

Ontario 150 Project “Living Off the Land”
 Edited Clips of Oral History Transcript of Diane and Bill Murray

	CLIP 1	
DB	Diane is going to begin by telling us her earliest knowledge of the farm. Diane?	
DM	My earliest knowledge of the farm was in 1954. My sister was a newborn, three weeks old and my dad had a plough fall on him and fractured his leg. He ended up spending six months in our living room in a bed with traction. We lived on the farm and that was our livelihood. I remember the neighbours and family coming daily to do the farm work and to do the ploughing. That went on for over six months. That was my earliest memory of the farm.	
DM	As time went on I remember the animals on the farm, the creek, the gardens and then when my dad was back on his feet, I remember another gathering, that was the threshing. The threshing mill moved from farm to farm. I don't remember so much about the work in the fields at that time but I do remember the men coming in for the meals my mom prepared for them. The other thing I remember about the farm was the long lane way, the beautiful sunrises, the beautiful sunsets and there always work to do.	
DB	How many acres is the farm?	
DM	The farm is a parcel of two hundred acres. Back in my dad's day there were about a hundred acres tillable. I think that has decreased a bit since then. There was hay, and there was grain, and we had a potato field and an apple orchard, and we had cedar in the bush and we made cedar posts. We had quite a variety of animals. I remember the hens and the chickens, cows and the calves, sheep and the lambs, the pigs and piglets, and the horses and foals.	
DB	What crops did he grow?	
DM	There was hay, and there was grain, and we had a potato field and an apple orchard, and we had cedar in the bush and we made cedar posts.	
DB	What animals were on the farm in those days?	
DM	We had quite a variety of animals. I remember the hens and the chickens, cows and the calves, sheep and the lambs, the pigs and piglets, and the horses and foals.	
DB	And did your dad use the horse for work?	
DM	Yes, he did, The horse were used when we used to take in loose hay. My mom drove the horse when we were putting the hay up into the mow. That was her job. The horse was also used for cultivating the potatoes, and digging the potatoes, and we used the horse in the wintertime in the bush for cutting wood and for doing cedar posts. We used the horse for pleasure too. We had sleigh rides and the horse was the transportation on our long lane way in the wintertime when the road was not ploughed.	
DB	When were the horses replaced by machinery? Was this a gradual thing?	
DM	Changing to machinery was a gradual thing. The tractor was more convenient and was gradually used more into the late fifties or early sixties. The horses were just pets then. We had a foal, but we didn't use the horses then except for pleasure.	
DB	What were your jobs on the farm? And what was your earliest job?	
DM	Your earliest job on the farm is when you are able to walk. You follow your mom around or your dad around when they were feeding or doing anything. I think feeding the chickens was my earliest job. Then a little later on I just remember when two lambs were born to the same mother and I always had to feed one lamb. That was my job. <i>As you grew older there were more responsibilities, feeding in the barn, helping with milking, rounding up cows for milking and bringing in wood.</i> My dad had beef cattle but he also sold milk. One of my not so fond memories of the farm was drinking the milk. To this day I have a hard time drinking milk. But we were always able to skim the cream off when my mom wanted to have whipping cream.	
	CLIP 2	
DB	Bill, you and Diane were married and built your house on the farm. How did you get involved in farm life?	
BM	I got involved with farm life first by falling for this lovely nurse, and as things evolved, if you want to marry this lovely nurse you are going to take on some obligations you never thought of. One of	

