

Interview with June Cullen
Saturday, May 22, 2010

JC = June Cullen

BC = Bob Crippen

BCC = Barbara Cullen Chapman

BC: June, if you'd just like to first of all tell me your name and your date of birth and actually where you were born.

JC: I'm June Cullen, I was born April 21, 1929 and I was born on my other grandparents' farm up off of Route 14 on the Spencer Road.

BC: I can't think what Spencer Road now is, but that's fine.

JC: It's five miles out on 14. The Spencer Road was named after my family.

BCC: That's the wrong side of the lake.

[laughing]

BC: So, you were born a Spencer then?

JC: Yes.

BC: And what were your parents' names?

JC: Vernis (?) and Stanley Spencer. My mother was a Moore.

BC: Moore, ok.

JC: Her parents were the ones that owned the farm.

BCC: On the Backbone Ridge.

JC: On the Backbone Ridge.

BC: Great. And siblings?

JC: I have one brother, Richard Lee Spencer, and he now lives in Lyons, NY.

BC: OK. And what was the age difference between you and Lee?

JC: He was born September 1st, he's four years younger than I am.

BC: OK, great. Were your parents farmers, is that correct? What did your father do?

JC: No, they just had a hard time getting along. My father worked in a garage in Dundee when I was young, in fact, we did live in Dundee for a while and then times were hard and we lived in my grandparents' house on the Spencer Road.

BC: And how long did your grandparents own the farm on Spencer Road?

JC: My great-grandparents owned it. So, now our son, Stanley Cullen, has the farm. My aunt left it to him, so it's been in the family for a long, long time.

BCC: I figured the other night it was six generations.

BC: Do you have any idea around approximately the year that they went up there?

BCC: Yes, I do. I don't have it, but I don't know on the top of my head.

JC: My great-grandmother was an only child and the family came, I believe, from Pennsylvania. And her parents had a place in Watkins Glen, which is on Franklin Street now. She took care of her parents, when they passed away the parents left her the property in Watkins. So, they sold that and that's what they bought the farm with, up on Spencer Road.

BC: Do you remember what her maiden name was, by chance?

BCC: I have all that information, I just don't...

JC: Towner.

BCC: Yes, her maiden name was Towner. She married Orlando Spencer.

BC: OK.

JC: And some of the furniture, like the secretary over here, was theirs originally.

BC: OK. So, you actually grew up on Route 14, correct?

JC: Yes, for a while and then my parents moved to Watkins. My father went to work for the Chevrolet garage down here. Which was owned by a Mr. Webb at that time and then Nick Forboni bought it. So, my father worked there when my brother was just about, I don't know, a year old or so.

BC: I'm going back to your grandparents on the farm, did you spend a lot of time at your grandparents' farm?

JC: I used to go over there and stay like a week or so at a time. I loved going over there because I had a good time with them and then my uncle was still at home and he was like a big brother to me. He taught me how to tie my shoes and things. He worked for the CCC, and helped build the Glen. But the farm over there, the soil was so bad they just could not make a decent living, they just didn't have anything, other than the farm.

BCC: What you're talking about is the one over in Reynoldsville.

JC: Yes.

BCC: The Moores.

JC: Yes, that's what I said, I went and spent like a week at a time or so.

BC: So, we don't really know what road that one was on.

BCC: No.

JC: All I know, and I don't know if you know the names of the roads, in decent weather, as you go in to Reynoldsville the first road that turns to the right...

BC: Potomac, I think.

JC: ...we used to go up that road and then turn right again and go across a bridge, which is no longer there.

BC: That's Ball Diamond Road.

JC: We think it went it went out in the '35 flood, we were talking, that's what my brother thinks, it went out in the '35 flood.

BC: But you remember that farm.

JC: Oh, yes. And we've got pictures of it here.

BCC: This is a picture of the barns on the farm that they sold. And that's a picture of her in a rocking chair. And this is a picture of her and her grandmother.

