

**Vivian, narrator**

**Anneliese Abbott, interviewer**

**March 21, 2023**

**V = Vivian**

**AA = Anneliese Abbott**

**AA:** All right, this is Anneliese Abbott. This is March 21, 2023, and I'm doing an oral history interview with

**V:** Vivian.

**AA:** And we're doing this interview over the phone. So Vivian, thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview today! Why don't you start and just tell us a little about when and where you were born?

**V:** I was born in Pennsylvania in 1954. To give you a little background in relationship to Walnut Acres, Walnut Acres was located in Penns Creek village. And I was raised about ten miles from there. We also had a summer home, which was located right along Penns Creek, the body of water. And that was probably about three miles from Walnut Acres. And my father ran a service station in Penns Creek village itself. So that's my location in regards to Walnut Acres. (1:04)

**AA:** So did you have any connection with organic gardening or farming when you were growing up?

**V:** Well, growing up, I think I was really unaware of the term "organic farming" until I was probably ten or twelve. And I remember going to Walnut Acres with my family, and my parents would also speak about Walnut Acres, the farmer down by Penns Creek, because he was farming differently. And I say that with a smile on my face, because as a kid it was almost mystical when they talked about Walnut Acres and Paul Keene, like it was something very weird going on down there at Penns Creek. So that was my first introduction to organic farming, was probably around ten or twelve.

**AA:** And then did your parents have a garden when you were growing up at all?

**V:** As a kid, my parents had a one-acre garden. And we were located outside of a small little farm. Now to me, that seemed like a huge garden. I remember we grew peas, beans, onions, lettuce, carrots and cucumbers. And along with harvesting those vegetables, there were a lot of weed pulling and stone picking in the garden. Now my parents didn't use synthetic fertilizer, or chemicals. So I think that was how I knew, I didn't know that as being organic farming, but it was in the sense of not using any of those chemicals. Then at about the age of fifteen, my parents bought an eight-acre farmette. And our garden grew from one acre to about four acres. And yeah, my parents didn't use any chemical fertilizers. So there was again lots of care to the garden, I had to take care of. But then our garden grew to include more vegetables like corn, watermelons,

cantaloupes, watermelon, blueberries--which I hated picking--but my favorite item to pick was strawberries. Needless to say, we worked a lot. I don't think I technically knew that was organic farming. It was just the way my parents farmed. (3:52)

**AA:** And so then, what was your earliest connection with Walnut Acres?

**V:** Again, that would probably be, what I can remember was probably that ten, twelve, my parents visited the farm. We bought items from the farm from their little store, because they did have a small store. And when I talk about the store, it would be just a few shelves, because really at that time all they sold was the items that they produced there, along with a few items from India. And those would be craft items. But that was my earliest memories of Walnut Acres.

**AA:** What sort of products did your family purchase?

**V:** My mother would purchase unrefined sugar. So I didn't even know about white sugar. It was always the coarse little granules that came into our house. And I remember bread flour, because I had no idea that you went to the store and bought bread. I knew that people had white bread, and I remember it in school, but I didn't care for the taste because I was just raised on whole wheat flour bread. My mother—I would say parents, but my mother was the one that was buying the items—she, we didn't buy canned items from Walnut Acres. And they were producing them at that time. Mainly because we had such a huge garden. We canned all our own or froze all our own vegetables and fruits. (5:52)

**AA:** I'm just curious, when you were taking your whole wheat bread to school, did you ever get teased by the other kids about that, or not?

**V:** I don't remember getting teased about it. I really don't. That's a good question, because maybe by the time I would have been in high school, there might have been more comments and everything. But in elementary school I don't remember that. But that's a good question.

**AA:** That's interesting, because I've had other people, some said they were, some said they weren't, so I was just curious. So then, what was it like touring the Walnut Acres factory when you were a child?