Edited Clips from Murray Family interviews

	<p>them was helping one farm which was a rather positive experience overall. My background is electronics and automotive. I managed a service business for many, many years, and when we closed that down about 1980 I got thinking more about the honey business which was an experience I had many, many years when I was in my early twenties. When I started to look at the honey business in a serious way, my father-in-law had some objections but they were not strong. He had the perception of the honey business not being very lucrative, which I didn't. Anyway there was no battle royal over it and I proceeded to pursue the honey business. I started in a commercial way about 1988 and got a few stores and got a wee bit of a business there...</p>	
BM	<p>My honey experience goes back to my twenties and my mentor in that would be Harry Toop who ran a rather large commercial operation. I worked with him for about five years and I also worked down in Georgia for a winter with a big commercial bee keeping operation there. I initially started with about forty hives and I am up to about 230 right now. We are going to be adding a few more in the spring to that.</p>	
	CLIP 3	
BM	<p>The challenges in bee keeping have all been imported basically. All the diseases other than American foulbrood, diseases, pests and mites have come in from offshore, shall we say, and those have been quite challenging, but they have also made us better bee keepers. We are dealing with things that fifty years ago bee keepers never had to worry about. One of the other challenges we are facing is changes in farming. We don't have these big fields of alfalfa any more. We have corn and soy beans, all kinds of things being grown that are not necessarily good for honey. I have six bee yards right now.</p>	
BM	<p>Back about 2002, we expanded the business by building a house for the handling and processing of the honey. We are dealing with changes in honey producing. Right now most of the problems are changes in labelling. The public's perception of what is honey is changing. That's probably more of an impact than honey coming in from foreign markets that are not at the same standards that we are used to here. Some people know that honey is one of the biggest food frauds in the world. The only one after that is olive oil. That's all in the distribution system. They are trying to correct it, but dealing with offshore companies and corporations is very hard for a country like Canada to control that because it's all offshore.</p>	
DB	<p>Is climate change or cold winters a challenge in beekeeping?</p>	
BM	<p>Our major factors in wintering are diseases and pests. If we have a good strong hive of bees with low mite count, and they have been treated for dysentery and the treatment has been successful, and the foulbrood treatment has been successful, then the bees winter very well, regardless of how cold it is. But if we don't have control over those pests and diseases, then wintering can be very disastrous. I am very fortunate to be in this part of Renfrew County because, yes, we have soybean and yes, we have canola which does produce honey, and yes, we have corn, but not as much as other areas have. If you get down in Southern Ontario, you know the crop are much different. We are still able to get some high quality nice white honey. I think in the township of McNab Braeside we are almost isolated in some ways from the big corporate attack on farming, and I think the honey business is very positive and I am very fortunate to be in it.</p>	
	CLIP 4	
DB	<p>Has the agribusiness that's taken over across the road with their large crops of canola had any effect?</p>	
BM	<p>The recent large scale planting of corn and canola on the farm across the road has not had much effect on my honey. There are some techniques that can be very pronounced, like air seeding. That is in the process of changing but it used to use talc in air seeders as a lubricant and the pesticides and herbicides used to cling to that talc. As soon as it came out of the air seeders, if there was any wind at all, it was airborne. It would be landing in places it was not supposed to and that would be very devastating in some areas for bees. We are fortunate around here that we don't have air seeders that I have seen. I am not saying they are not here, but I have not seen</p>	

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	them. I have a couple of large farms that plant soybeans and corn, but they look after the land, I think pretty well because they rotate alfalfa and oats, crops that don't need the high levels of pesticides.	
DB	What are some of the products you sell and what are your markets?	
BM	I sell honey and some bees wax. My markets are basically the large grocery stores. I have a few smaller grocery stores and the odd little convenience store but the large end of my business is the big chains. That is a growing area for me and it's looking very positive for the future in those markets. I do sell some here at home but the big end of it goes to your big grocery stores.	
DB	You find much competition from the imports from offshore?	
BM	There is some competition from imports. If people are looking for price, then they are going to go to the Chinese honey. It bothers me a wee bit from the point of view of what they have to do to the Chinese honey to get it safe enough to eat. They super filter it which means they add water to it to dilute it down to put it down the super filters. They are taking out chemicals and some heavy metals. How the heavy metals get in and how the chemicals get in I am not sure, whether it is the equipment they are using or the method they use to control diseases, but anyway they've got to do that, and then they reconstitute it. When they do that they take out a lot of the pollen, in fact they take out all the pollen and sometimes they have to add a little bit of our domestic honey here to give it the honey flavour. The way I look at it, it's really not honey, it's a honey taste sweetener. We have to deal with it. Anybody looking at quality honey is not looking for cheap. I am doing very well.	
	CLIP 5	
DB	How long do you think you'll carry on?	
BM	How long will I carry on? Some days I am looking at getting to the end of the day. Other times I will just go on for a few years yet. I have enjoyed it immensely. I find honey bees fascinating, and other insects, but I think if I didn't need the money to keep the bees going and keep a roof over our heads, I'd just deal with bees. They are very fascinating. They do have their problems but they are not people problems.	
DB	I hope your passing on some of this knowledge on to your son?	
BM	I am making an attempt to pass on my knowledge to my son. A few years ago my sons asked what am I going to do with this because I probably would have been winding down quite a bit. I said well what do you want to do. They said we'll sort of look over your shoulder. That more convenient for Peter because he lives right here. So I said here's what I have. If your are interested, fine we'll keep it going and that will give you a good strong solid base that you can build on. He has sort of taken on that challenge, and it's been a blessing for me. He looks at things different which is good. It gets me out of the rut as far as some of my thinking is, to look at things with fresh eyes. Some of the things I think that's a lot of money for that and he'll say yes but the time you are going to spend on it is going to be reduced considerably and give you time to do something else. Any changes that I have made, that we have made, based on his advice have been very, very positive.	

