

Denise Jarman

Denise Jarman was born in 1952 and grew up on Boosley Grange Farm, near Longnor. She remembers life on the family farm up until the great changes of the 1980s and 1990s. She often revisits the farm, where most of the fields are now rented out to a large-scale dairy producer.

Part One - Childhood

Christine: So, you grew up on this farm, you were here as a tiny child?

Denise: I was born in 1952 and we sold the farm in 1979 after my father died, so for that time.

Christine: So, you've grown up in quite an isolated situation, haven't you, down on this farm. What other memories have you got as a small child in this beautiful landscape? Quite a lonely farm house. What was it like?

Denise: Well, I've no bad memories of my childhood whatsoever. I think it was one of the happiest times of my life. And we were not that isolated really because I had lots relations that lived around and I had a sister. I was sixteen months older than her and she was my best friend, so we played together all the time. So, I never felt isolated.

Christine: It was quite interesting for me just driving in here, that actually this is a bit different from the landscape, certainly in the High Peak, in that you've got lots of little linked farmsteads. So, it's quite a little community really, isn't it? You'd only have to walk about quarter of a mile or something to your nearest neighbours?

Denise: Here, living next door was an aunty and an uncle and two cousins, and he was, I think, our favourite uncle. And of course they were two boys and we were two girls so I think Uncle Bob always spoilt us. I can remember if my dad wouldn't let us do anything, or if my mum wouldn't let us do anything, we would come round here and Aunty Fanny and Uncle Bob did. We used to get away with murder.

Christine: Were you expected to help a lot as a little girl?

Denise: Yes, we had jobs we had to do when we came back from school. We had to collect the eggs. We had hen houses all around the farm. We had to put the units together. Go and collect the cows in the summer, 'cos they were locked in a field - that huge big field down there. And as we grew up, our summer holidays were spent hay-making. Driving a tractor. We had a big Fordson Major and the clutch is high off the ground. We were only tiny. We had to stand on this with two feet, with all our weight to make this go. We'd be driving the tractor while they'd be loading the bales up, because that was easy for us to do, because we were not old enough to load. Although, when we did get old enough, we definitely had to stack and do all the haymaking. I mean that's how we spent all of our summer holidays really, haymaking.

Christine: So, what did you have then animal wise?

Denise: We had cows and sheep, never anything else. My dad never kept pigs, just cows and sheep. We had a Friesian herd with a few Guernsey and Jersey just to keep the cream up. But the majority of them were Friesians. We had a hundred and sixty acres I think.

Christine: It was milk churns up the end of the lane, was it?

Denise: No, it was churns, but they'd come down the lane and collect them about half past nine every day. They'd collect the churns. Because there's a huge trough down on the farm

next door and the milk churns were kept in the water in the milk trough. And then every morning we'd have to take them to the milk stand.

Christine: How many cows were there?

Denise: I would be able to count it up. They all had names. We kept more than twenty. I think that land is better than this, wasn't it? It used to be, I'm not sure that it is now.

Christine: What do you remember about the care of the sheep? Who'd do the work with the sheep?

Denise: My dad. We didn't have a huge flock of sheep, again maybe about thirty. I don't really like sheep. I liked the cows better, much better, but I'm not a huge sheep person.

Christine: Was there any sort of degree of camaraderie amongst farmers around here?

Denise: I think yes it did when my cousins lived here and also when the Coopers lived at the Sitch, which was the next farm over. I can remember them helping with the hay.

Christine: So, you've seen these big changes in the intensification of farming. When do you think it changed the most?

Denise: You see it's '79, it's a long time to be out, and I've not really been involved in farming since 1979. I think it is intensified now because all of the hedgerows have been taken out. There used to be three fields on our land and now it's just one huge field. So, they've taken two hedges out, because it makes it easier now, doesn't it? Because they've got huge tractors, the huge machines. Whereas I can remember when we had a horse. We had a white horse called Dick, and he used to pull the trailer and we used to get the hay on there, but now it's all these huge machines. I can remember the hayricks. Because Matty's husband Uncle Fred, he was the one who was the master of hayricks. There's a real art to laying a hayrick. I can remember where we used to position every hayrick in every field.

Christine: Can you describe the hay making? Tell us how it was cut and what was done?

Denise: I can remember the horse being used to gather the hay on carts. I'm too young to really remember what he would use to cut it, but certainly I can remember when he used a tractor. We used to pitchfork it up onto the trailer.

Heather: I can remember when you use a pitchfork and it took me forever to get that balance to lift it up.

Denise: But then I can remember when my dad bought a baler and it was marvelous, so much easier. I can remember that, definitely, it was yellow. My sister then, we had to go round every field and rake all the last bits. You didn't waste any of it.

Julia: Hay making was the be all and end all. It was so important to get done.