**V:** Okay, looking at the dates, so this would be in the sixties. I can only remember the store. And that was part of a little extension onto the barn itself. And then it went down into the cannery. I don't remember a lot about the cannery, but I do remember the mill. The mill was part of the lower level of the barn. Because everything was converted out of the barn. So if you think of Walnut Acres, you see the barn, and then there was the store there and office spaces, and the mill was in the lower section in the packing area. What I remember the most was the odd smell. And as I thought about it, it was a malty, earthy smell. And that was really being generated from the mill itself. Later on, I remember giving tours, and that would be what the children would say, the very first thing, because kids kind of blurt out whatever they are thinking, and they would just blurt out that—"This is an odd smell," or "It smells in here." And that usually was generated from the mill itself. (8:03)

**AA:** Is there anything else you remember about Walnut Acres at that time?

**V:** At that time, I do remember hearing that people could go and pick the products out of the field, like the vegetables, after harvest time. So that was probably in the sixties, maybe in the seventies. Like after they would harvest the tomatoes or string beans or peas, if they missed some, then the local people could come in and just pick whatever was left over for free. There was no charge on that or anything.

**AA:** So what got you interested in working at Walnut Acres?

**V:** I knew that Walnut Acres was, it was known at that time that Walnut Acres was an employee-friendly place to work. And they paid really well compared to other companies in the Snyder County area. So that was definitely a draw. But I already had a job when I got to know Paul Keene and Emma. Just let me tell you a little about Emma, because I'm introducing her, too. She was the person who hired at Walnut Acres, but she was also a woman of full energy. And she also created a lot of product recipes for Walnut Acres. So I got to meet them through the Penns Creek community center, which was founded by Paul Keene. So you can see that that work, there were just so many fingers going out, and you got introduced in so many different ways to Walnut Acres. So I let it be known that I was looking for a position there if one became available.  
(10:12)

**AA:** And so then, when did you start working?

**V:** I started working there in 1979 in customer accounts. But the story starts a little earlier than that. I had a call from Emma asking me to come in for an interview. And I met with Paul Keene and Emma, and during the interview Paul Keene and I started to talk about education, life, and he ended up encouraging me to further my education. So I actually left that interview to go and enroll into a two-year business college. And lo and behold, later on I got another call saying that—well, they told me the position was filled, and two years later I ended up getting a call from Paul Keene and Emma saying that that same position was available. And I ended up getting that same job that I applied to earlier.

**AA:** So then, what was it like working there when you first started?

**V:** I was excited about working there because I already knew Paul and Emma. And people just embraced you. If you're talking about just the accounting department, I loved it. But there was a friendliness. And I didn't feel intimidated at all. There was a cooperation from different departments to help you understand your department.

**AA:** So you said you gave some tours of Walnut Acres. Can you kind of just give a tour of what it was like at that time, when you were working there?

**V:** Okay, love to. I actually enjoyed tours. There was probably about four of us that were pretty consistent in giving the tours, and I actually enjoyed it. Other than the fact that you had to leave your job to go give your tour. And the tours were probably fifteen, twenty minutes to a half-hour long, depending on how interested the group that you were taking through were. We would

always start by greeting the tour in the store, and then walk to the warehouse. This is the part I really liked, because the very first part you would talk about the history of Walnut Acres, starting in 1946 and Paul and Betty being in India, coming back, and deciding that this was truly what they were striving for, was to be more earth-friendly in farming. So I enjoyed the history part. But from there you were staying in the warehouse, and just to give you a visual, you would then be in a building that was two stories high, filled with lots of canned goods and boxes. The temperature would be basically whatever it was outside, with maybe a tiny bit of heat. So you would get to see the mass building of products that were being shipped out of Walnut Acres. This time frame that I'm talking about was probably in the late '80s to '90s, because the warehouse was there.