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Oral History Transcript of Peter Murray interviewed October 24th 2016 by D. Brearley

	Clip 6	
DB	The home of Peter and Leanne, Lot 13, Concession 3 of McNab Township, October 24, 2016 Peter, can you tell who was the first person in your family to own this farm.	
PM	I believe that Neil McKay was the first one to own the farm. Neil and his brother Jim lived over on the fifth line where Sparlings have their home now. I believe Neil came over here and built the farmhouse. I am not exactly sure if he was the first one but the first one that we know of in that line. That would be my great grandfather. Then my grandfather was the youngest of four brothers and my mother was one of Arthur's daughter and I am Diane's son.	
DB	So, your grandfather was Arthur McKay.	
PM	Arthur McKay. That's right.	
DB	So we have heard about your mother's growing up on the farm and your father's honey business. At what age did you and your brother Jeffrey start helping on the farm?	
PM	My earliest memories of working on the farm, helping on the farm, being on the farm, I guess, I remember I guess about being about five or six and helping to do things like stacking wood when the wood was being split. I have very distinct memories of leaving my rubber boots behind in the garden. It was that wet. So I must have been about five or six. I have good memories of those kinds of things. I certainly remember the warmth of the house in the wintertime at the farmhouse and just enjoying doing those kinds of things, what little people can do. Working in the garden. Grandpa kept a huge garden, by today's standards, a relatively large garden for one person. Definitely helping with the weeding.	
PM	As I got a little bit older, I guess I was able to help with chores. I remember being in the barn in wintertime and helping with dropping hay down and feeding the cows. I remember watching my grandfather who used to carry square bales out to the feeder, one bale on a fork that was slung over his shoulder carrying another one in his hand. He would go back and forth I don't know how many times taking square bales out. When we got more involved with doing some of the haying work, we were allowed to drive the tractors. I remember raking and enjoying that part of haying. But I certainly remember long days stacking and loading and unloading hay. I think that was the extent of it. I don't think Jeffrey and I got involved with planting anything. I certainly have a healthy fear of cattle which I think is a good thing, given my grandfather's encounters with them. So that was right up until, I guess, Grandpa got out of farming and started renting the farm.	
	Clip 7	
DB	Okay, your mom outlined the livestock which was quite extensive when she was growing up, and I think that had changed by the time you were growing up on the farm. Could you tell us what kinds of crop and livestock were being raised then.	

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PM	<p>It was beef cattle, that was the only livestock that was kept on the farm that I can recall. Occasionally there would be a crop of oats. I know oats would be taken to M&R [feed store] to be mixed or ground up and used for feed during the winter, and there would be straw for bedding. I think that was the extent of the different crops and livestock at the time that I can remember. Those were the memories of what was being done on the farm.</p>	
DB	<p>What did you like about farming?</p>	
PM	<p>PM- What did I like about farming? I think what sticks out in my mind is the ability for the farmer to change the land, how the land looks. I was always amazed every year to see a hay field go from a tall stand to being mowed to dried and raked and baled. I just thought that was phenomenal. <i>Certainly from where we live you could see the neighbours' farm and the next neighbouring farm and you could see everybody doing their haying or the processing of their haying.</i> They everybody could do different colours. I remember thinking that was phenomenal. Even now I understand the abilities that farmers do have to change the land, and in a significant way too. I think that is something that is scary for me now but I think I also like looking back on it. That was something that I found pretty amazing.</p>	
PM	<p>What were some other things that I remember, lots of fun. I guess I liked doing the work. I enjoyed haying. I enjoyed doing chores. I don't remember getting tired of it. I guess in some ways it feels like it's the most, well one way of being connected to your environment, and I think from maybe just a being perspective, being very connected to your environment is something very common and thought provoking.</p>	
	<p>Clip 8</p>	
DB	<p>Have you started teaching your children about nature and the land that surrounds you?</p>	
PM	<p>I think by being in it [nature] we are exposing them to it. Having chickens on the farm right now they are very aware of where eggs come from and that those eggs have opportunities to become birds, and some birds we eat. They know we grow some birds to eat them. They are living one day and they are in our freezer the next day. We are exposing them just by telling them what we are doing and what's going on. From my perspective kids have got a baseline curiosity figuring out things and asking the right questions. And yeah, they have some very clever questions about why we are doing this. And this is how they are learning about what we are doing and why we are doing what we are doing, how we live, and where our food comes from. Our girls love gardening. Our second one, Kate, she loves planting seeds but does not like weeding. And Alida loves weeding but doesn't like planting so I am hoping Benjamin loves to harvest and we've got a whole team. Yes, going out to weed the garden and</p>	

