

**Life of Christie Looft**  
*an Oral History*

Christie Looft, Interviewee  
Of Ottawa, Illinois

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Narrator's Name: CHRISTIE LOOPT  
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Q: Christie, would you mind telling us where and when you were born?

A: I was born December 22, 1897, in Manlius Township, two and a half miles east of Marseilles.

Q: Thank you. Tell us now something about your boyhood.

A: Well, I don't remember too much about -- until about September of 1903. I started to school.

Q: That should be good.

A: And I remember a very few things that we didn't have too many schoolteachers. We had two of them that was there practically all the time I went to school.

Q: How -- was it a one room school?

A: One room school. It was north of Marseilles, and it was really a good, big school. I remember some of the things that happened there. I know we had a ball team and some lady -- or some young girl hit me in the neck with a ball in playing \_\_\_\_\_ and it hurt for a long time. That's about the only sad thing about the school I remember. The good things was everybody always got along good.

Q: A little different than today.

A: Yes. And I went as far as in March in the eighth grade and I decided that I wanted to get away from home because my dad made me work and wouldn't pay me. (laughs) So I went to North Dakota and lived with my uncle and grandfather and grandmother.

Q: Where was that in North Dakota?

A: Grand Forks County. Larimore. And there's where I bought my first

A: horse. My grandfather had a wonderful saddle horse and my uncle said that you're not going to ruin your grandfather's horse; you go buy yourself one. And he gave me the money, and I went out and got one. And that thing turned out to be a nice horse but he -- couple of times he jumped up and down and once in a while I wouldn't come down at the same time he did. But it finally got going good, and we got along very good. And we used to go out in the fall after the rush work was done and go out and take a blanket and sleep outside to be cowboys. And I don't think either one of us fellows could catch a cow if you had it in a barn but we had a lot of fun anyway. And we only -- the first sad trip out there was we run across something that really scared us out of that country for good because there was a railroad crew building a railroad up to Canada.

Q: What railroad was that?

A: North -- Great Northern.

Q: And some man was buying cattle to feed the railroad crew. And he found out that you could get cattle easier by just butchering them and hauling them away. And those ranchers up in there caught him and took and turned his horses loose and hung him in a tree. And us two young kids came by and we seen that. We rode over and that scared us away from there forever.

Q: Did the men -- were they afraid you might tell?

A: No, they were not afraid because there wasn't any of them there. They'd done it in the evening and he'd been there all day.

Q: Oh. So then you left.

A: And we never went back. And I stayed there during the winter between

A: 1912 and 1913; I went to school to get some more eighth grade education. Add we really had a smart schoolteacher. She went to high school one year in Grand in Grand Forks, which most of them only went through grade school. And in October of 1913, I came back home. I got a little homesick. And from then on I worked as hired man on the farm and odd jobs here and there and in 1920, I worked at the paper mill in Marseilles for awhile and then I bought a tractor and done road grading. I graded every road in Rutland Township.

Q: I didn't know that.

A: Yes. And that went on for two years and the road commissioner got beat in the election so I didn't have the job. From there on I went to Ottawa and worked for Fleming Leverage for awhile and he got me in at the glass works and I worked there for about seven months and then I got on as a special deputy and I really got a workout. I had all kinds of jobs and all kinds of things and. . .

Q: That was LaSalle County?

A: LaSalle County. And one great thing was the big coal mine strike at LaSalle-Peru. The first day I was down there was rather scarce but it turned out it was a lot of time I spent there that I got paid for. And on -- besides there was about seven or eight dance halls around LaSalle County that always had to have a deputy every dance and it paid \$5 a night. Add we really had a lot of fun and you got free dancing.

Q: Was that a law?

A: Well, the law was you was out there, and they gave you free dancing and paid you besides.

Q: I mean was it a law that you had to be there?

A: Well, no, it wasn't a law, but they had it mainly for protection.