BC: On the same farm too.

BCC: Yes.

BC: Yes, they said the soil was very depleted. So, when the government bought you out, and I think it's fantastic that I have a copy of the letters now from the Forestry. You say your grandparents moved to Logan Road?

JC: Top of Sawmill Gulley.

BC: OK.

JC: On the north side, they had the farm. The house was on the west side and the barn was on the east side. And then they did great, once they got there.

BC: Great. There was a schoolhouse up there, right across from the cemetery, north of that, I think. A small cemetery in the corner and the schoolhouse.

JC: They were south of...let's see.

BC: North of the gulley, I'm thinking.

BCC: No, south of the gulley.

JC: They were on the top on the north side of the gulley.

BCC: No.

JC: Yes, right?

BC: On the Lodi side?

JC: Yes. Because the cemetery is on the south side of the road. Because we went up there and were amazed how well the cemetery is kept up. Some guy had taken the fence down, in fact, he was there the day Barb and I went. He'd taken the fence all down and had painted it. Pretty much all of my relation, the Moore side, is buried over there, my grandparents and great-grandparents.

BCC: In the Logan cemetery.

JC: Yes, in the Logan cemetery.

BCC: So, your grandparents names were Susie and Edgar?

JC: Yes.

BC: That's great. And the date on the document here is June time-frame 1835. Is that approximately when the farm was actually transferred?

JC: I don't really have any idea.

BC: It's a long time back to remember.

JC: We don't have the paper on the other farm that they bought.

BCC: No, all this paperwork is just on the Resettlement.

BC: The electrification, I think, was around that time frame. Can you remember, did your grandparents have electricity?

JC: They didn't have electric, as I remember over at Reynoldsville.

BC: Right. And heating, can you remember that?

JC: No, not really.

BC: I think a lot of them were just pot-bellied stoves.

JC: I think you're right

BC: They just do a room.

JC: Well, we didn't spend a lot of time over there in the winters. My grandfather would come over to uncle Will's farm and pick us up in the sleigh. Because none of the roads were open then in the winter, to get to their place.

BC: Wow. You had mentioned that earlier, can you tell a little about that? You drove the car up...

JC: We went up to uncle Will's and parked the car and then granddad came over in a horse and sleigh, just came over the hills. I don't know if he followed the roads or not, I don't remember that because I wasn't very old, and took us back to their house.

BC: Then bring you back in the evening or whatever?

JC: Yes. You know, later in the day before dark.

BC: Fantastic.

JC: And of course Uncle Will Voorhees, his wife and my grandmother were sisters.

BC: I've got some Voorhees connections.

JC: There was a lot of Voorhees.

BC: I think that anybody from that area is connected.

BCC: ...connected to a Voorhees.

BC: Well, Swicks and Voorhees and Whites.

BCC: Yes, we were Swick too.

JC: Our Voorhees was a brother. Art Swick was a brother of my grandmother. And Bob was just saying he ran into Carleton, who was a son.

BC: Mary Louise Swick Stillwell must be a cousin.

JC: A cousin.

BCC: We have a Stillwell connection too.

JC: Alma June Switzer is a cousin.

BC: We just did an interview with Mary Louise.

BCC: Well, actually I don't know if you've seen the house of Swick or the Stillwell family publications?

BC: I'm in it.

BCC: You're in it? So you've seen it. But we go back to Arthur Swick who married Mary Stillwell and he was born in 1855, so we've got ourselves back as far as that.

BC: Oh, great.

JC: There was a Clarence Moore, granddad's brother.

BC: Now, did you spend summers with your parents at home or did you spend summers, when you were younger, with your grandparents.

JC: I spent most of them at home, but I did spend time with my grandparents Moores and also with the Spencers.

BC: The Moores were in Watkins, is that correct?

JC: No, Moores were over there on the farm.

BC: Oh, they had that farm, OK.