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	hearing my oldest talk about why we are weeding the garden, exposing them is the best thing we can do as far as nurturing and understanding it.	
DB	The farm has changed a bit since your grandfather retired and your father has his honey business. What have you done to change the land?	
PM	We moved to the farm in January 2014 and Leanne and I have had dreams about farming and actually operating the farm so the first thing is just to learn about our specific area and our specific plot of land. The major activity I have done now is to clean out about three generations of discarded materials. I have picked up a lot of forgotten fencing, and we have planted some trees because we think it is very important part of our contribution, and the next part is we are hoping to have some livestock next year.	
DB	Do you plan to take over the honey business as your father retires?	
PM	I don't think dad will retire. We have kind of a joint venture going on right now where dad supplies the bees and the brains and the capital as far as equipment is concerned and I bring some sweat equity I guess and a bit of a different perspective. Do I plan on taking it over? I think we are working on trying to figure out if that's a fit.	
DB	You have two daughters and a son. Do you have hopes that one of them will carry on the farming tradition?	
PM	I think it would be great if one or all had an interest in doing something that connected them to their environment. When I think about this particular farm that I am living on right now and the history, I fully acknowledge that I am just a steward for this generation. There are not many farms that are like these in the world, from my perspective in Ontario. <i>There is a history of many generations so I guess I am looking at it as a bit of a blessing and a bit of a burden at the same time that comes with something like this farm we have.</i> My hope is that I equip them the best that I can to make their own decisions and if taking over this is something they want to do I will make sure they get exposed to it long enough and early enough that they can make the best informed decision that they can on whether they want to continue or not. Fundamentally I just want them to be connected to the environment that they are in and if the same ways that farmers have the ability to change the land, at least how it looks. I just really hope that they can appreciate that in doing so they are thinking many generations down the line to care for it. That's my greatest hope.	

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 Oral History Transcript of Leanne Prins interviewed March 7 2016

	Clip 9	
DB	I am talking to Leanne Prins, wife and partner of Peter Murray on the Murray Farm, Concession 3, Lot 13, McNab Township. It is March 7, 2013. Leanne, you are the wife and partner of Peter Murray on the farm. What education and career did you pursue before moving there?	
LP	I started university with plans to become a teacher, and I did teach for five years. When it became clear that teaching was not a career where I could stay in one school for very long, I happened upon a job in housing which I did for about seven years. It was a really good fit, but I recently gave my notice for that position due to the distance and three kids at home.	
DB	When were you and Peter married?	
LP	We were married 1st January of 2010.	
DB	At that point the farm belonged to Peter's mother, Diane Murray, and you and Peter were living in Ottawa. Did you have any experience of farming or living in a rural area before that?	
LP	A number of aunts and uncles as well as my grandparents on both sides had farms. My grandparents on my dad's side had a flower farm, and my grandparents on my mom's side when I was little had a farm. I don't know how big it was, but as a kid it had a lot of things that were interesting to me. The farmhouse was really fun to explore and it also had lots of fruit trees and berries planted around the farm which was really appealing. When I grew up in the suburbs it was always good to visit them.	
DB	How did you feel about moving to the country?	
LP	I was interested. I think I also knew, it's hard to know for sure until you move out here, but it was definitely something that interested me. I was on board for it.	
DB	What appealed to you most about moving to the country?	
LP	I think having the space, somewhere to grow something. Efforts we had moved here Peter and I had a garden up behind Bill and Diane's house, a rather large garden, and Peter seemed his happiest here. Just having a little bit of space to grow things and try out some of those things.	
DB	Do you have any interest in making this a working farm, raising livestock, crops and so on?	
LP	I think right now my plan is to support Peter. I can see he is passionate about the farm and trying to get something going. I am not sure what my future plans for the farm are.	
DB	You have three young children. Do you have any plans for a role in the honey business?	
LP	No, (laugh) not really. They are five three and one right now and there is not a lot of time for taking that on.	
DB	Do you have any plans for the future?	
LP	For the future with the farm? I think I would like to make it... there are parts of that farm, from my grandparents' farm, that I would be interested in recreating where we are in terms of ... and we've started to put in some strawberry plants and apple trees and that sort of thing. I do really like seeing the kids interact with the chickens as we have them and the opportunity to just go out and pick strawberries from the garden. That's a pretty nice thing to watch kids do.	