

RAY HOOK

Interview 131a

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Tammy Hook, Interviewer

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Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: In this short interview with his granddaughter Tammy, Ray Hook talks about growing up on a farm in San Augustine County, Texas. He describes their crops and animals and the harvest and planting times. He also describes hog butchering and preserving the meat.

Tammy Hook (hereafter TH): My name is Tammy Hook. I am interviewing my grandpa, Ray Hook, at his house on November 18, 1987. Our subject is about farm life. Papaw, tell me about your farm life.

Ray Hook (hereafter RH): Tammy, Papaw was raised in San Augustine County on a farm. We had cats, dogs, chickens, cows, hogs, and horses. Our cats caught the rats out of the corncrib. We used the dogs to run the rabbits and tree squirrels. The hogs is where we got our meat, soap, and lard. The chickens laid our eggs. We used the eggs; we used the fryer to fry; we used the old hen and rooster to make dressing and dumplings. The cows gave us milk and butter and furnished us with beef. We had to can our own beef in cans at that time – no iceboxes and no deep freezers. The mules played a big part in our crops and on the farm. They helped us make our crops and haul everything in. Also we had peanuts, corn, sorghum, tomatoes. We had a big garden and canned a lot of canned stuff – about five or six hundred quarts a year. Also, Tammy, we had an acre of sweet potatoes that was feed for our hogs and cows.

Tammy, we will take a rundown on the hog. I guess that played more part in a farm than anything. We would buy this pig in March. We would feed it on through the summer. It would eat anything – peas and sorghum. We would start feeding this hog peanuts in July and August. In the fall, we would put it on corn and fatten it out. We would kill this hog in November. We would kill it, cut it up, salt it down and turn the flesh side down. The next morning, we would turn it over and put the skin side down. We would wrap it with salt and leave it nine days. We would take it down and wash it off in the wash pot. We would punch a hole in the hide and put string in there and put a stick through it and hand it up, we would put black pepper and salt peter on the meat and rub it in the meat to keep flies and skippers out. We would carry it to the smoke house, hang it up, put a big smoke under it for a week or so as you could tell when it would get cured. You could cut a piece of the lean meat off and eat it right then. We would grind the scraps up and make sausage. We would stuff them and hang them up on a rack over a fire so they could be smoked.

Tammy, when we were cutting the meat for the sausage, the fat meat skins and all, we would cut that up in little pieces and put it in the wash pot, put a fire under it and

cooked that out and make cracklings and lard. We would take the chitlings – the entrails – some people would eat them. But if we didn't eat them, we would take the entrails and we would stuff our sausage in them. That way, you didn't have to buy the casing.

Tammy, we took the cracklings after we got through cooking the lard out and we would make soap. We would take two gallons of water, one gallon of cracklings, and three cans of lye, and that was the way we made our soap.

On the farm, times were hard. Kerosene was a nickel a gallon if you had the nickel. But like it was, we didn't need much money because we had a good living. We raised our living. Tammy, I worked all day long for a dollar, and some people didn't have a dollar and they would give me a bushel of corn or two buckets of syrup. Sweet potatoes were fifty cents a bushel.

TH: Papaw, what did you all do with the hog head and the feet?

RH: Tammy, we got a black man to dress our hog. We gave him a little mess of the meat. He would take the hog feet and put them in hot ashes and clean them. I don't know how they ate them, but they did. They would take the hog's head and get the brains out and they would make a hogshead souse out of it. You can go in a store and buy hogs head souse. It is like cheese. You can go to a café and get pickle hog feet. Tammy, about the only thing left of the hog was the squeal. We would even take the bladder, blow it up, and play with it until we wore the thing out.

TH: Papaw, what would you use the lye soap for?

RH: Tammy, times were so hard we didn't have time to go to town and buy washing powder and sweet-smelling soap like you have now. Our clothes were real dirty and we used lye soap to clean them with, washed our hands and face with it and even washed our head with it. Tammy, you haven't seen some one dirty until you have seen someone get out in the field and pick cotton all day, pull corn all day, and pull up peanuts and shuck them, even dig sweet potatoes and crawl around in the dirt.

TH: Papaw, what did you like best about your farm life?

RH: Tammy, we had to work real hard and we didn't mind it. We would work real hard to get to go fishing. Papa always let us off Saturday at dinner to go to church. The only entertainment we had was to make our own music. We would sit on the front porch at night and play the guitar and sing or maybe go to someone's house where they had a fiddle. We would play that way – fiddle and guitar. Tammy, what we would really get a kick out of was that it would could up a rain and keep us out of the field a day. But more rain, more grass we always said – more rain, more rest.

TH: Papaw, would did you not like most of all?

RH: Tammy, we had to work hard and when we would go to bed at night, the bed would be so hot. We didn't have a fan, no electric fan or anything like that. We would get up the next morning, tired, and have to go to the field maybe at one o'clock pick cotton. Have to go in the wintertime maybe pull corn or dig potatoes, or help with the sugar cane. That is where we got our syrup.

TH: Grandpa, did you have to work on the farm and go to school, too?

RH: Tammy, sometimes in the planting time. We might have to miss school so as to help on the farm. In the fall when school started, we would come in, change clothes real quick, grab us a potato and a piece of bread and right on to the field we would go. We would work til dark. Yes, we went to school and farmed, too. We studied by a pine knot fire at night. Tammy, in the fall when our peanuts got cured good we had to haul them in and put them in the barn. We would use them to feed the hogs and cows. We would even use the vine to feed the cows. And we had a time eating parched peanuts and popcorn in the wintertime.

TH: Papaw, how would you cure the peanuts?

RH: Tammy, we would go in a patch of peanuts. We would take a posthole digger and a pole. We would dig us a hole and set this pole up in the hole, and we would nail two pieces about a foot from the ground. We would pull the peanuts up and start us a bird nest at the bottom on these two sticks. We would go round and around until we got about five foot high and then we would saw the pole off and put us a piece of tin up there to keep water from going down and ruining our peanuts. And there is where we had fun keeping the crows off them. Tammy, we didn't have money to buy candy. We would parch peanuts, pop popcorn, and ribbon can syrup and we would make candy, popcorn balls and such as that. We kept it laying around all time.

TH: Thanks, Papaw, for letting me interview you.

RH: You are welcome, Tammy. Any way I can help you, come over and I sure will.

END OF INTERVIEW