JC: I liked to go over there and Uncle Irvin, as I called him, we'd go on horseback to bring the cows in and things like that.

BCC: The dogs didn't do that? You didn't have dogs to go get them?

JC: Well, he raised cocker spaniels and they didn't do things like that. You've got that picture with them.

BC: Yes, a lot of people said the land was really depleted but then you've got two sides to the story. Some said it could have been saved with a little chemical.

JC: But they didn't make enough money to buy the chemicals, I'm sure.

BC: OK, I'm just going to talk about you growing up some interesting things. Where did you go to school as a child?

JC: I started out in Watkins Glen, went first grade and second grade almost the end of April and then moved to Reading Center.

BC: Now, Watkins Glen was a central school, wasn't it at that time?

JC: No. They had all these small schools so I went the one on County Route, I think it's 28 or 29, the one that goes to ??? Street. And I went there to school until...I think I didn't go back to Watkins probably until 8th grade and we'd had a teacher who all she wanted to do was put on plays and stand up in front and read. And she and my mother did not hit it off, so I didn't do very well in school.

BC: Do you remember any things in school as far as taking your lunch or breaks?

JC: Yes, we walked to school. The year I went up there, the rest of the year there was a Harriet Smith. I can't remember her maiden name. The older girls used to lock her in the bathrooms and do terrible things and I was just so shocked.

BCC: This is the teacher?

JC: Yes. I think she gave up teaching after that. But then Dorothy V. Hotkins came she wasn't the best teacher. I guess she was a good enough teacher, but she didn't get along with my mother because my mother babied my brother and she didn't, the teacher didn't.

BC: And back then was it one class or more than one class in Reading?

JC: Oh, it was all the classes in one room.

BC: In one room. I think above 8th grade normally they went ...

JC: We went to Watkins, but I can't remember for sure, I think I went to Watkins I think in 8th grade. But I was so far behind I just had a terrible time in school, once I went to Watkins.

BC: Reading wasn't that big, but there was probably a lot of kids there at that time?

JC: I can't remember, they had quite a few. But they also had another school in West Reading and they had one down on 14, so they still had a lot of small schools around. Irv Goodrich was, what, Superintendent of all the schools.

BC: Now, you were about 6 or 7 when they had the flood. Do you remember anything about that?

JC: We lived in Watkins. What year was that flood?

BC: '35.

JC: We lived up on the corner of South Glen and, what is it, Division? What's the street? The one that goes on an angle that goes up for Glen Hill. Goes up to where the one that had the salt company. Where you go up on an angle and I lived on the corner and I was scared to death because it was thunder and lightning so bad and when we got up in the morning the whole street, all the culverts and everything laid out in the street, but the water never went through our house.

BC: Pretty lucky you had the drainage off the hill.

JC: But the street was all gone, it was on the north side of our house.

BC: That must have been a big cleanup. I can't imagine. I've seen pictures afterwards.

JC: Houses down on the flat washed away in the crick.

BC: Completely. What do you remember from home life as far as traveling, vacations or...

JC: We didn't.

BC: You went to see the family though maybe?

JC: We did do that. We did go to the Syracuse area because my father had been adopted and he finally looked up his birth mother, so we would, once in a great while go up and see them.

BC: Big day trip.

JC: Yes, took a long time to go to Syracuse.

BC: I'm sure. And growing up did you have responsibilities at home, as far as chores and things you had to do around the house?

JC: Oh, yes. My mother didn't like doing housework so when I got older I did baking on weekends and cleaned house while she worked outside in the garden.

BC: Woodstove baking? Do you remember that?

JC: Not once we moved to Reading. We didn't have inside bathroom, I know when we first moved up there.

BC: And what about social life, you know grange or church, do you remember?

JC: I went to church, my parents didn't, but I went to church because I liked to sing, I sang in the choir.

BC: I think before we had TV there was a lot of community social gatherings.

BCC: Weren't you in the grange?