Then you would go into a walk-in cooler. And inside the walk-in cooler, which was about 45 degrees, would be items that would perish if they got too warm or got too cold. The cooler—when I say walk-in—was the size of an 80 by 100 foot room, two stories high. So it was quite big and impressive. On a cold day you'd walk in there, and everyone would go, "Wow, it feels really comfortable!" And on a hot day you would walk in there and be like, "Wow, this feels really nice!" because of the temperature. From there you would leave and go to the bakery. And I always loved walking into the bakery because it was so white in there. You stood outside, it was glass windows, and you would look in, and all the people in their white outfits, and the room just looked extremely bright. The bakery would do things like mix granola, make bread, cookies. They would also do fruitcakes, which was one of Walnut Acres's big-selling items. At one time they would actually physically hand-dip the things into the bags and weigh them. And later on, Nate Anderson, who was Paul Keene's grandson, came up and helped design a bagging machine and weighing machine, so you would put the item in at the top and it would filter down and actually fill the bags to a particular weight, and then they would get sealed.

From there I would take the tour to the cannery. And it would be a noisy room, because you would have soups or vegetables being processed in the back section of the cannery. And then they would come to the pressure cookers, and they would be put in these big pressure cookers that were about ten feet tall. And as the cans then would have to be labeled, they would roll down through a conveyor belt, and then they would roll across the label and would be put into the boxes. So the cannery did many items there—peas, corn, soups, pumpkin. They also did cranberry juice.

From there I would take the tour to the mill. Once again, that would be an enclosed room, but we could look through a glass window and see the stone grinding and steel grinding and then see the big bags being filled and sewed shut. And it was, again, very smelly and also very dusty there. We moved then to the packing area at Walnut Acres. And this would also be in the lower part of the barn. And there you would see Dorothy or Annette pushing a grocery cart. And they would have an order in front of them, and they would go down and shop for the clients who sent in their orders. And then they would bring them back, take the basket off, get the basket to the packers, and the packers would double-check the order and then put that into the boxes according to how the order was. Canned items would stay with cans, glass would be wrapped several times. And from there, after it had been packed, it would go over to a weighing station, and then from there it would be put on a cart for UPS and parcel post to come in and pick up the items.

From there we would take the tour up to the peanut butter room. So now we would go up to the first level of the barn, and then walk up a ramp to the peanut butter room. So now we were in the peanut butter room, which used to be the bakery as well as the peanut butter room. So there Gina, who made the peanut butter—I think from the time she graduated from high school,

so she was doing peanut butter for a long time—would bring the peanuts in, and they would use Spanish peanuts, and they would leave the skin on. They would heat those, roast the peanuts. I was trying to get ahold of Gina, but I couldn't quite connect with her on the phone. But they took it to 160, 180 degrees, I'm not sure of that. And then they would hull the peanuts, and then they would put them in a grinder and grind the peanuts. So when you got the peanut butter, it would be a flicker of red in there from the skin in the peanut butter, and it was absolutely delicious. I will give you the sidenote that, if you're familiar with Dunkin Donuts, Dunkin Donuts around here would buy Walnut Acres peanut butter, and they used that in the inside of their peanut butter donut, that made their filling. So just a sidenote on that.

We'd leave the peanut butter room, and then we'd come back downstairs to the main level of the barn. And there would be the call center, and phone calls would come in there with orders, and the ladies would take—I think there was three of them—would take the orders and then write them down. And they would also be working on the mail orders as well, adding those. So you would see long tapes of adding machine paperwork coming over their desks. It was an impressive sight to see. Then we would be standing actually in the mail room, and that's where our mail would come in for orders, and also where we would ship out our catalogs. From there we would go to the department I worked in, the customer accounting department, and that's where we would record all the accounting information regarding our customers. And then from there we would take the customers back to the store. We ended the tour there, hoping that it would inspire them to buy some of the things they saw along the tour. (22:25)