Christine: Your work then was seasonal, what else can you remember about the seasons through the year, 'cos you'd have your lambing and all that?

Denise: I can remember definitely, because at the weekends we would have to help, Yvonne and I. And I used to hate the winters, because on a Saturday morning we would have to clean out all of the shippens with a wheelbarrow, a brush and a shovel. And that was our job and we cleaned out every... when the cows were in for winter, because they were tied up in a shippen. I mean now they have huge sheds, they're not restrained, which is nicer obviously for the cow, because I never thought about how a cow would feel just standing in the same position for about five or six months or however long. I think my dad used to let them out into the yard, sort of rotate them. If the weather was nice he would let them out and then put them back in. That was from November and definitely not until the first of May, because they had to protect the grass. It could be beautiful weather, it could be fantastic weather, but my father never, ever let them out before the first of May, ever. Even if you had

a scorching April, they would be in. He would let them out and they would just skip off didn't they, and run around. It was wonderful watching the cows being let out for the first time after the winter. They would be frolicking. But then of course they had a change of diet and that was not good when you had to clean the shippons out then.

Christine: It just really occurs to me that in our culture, in this period in history, in the west, we don't tend to think of children as having a role in the economy of the household, the work of the household, the graft of the household, but mainly speaking children are counted out of the picture, aren't they?

Denise: I think it was expected. When I was young, it was expected of us, that we all had little jobs. I mean I can remember we used to sell eggs. We used to stamp the old lion's stamp on them. I can remember one of my first jobs and my sister's jobs was collecting the eggs and washing them and putting them in the egg trays and then the egg man would come and collect them every week or every couple of days, I can't remember. You know, we came home from school and we had set jobs to do. I came home from work and when Yvonne and I were older we used to help my dad milk, because there was no-one else. And so I would come home from work and just put my farming clothes on and go and help my dad to milk and then my sister would come home from work. We used to take it in turns. Because she came home from work later than me, I always had to do about an hour of her milking. I worked in a nursery school. I was a nursery nurse, so I finished at half past three. But I had about an hour's drive, because I worked in the Potteries, well just the other side of Endon really. So, I would be home for about half past four. My dad used to go out milking at five, so of course I would be home, but Yvonne would not get home 'til about six. So even if it was not my turn I'd have to go out and do it.

Christine: Then as now, of course it's an incredible tie having a dairy herd. So, not a lot of breaks or holidays?

Denise: I never, never had a holiday with my dad. Never, ever had a holiday with my dad. I cannot remember my dad having a holiday. I had one holiday while we had the farm and that was with my mum and my sister and one of my brothers, my youngest brother. We went to a caravan in Tyne. That's because he'd been diagnosed with diabetes. And Les Riley, he came with us, and that's the only holiday we had together as a family. I never, ever spent a holiday with my dad, ever.

Christine: It's a big thing to miss, holidays. They feel very important to us now, don't they?

Denise: But you see we didn't have anyone who could milk.

Julia: It didn't really occur to them to take break, did it? If there were people available to do the work, they wouldn't know the system or they wouldn't know the intricacies of your shippon or the way you wanted it doing. I think letting someone else come in and do that work, it just wasn't on their radar at all really.

Denise: Because all the cows were milked in a certain order. You wouldn't go starting at one end of the shippon and work down or go to the next shippon and work down. I don't know why, you know. But I know we always started with that cow there and I knew obviously, and my sister knew, and my mum and dad knew which order those cows were milked in.

Julia: I don't know, some of it might have been habit. But some of it might have been those that gave the most got started off first or whatever.

Denise: And I think also you would have, oh well we'll milk the Jersey and half of it will go in that churn. You know, I think maybe it was in order because you would split the creamy milk. I'm not sure. I should have asked my Dad why.

Denise: My dad would get up at half past six or whatever and have a cup of tea and bread and butter. Then he would go out and milk the cows and then they would come in and have

breakfast. We would only have cooked breakfast on a weekend. Because during the week my mum would help my dad to milk in the morning and before we went to work or to school me and my sister would lay all the breakfast table, get everything ready for my mum, and they would have porridge and maybe eat toast or something or maybe boiled eggs or something, but never bacon and eggs because at a weekend we used to cook breakfast, Yvonne and I.

Christine: So, this is a hard life all of this, very early starts. Do you think this restricted your social life as a young teenager and a young woman with the farm?

Denise: Yes, it did really. We both learned to drive, Yvonne and I, as soon as we could because you had to drive to get anywhere. We had to drive to go and see my grandma who lived in Longnor. We used to go to the dances in the village hall every Saturday night. But before we could drive, my dad would take us and pick us up. But yes, it does restrict your social life or it did then. We had a youth club in Warslow school every week on a Wednesday, so we would go there.

Christine: Just a completely different tack really. How would you describe this landscape that you've grown up in?