JC: Yes, I was in grange too. My parents belonged to that, I guess. My grandparents did. And I went to Sunday school because my aunt Dorothy, my father's sister, taught Sunday school so I used to go to Sunday school with her. And I used to go to church when I went to the Moore's over on the other side, they went to Logan to church. So I always went to social events with them. They always had dinners and stuff.

BC: And growing up here near the lake did you spend a lot of time there as far as...

JC: Well, when I got older my parents rented a place at the lake, so we walked down because there was no roads so you walked down. It was down on the same properties where Barb and Bob are now. Julie and Kent owned it. And eventually property became available so my father and George Beardsley bought all the property between two gulleys, in what, '42?

BC: Yes, a lot of people moved on the lake at that time. My grandfather bought property and moved two chicken coops down there.

BCC: Chicken coops!

BC: Well, later they ended up being cottages. The frames of the chicken coops were the start of the cottages.

JC: And my father and George Beardsley didn't want a road into the property that they bought so they put a foot bridge across. Beardsley's bought 100 foot and my parents got 50 foot with the option to buy another 80 when it became available. I was going to be available eventually and they bought the first properties for \$5 a foot.

BCC: \$5 a lake front foot.

JC: And then when they got the other 80 foot it was \$10 a foot.

BC: A pretty good deal.

JC: And then in '57, when my father became ill...

Other male voice: '67.

JC: '67.

BCC: '77.

JC: '77. My father became ill and knew he wasn't going to get better and my mother wasn't going to keep the property, so we bought it from her. Then we had it and fixed it up and put an addition on and put a bathroom in and did quite a bit to it. What year did we decide we couldn't travel or do anything with having lake property because you had to use it to...

BCC: to justify the taxes.

BC: Right, definitely, yes.

JC: So then we decided, well, we were going to sell it because we didn't figure any of the kids would be able to have it or want it or whatever. So, we told all of them we were going to put it on the market and the next day Barb called and says "Dad you've got to come to my office, we've got to talk. I've got one kid in tears and one pouting." So, they decided if they sold their property in Watkins and lived down there year round they could swing it. Now they have it.

BC: My aunt and my grandmother had property on the lake, a little lake. I was gone and they sold it. Growing up were you active in the grange as a teenager or in the church, I mean did you do socials?

JC: Not as a teenager I didn't do an awful lot, as I remember. Once I got going with Ed, my folks became very involved in Masons and Eastern Star. My father particularly, he was grand lecture or some darn thing.

Other male voice: grand poo-bah.

JC: And they thought I should become an officer in Eastern Star. With being an officer you had to go to all of the meetings and everything and I just hated it. I wanted to be going out with Ed and if I had an office I had to go to Eastern Star. So, I went to Eastern Star but once my year was up I guess I got out. I was in Eastern Star for quite a while but I didn't do anything in it. And I used to do a lot of singing and I was in singing group in the summer. That was my main thing.

BCC: What was the name of the group?

JC: I can't remember.

BCC: Peach Orchard Society? I remember that one.

JC: Yes, Peach Orchard Society.

BC: You know, you look at today versus...I think people were closer together years ago. You had to be to stay in the community. You join more groups than they do today.

JC: My parents, you didn't travel a lot, you didn't have the money to do it. Until I had grown up, once I had left home then they had more money. Not because I left...

[laughing]

JC: They got so they were traveling and my brother got to do a lot more traveling.

BC: Getting back to the farm, your grandparents' farm, whatever happened to that, did it pass through the family? Was it sold? In Logan.