**AA:** And then what sort of products were in the store at that time?

**V:** In the '90s it was actually, the store had now moved, there was a new store built. And that was alongside the warehouse. And in the store were some of the items from our bakery, the granolas—which Emma created many of them—breads, cookies, mayonnaise, fruitcakes, the items from the cannery would be corn, peas, string beans, tomatoes. Pumpkin was very popular. And of course the cranberry. And of course the things the mill had created, the different flours. And the peanut butter room—the chunky peanut butter, regular peanut butter, salted, unsalted, sesame tahini spread. And of course, the famous one was the apple butter. But we also had, in the '90s there was a lot of things being brought in from, by this time the organic industry was producing a lot of products. So they were bringing in items, salad dressings—although Walnut Acres made some salad dressings, too. There were pancake mixes, and nuts, and some frozen items, organic beef, fish. So quite a few items. It almost became like a grocery store. And there was fresh produce there as well. (24:17)

**AA:** So what was it like working in the customer accounts department?

**V:** I enjoyed working there. If it would have never changed or anything, I probably would have stayed there forever. I worked in the customer accounts department along with four other ladies, and we each had a primary responsibility for customers according to the first letter of their last name. Mine was Q, R, and up to St. And so what that allowed us to do was we got familiar with our clients. So what we would do was, we would receive the orders each day, and our goal was to complete them that same day if at all possible, do the accounting process, and then send those orders to the shipping department. So we would start with pulling a customer's account card and confirming that it was the client. And these were cards that—probably you're familiar with—the

date you receive something, the amount, and it would have different descriptions at the top, and it would fall down through, that we would put in the amount of the product, the shipping amount, and then you would have a running balance. So you would pull those out, you would review the order and determine how many boxes the shipping department would need in order to ship out the order. Then you would record the debit or credit that they might have been carrying from the previous order, the cost of the produce, the shipping cost, and then you would record this on the card and leave a running balance if there was one, either as a debit or a credit. So our customers did have debits and credits, they didn't necessarily pay the exact amount.

But later in the '90s we ended up going to a flat rate shipping cost. So if your order was \$30, there would be an actual number, maybe \$6, that you paid for shipping of the product. And then as the order went up, the amount would go up as well, making it easier than trying to guess what some of the weights would be. Because we would go, like, "Each can is one pound, if you have six cans, that's six pounds"—we had to kind of guess what that shipping weight would be. But I enjoyed working in that department. (27:38)

**AA:** So then, were the majority of the orders mail order?

**V:** Yes, the majority at that time were definitely mail orders. People still tended—I started there in '79—so through the '80s, going into the middle of the '90s, most people sent their orders in by mail. Later, when Walnut Acres was moving to the computers and people were moving more to using the telephone, store orders did climb, but still the majority were coming through the mail.

**AA:** And then how many people came into the store to pick up their orders versus how many got mailed out?

**V:** Very few. In the early days, I would say—now I'm talking probably the '60s and the '70s, looking at the history, even though that was a lot of mail orders, you still only had people who drove from a certain distance in. And they would make it more like a day trip and come and get the orders. But in relationship, the store was a very small percentage of sales.

**AA:** So do you know anything about what type of people bought food from Walnut Acres?

**V:** I'm going to say informed people. Health-conscious. And environmental. I would say that was the majority of the people that I interacted with. I did have the occasional, I'm going to say free-will, I don't want to say hippies, I don't put them in that category, there were some of those people. But the majority were very informed, health-conscious, and environmental.

**AA:** And did you see that change much the years, or stay pretty much the same?

**V:** No, I would say it stayed the same, yes. It didn't change at all. (30:12)

**AA:** And so then you mentioned that your second job was in customer service. What was that like?

**V:** Customer service, when I moved to that, I came back. I had left Walnut Acres for a while during the illness of my father, and when I came back in and went to help out in customer

service, that's after Walnut Acres started to go to the computer system. And as any company, when they change some kind of system, there's usually a period of time when errors occur, and that's what was happening when I was working in customer service. There were issues that needed to be solved in regards to an item being spent wrong, something missing, something broken, incorrect accounting on the order. So I came back, and I can remember seeing a box sitting by my desk filled with sheets of paper of issues. And I did. I really enjoyed that job as well, because I was solving an issue for a customer as well as for Walnut Acres. Because when we were looking at those issues, we were trying to determine where the errors took place. Was it under our control, or was it after we left the building? And when we felt that it was inside Walnut Acres, then we were able to address it to correct it. So yeah, I enjoyed following the trail and solving the issue.