Q: Oh, I see. Their own protection.

A: Their own protection.

Q: I see.

A: And from there, I stayed with that until I think it was 1929. I went to Joliet as a guard, up at the pen. And I stayed there -- I had a lot of good jobs there. I went several different states to bring prisoners back. And my mother worried a lot. And I think I made a mistake in 1932; I got married in August. And after going on [phone rings] one or two trips -- can you shut it off? PAUSE The reason I say I made a mistake by getting married -- when I went on trips my wife worried and fretted and stewed so much that she finally convinced me to quit.

A: You must have had some very interesting things, though. Can you remember some?

A: Well, I had a lot of interesting things. I had one trip to New Jersey, and I did cheat a little there because the guy wanted an extradition hearing and you had to go before the governor. And I went there three days in a row and I was getting sick of it, and the deputy of the county jail there told me you come down here about five o'clock and I'll get you out of here. And I went to Joliet with my man and by the time I got to Joliet, I had to do a little fibbing to get off for about four or five days because they palled up and were going to have me prosecuted for kidnapping. But it never turned out that way.

Q: (laughs) Because you had taken the man without. . .

A: The extradition hearing.

Q: I see.

A: And I had a lot of experiences. I patrolled the Honor Farm for about eight months.

Q: Did anyone try to escape?

A: No, and we rode around in good weather on motorcycles and in bad weather with our car, and that was the first time I had a motorcycle accident. I hit a dog. (laughter) When I should have been watching the road, I was watching the dogs chase a rabbit. And there was a lot of other things that happened like three of us guards went out one night and stole two goats so we could have a big feed. And we never got caught at it because we had experienced teachers. (laughter)

Q: The people in the prison were corrupting you. (laughter)

A: Yes. And when I left there and moved back to Ottawa, I decided to go farming. And I started to farm in 1934, and the first year was a dandy. I didn't raise enough corn to feed the cow a week. It was a bad year, but I lived through it and it got better from then on.

Q: Was it dry?

A: Dry. That was the year of the drought, and I had from then until 1944, I farmed. I got up one morning, and I told my wife I'm done farming; I'm going to quit milking cows so in three days, I had the cows sold and ~~in~~ about a week, I had the farm sold. And when it came to the last point, I accepted a job as manager of Dayton elevator, located in Dayton, owned by Carter Grain and Lumber Company. And I worked there until -- for them from 1965 to about 1972. And I retired then.

Q: Did you see any great changes?

A: The changes in the grain business from the time I came to Dayton

A: until I left there was a lot of change. When we first started here -- when they started the elevator, all the grain was shipped by rail. But along about 1951 or 1952, we got river elevators and before long all the trucks and stuff coming in, all the grain was hauled direct to the river through the local elevator. And it was quite an experience; I enjoyed every minute of it and I sure have a lot of good memory -- memorable friends. PAUSE

Q: Go on. That's all right. Excuse me, I. . .

A: Well, I don't know, I -- that seems like an awful long time to work at one place but I sure missed it when I retired.

Q: ~~And the prices~~ change terribly during (laughter) -- I know they did.

A: Well, the prices changed a lot and it was really -- to start out with -- it was quite a chore because only with an eighth grade education, sometimes the figuring kind of got me under the table but I lived through it and never had too much trouble.

Q: Do you remember what they paid for grain at the beginning?

A: At the beginning when I came over here, they were paying \$1.10 for corn and 65¢ for oats, and soybeans were \$2.00. And in my time at the elevator, corn got up about as high as \$2.00, and oats got up to \$1.00, and soybeans got up to \$3.00. But they have gone a lot higher since. Well, I think -- I think that is about all of it.

Q: All that's interesting. I'm sure you have other interesting things to tell us but we'll stop there.

Janet Kankaala  
Transcriptionist

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DATE Feb 6 1976

Christie Laobt

(Interviewee)

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(for \_\_\_\_\_)