kept the bean alive, you know, the string going. Because we save the, we dry the seed out and then just replant it, you know.

LG: Uh huh.

MB: I don't know what it is. No one else has it so.

LG: A mystery.

MB: Yes, it's a mystery bean. It's a shell bean, you know, you have to shell it out of the pod but I don't know what it is. We have our own canning time and don't know what it is.

LG: Yeah.

MB: I'd like to find out. But I don't know how to find out so, you know, I've had different people look when they go to Scotland but they say they don't see it either. So.

LG: Yeah.

MB: I don't know what it is.

LG: That's interesting.

MB: It is, it's neat. Ha ha.

LG: And then what else do you have on the table.

MB: Let's see, um, I do grape juice. I do my own grape juice.

LG: Oh, okay.

MB: That's a really easy thing. It takes about five minutes.

LG: That's awesome.

MB: You just put two cups of grapes in, a cup of sugar, fill it with boiling water and process it and.

LG: That's really cool.

MB: That's easy. Grape juice is easy. Um, I make vegetable soup, kidney beans, this is salsa. I tried that one year just as something new. I make relish. This is out of cucumbers and this is out of zucchini. And just the other is chili and spaghetti sauce.

LG: And with the vegetable soup, do you um just put in vegetables that require about the same amount of time or do you? Because I know it has to go as long as the longest one.

MB: Um, no. I put it, I just can it for, like if I put these shell beans they have to be processed for 45 minutes so whatever the longest bean is, or the longest item in there, I just process it that amount of time.

LG: Uh huh.

MB: And it works great.

LG: That's wonderful.

MB: I love having vegetable soup.

LG: I, um, I actually did not grow up with canning but I'm very interested in it. In talking with people, and talking about food, I'm eager, once I settle down.

MB: You're going to try it, uh?

LG: I'm going to try it. But, um, so you have a pressure canner with a dial. Because the last one I saw, it was a gauge.

MB: Yeah, there's two types. And I use the dial and you put your jars in there and it will hold seven quarts. Usually I do quarts.

LG: Okay.

MB: And you just clamp it down and then when the steam comes out of here, then you put that in there and that is how your pressure goes up and then you just watch your dial. I mean if it's ten pounds you put it up there or however long you need it. One thing is nice, I do it on a gas stove and it's much easier to regulate your heat on a gas stove than it is on an electric stove. My mom has an electric and she has to keep turning it up and down, up and down. She has to sit there and do that, whereas with the gas stove, you can just turn that plane down and it's a much more steady heat than with electric. So I really like canning with gas much much more than electric. Like I said, I never did it at home so you know I just have always done it with gas. But I know she talked about when she switched from gas to electric that it was much easier with gas because you can get a more consistent heat pattern.

LG: Yeah, and I know, I know if it fluctuates too much

MB: Then you're in trouble. Your jars won't seal so that's always a problem. Do you want to try something.

LG: Yeah.

MB: Okay. What would you like to try?

LG: Um, I'll have some of the grape juice.

MB: Okay. We can try that.

LG: That interests me.

MB: I won't take the seeds out or anything until I

LG: Okay.

MB: So the way I do that is that I just [unintelligible]. And I do this for my Sunday School kids too. I teach Sunday School so if we have a lesson on communion or something, then I just uh, I'll just take over some of my homemade grape juice. Okay, this one is sealed good. See?

LG: Uh huh.

MB: If you can hear it pop. So just to get more grape flavor I just kind of mash this up, so that your seeds don't go down through.

LG: And so you just add sugar.

MB: Just sugar and boiling water and grapes. You can smell grapes.

LG: It smells really good.

MB: There. Let you have some. You want to try? I've never tried my salsa since I made it last fall.

LG: Oh.

MB: You want to try that? I have no idea what it tastes like.

LG: Yeah, yeah.

MB: I'm not sure it will taste good with grape juice but. I have no idea what this is going to taste like. Like I said, I haven't tried it.

LG: Just as long as it isn't as spicy as your chili!

MB: My chili can be real spicy.

LG: I really enjoy Indian food so I'm trying to develop my tolerance to spices because so much of it involves curry.

MB: Hmm. Different. Well I can taste some, I grew some jalapeno peppers and I think I put some in.

LG: Oh no.

MB: Try some.

LG: Okay. I'm strong. I can take it.

MB: It's not going to taste like store boughten.

LG: I like it though.

MB: It's not bad.

LG: I like it a lot. I love with homemade, you can really taste the tomatoes.

MB: Yeah, I think I got some pepper in it.

LG: I'm tasting it.

MB: But, my one daughter doesn't like onions so I usually have to disguise onions when I put them in things.

LG: That's too bad because onions are such a good flavor.

MB: I know, I love soup with onions in it. I mean, what's potato soup with no onions.

LG: Right.

MB: You want to try some.

LG: Yeah, the mystery bean. [and this is at 10:30 in the morning]

MB: Yeah, the mystery bean. See, they dry up on the top but I'm going to heat it up. [unintelligable] They are a real meaty bean but they are real fat and chunky.

LG: Yeah.

MB: I never, my mom never grew kidney beans but we use several more beans in the chili than she does. And stuff. And so I started growing kidney beans. But you have to be careful. I usually plant them at different times so the bloom doesn't come at the same time. If I plant my shell beans, then I will wait three weeks before I plant my kidney beans so that the bees won't pollinate and mix the, mix it up.

LG: Then you start getting strange hybrid

MB: Yeah, yeah. I get strange things. So, um, and I always make sure, anything I can, I boil it before I eat it. Just as a safety, good safety thing. So, we'll just let this heat up a little bit.

LG: So how often do you have to go to the grocery store since you can so much?

MB: Oh, I still go to the grocery store a lot. I still go the grocery store and spend money. Um, I do a lot of bread baking and stuff. Still going?

LG: Still going.

MB: Uh, we like homemade bread so I make a lot of bread but um there are still so many things you have to buy at the grocery store.

LG: Yeah.

MB: And with kids being in sports and stuff, quick things are always nice. You can't have chicken sandwiches every night.

LG: Right.

MB: But, my salsa isn't too bad.

LG: M hmm. I like it.

MB: Like I said, we hadn't tried it. I told the kids we would let the flavors mix a while and then I guess I forgot about it down there. Let's see. Oh yes. He's back.

LG: How long have you had him.

MB: Um, he's about five. We got him when he was a pup. He is part border collie, part lab.

LG: Okay.

MB: You guys could come out, you know. Now how old are you?

LG: 21.

MB: Are you a senior?

LG: Yeah.

MB: Oh, neat.

LG: I know. It's scary.

MB: I'll bet.

LG: I can't believe I'm graduating.

MB: All right. This is Becky.

LG: Hi. I'm Lisa.

MB: Oh, one of her best friend's is Lisa. Okay, we can try some beans.

LG: Awesome.

MB: Here.

LG: [to kids] I'm in this field work class at school so I'm interviewing.

MB: We do this family style too. Ha ha. Hey you guys, try the salsa. Remember? We made it and then I forgot about it down there.

Becky: Is it like Uncle Harry's?

MB: I don't know. Try it and see. It's different, not bad. What do you think?

Becky: Tomatoey.

MB: Tomatoey! Ha ha.

LG: I these.

MB: They're different. They don't taste like, you know, anything I've tried.

LG: M mm.

MB: I've always wanted to send some to seed savers but I've never really gotten an address for them.