Denise: I think when I was young, I would have described our farm as having lush meadows with lots of wild flowers. Because I noticed the wild flower verge at Eleven Lane Ends when I was coming. Whereas I can't remember the last time I ever saw a meadow filled with wild flowers.

Julia: Did you know what they were?

Denise: Oh yes, definitely. I remember one year Yvonne - that was her school homework in the summer holidays. They had to make a book of wild flowers. So that particular year I think we walked everywhere to get these wild flowers and to press them. And also, I think the land was better cared for. The thistles were cut down and I know it sounds cruel but my Uncle Fred, if we had molehills, he would try and eradicate the moles. Definitely the land was better cared for.

Christine: How would you account for that? What would you say is being done differently now? Because, it's a bit of a wildlife dessert to be fair.

Denise: It is, isn't it? I think personally, with our farm, because it's rented now, isn't it? Or do the farmers live away? And also, my Dad and Uncle Fred who used to work on the farm with us, they would build the walls up. They were great drystone wallers. If a wall fell down, they would build it back up, every year. Yvonne and I, we used to go thistle spudding. Have you seen the big thistle spudders? Cor, I used to hate that.

Christine: It's just another thing that occurs to me, you were helping out with the milking when you were children, the level of handling that stock had in the past made them a lot safer. The lack of handling is what's making them a bit more dangerous.

Denise: It is, because as I said to you before, they were tied up in a boskin. But even as a child when we were milking you would go up between them and milk them. And really, we didn't have any problems with any cows, because you were interacting with them all the time, you were feeding them hay twice a day, you were feeding them corn, you were cleaning the shippons out. Whereas now, we take my young grandson and there's a farm in Doveridge, and they let all the cows come into this huge yard and then these cows, they just line up and they just go in and then they're milked and then they walk out. I don't know what happens. It's like they're on a conveyor belt.

Denise: I was just saying, we have some cows in the field opposite, young calves really, and Noah loves these 'moos'. He'd be out there all day if I let him. And I was shouting to them and Neil says 'what you doing?' and I said 'when we were young, we would call our

cows and they would come'. But everything, it was hard labour though really. Because every summer when we let the cows out, every one of those shippons would be... the boskins... we would whitewash the walls, we scrubbed every part of that, we scrubbed all the boskins, we scrubbed all the standings. They were immaculate you know, by the end of the summer every shippon those cows went into. It was hard work. But, if you're not sitting on a tractor these days, if you have to use your hands, if you have to use hard labour, I don't think they're interested in it.

Denise: We didn't have any electricity until I was thirteen. And people say 'thirteen, well what did you do in the evening?'

Heather: I tell 'em at work about the frost we'd get on the inside of the windows and they don't believe me.

Denise: We listened to the radio, we played, we read books, we played games. We didn't just sit there in the dark doing nothing. But we did not have a television in my house 'til I was thirteen. We played and in the summer... I know we had a sandpit Yvonne and I, and we would go into the hen house and we would take the eggs and crack them into the sand and make cakes like my mum used to, for a while, 'til she found out, and we couldn't understand why my mum was so cross. And in the Croft Yvonne I used to have tea parties. My mum used to give us her best china and we would sit all our dolls around having tea parties, Yvonne and I. I had a wonderful childhood. I didn't miss the electricity. I didn't know what electricity was.

Julia: That's the thing, you didn't know any different and you made the most of what you'd got, didn't you?

Denise: I think being born here I have got a great love of the countryside and I do like the silence and to hear the birds. You can hardly get that anywhere now, can you? There's always the sound of cars and aeroplanes.

Denise: It's one of my favourite memories and when I hear a lapwing it just takes me back then. Yvonne and I used to walk to school up the lane and lapwings would nest on the pasture there every summer. And that doesn't happen now because they've changed their

habitat. They've changed that into a field that they mow now for silage. So we have no lapwings now anymore. There were large numbers that would come and fly down. We had to run the gauntlet every morning and every evening because they would just come and fly down and nearly touch your head. And also their call is just amazing and whenever I hear a lapwing I always think of that part of my childhood.

Denise: I think it is (different from modern family life) because now I live in a village and I have three sons. They all went to university and they've all got jobs and they're all dotted around. Whereas I think if you're born into a farming community, certainly in my days, it was kind of expected that if you were a male you would take on the farm and it would be handed down through generations.

[Is it a positive change?]

Denise: I think yes, because the world has changed, hasn't it? The world of now is a smaller place than it was when we were younger and I think it's a 24/7, seven-day-week job. And I think you have to be a certain type of person to want to do that.

[Were you expected to help as a child?]

Heather:

We used to have Gordon Stone come round, did you? And a delivery van and Bagshaws butchers. So they'd come round, didn't they? Do you remember Gordon Stone from Hartington? He'd bring groceries.