JC: They sold it. My grandfather died, he was only 50-something. Fifty-seven maybe? He was fine, supposedly healthy. They had been to a church dinner, church social, at night he came home, seemed fine and went to bed and in the middle of the night grandma heard him make a funny noise and she turned on the light and he was dead. Of course she had a big farm, they had a lot of chickens. So, my uncle moved back and helped her with the farm but it didn't work out too well. So she ended up selling the farm and she moved to Reading Center, bought a house on Church Street in Reading Center. And then, I don't know how long she lived there, but she ended up with cancer. This was when Ed was in Germany. We had the house next door to her, we had bought it. My Aunt moved down from up north to help take care of her and then I moved in to help take care of her too until she died. I don't know what year that was. Must have been...what year did you come home from Germany [speaking to husband]?

Other male voice: '54.

JC: So it must have been '53. Because I lost all three grandparents in a year.

BCC: Your grandfather said he was an active member in the Logan church and a member of the Searsburg Grange. Do you remember any of that?

JC: I used to go with him some to grange. Quite a few things at church in the summer when I'd go. And one interesting thing, they always had their big meal at noon, working on the farm. So, at night they had bread and milk. And granddad always bought onions by a big bag full, so we'd see who could eat the most onions. Granddad and I would see who could eat the most onions with our bread and milk. It seems weird but it was fun.

[laughing]

BC: Seems normal.

JC: Which nowadays it sounds weird.

BC: We used to eat onion sandwiches.

JC: Oh, I like them. My husband doesn't like me to eat them, but.

[laughing]

BC: What about any illnesses, not in the family, but as far as polio or flu or...

JC: My uncle had polio. And he was in real bad shape and thanks to my grandmother working with him he got so he could do most anything. One leg was just skin and bones from his hip down and it just dragged, but he learned to run all kinds of equipment on the farm. He learned to run big equipment, he worked on the C-Way. People couldn't believe the things he could do. And he had a cousin who had polio real bad like he did and his mother wouldn't do the exercises with him because they hurt and he never got so he could do much of anything.

BC: I've talked to others who have said that there was even a time in Hector, and I'm not sure it was actually where Townline Road went over in to Covert, but there was an epidemic. I don't know if it was smallpox or diphtheria, or what it was, but they were blocking people off. They'd pass food in and out, but they didn't want anybody to go in. But that was on the Ridge in that area, but it might have been a lot earlier too. Any really special recollections you remember on your grandparents' farm? The idea of going over in the winter on the sleigh is a neat recollection.

JC: Well, I do remember the funniest thing was they had an old gobbler, turkey gobbler and he was mean. So, every time grandma would go to take care of the chickens or do chores, the barn was across the road and the chicken houses were across the road, and she'd go out and he'd start to come after her and she'd grab him around the neck, tie him up to an old combine until she was done chores and then she'd let him go.

[laughing]

BCC: Why didn't she just cook him for dinner?

JC: He was probably too old and tough, I don't know. But she'd always tie him up.

BC: Got to tie up a turkey so I can do my chores, that's good.

JC: At Dorothy's farm we used to tie up the geese. She had geese and they were mean. We'd always tell Ed's sister when she was little, "now don't run, he won't get you." Well, he'd stick out that neck and she'd take off. I guess you did too [speaking to person in room].

BCC: And she always used to name the geese after all us kids.

BC: And how did the second world war affect your family, or your memory. Can you remember your friends or uncles or relatives going in?

JC: No. My father got deferred because he did help some on the Spencer farm, did some plowing and stuff like that. Of course, he worked in the garage. So, they considered he was...and we didn't have anybody else eligible to go, I guess.

BC: And the rationing probably didn't affect you that much up here, I don't think. We were pretty fortunate to live away from the city. People in the city would have a lot more...

JC: I remember my father bought a bicycle. He figured he could ride that to work if he couldn't get enough gas, because we lived in Reading Center at the time.

BC: Political views, do you remember what your family, I mean...?

JC: I don't remember.

BC: much into it? Is there anything else that you want to remember and let us know about?

JC: No, I guess not.

BC: Well, I guess we've got enough right now then.

[interview ended]

Transcribed by M. Van Der Heide January 11, 2013 for a total of 1 hours and 45 minutes. Total recorded time = 30:06.