**AA:** So how long did you work in that department?

**V:** I would say probably only several months, maybe six months or so. I'm not quite sure how long that was.

**AA:** And what did you do after that?

**V:** After that I did fill in, because then we were taking the customer accounting, we ended up being on the phone as well, taking orders. I didn't care for that as much. But after that, my next position at Walnut Acres was in the store, because there really wasn't an opening after I came back from my father's issues, him passing away and everything, there wasn't anything in the office. So I went to the store, and I took over the produce section in the store. And I always felt like, okay, this is just my stepping stone to get back into the office when that position becomes available. But what I found was that I really liked working in the store and communicating with the clients that came in. So that was my first introduction to the store, was working as a produce manager in the store. (33:44)

**AA:** And so then, did you purchase organic produce from local farmers?

**V:** We did. I connected with local farmers that would bring in their produce. And that would be mostly like lettuce, and maybe some onions. Walnut Acres had established for years a connection with Leon Koonz, who was a peach farmer. And I still feel I'll never taste a peach again that was so delicious as the ones he raised. So we would buy those. But I also would buy from organic distributors in the '90s, because now you had lots of farmers growing, and they would bring them to a distributor, and the distributor would place the order, and the order would come in to Walnut Acres. So you could buy things like bananas, avocados, lemons, oranges—things that you could not raise in central Pennsylvania.

**AA:** What were some of the people like who sold produce to Walnut Acres?

**V:** They were enjoyable. They were educated. They were excited about what they were doing. They were dedicated. Those are the words I would describe. I always enjoyed conversations with them because I would walk away knowing so much more than when they came in that day. (35:39)

**AA:** And then how long did you work as produce manager?

**V:** Probably, I'm going to say a year and a half, and then I moved to assistant manager in the store. And then from there, it was more like a co-management with Jane. And then Jane went into—she had this gift, she could just tell what ingredients were in a dish—so she went into product development. And then there was another person that came in as manager, and then she moved into another position. And then I was offered the position of store manager.

**AA:** And so how long were you the store manager then?

**V:** Well, I was trying to think back on that, and this was near the end of Walnut Acres, so I would say it was probably only a little over a year at that point. I was trying to remember the timeframe, but I really can't. I'm going to say it was probably from 1998—it could be a little later than that, maybe 1999—to the closing of Walnut Acres in 2000. So somewhere between one and two years, I would think.

**AA:** And what was it like being the store manager?

**V:** A little scary at first. I wasn't sure I wanted the responsibility. But I enjoyed it. I felt that I was constantly learning and challenging myself. There were multi jobs in that position, which I'll tell you a little about those. Of course there was hiring. But fortunately I had the greatest crew that you could ask for, they were wonderful. Of course you did scheduling, ordering from distributors, working with some local organic farmers. Determining sales. And I enjoyed that part, because I learned a lot about Walnut Acres manufacturing and how you determined the cost and how we could actually put a sale on a product and still make money. And then there was the writing of a newsletter, which I will confess I was probably not very good at. If you ever had the opportunity of seeing the newsletters when Paul Keene wrote the newsletters, they're brilliant. They capture you. And mine was more of, here are some sales we're going to have, here's a vegetable I get to feature, here's the health benefits of it, and I'm going to give you a recipe. Then these were sent out to our regular customers that came into the store. But my format actually drew a lot of business into the store, because then people could see what was on sale more than just a newsletter that informed you about organic farming and where Walnut Acres was in the process of helping laws and regulations. And then you kept the records of the sales, opening and closing. I also had to keep a good relationship with the warehouse and the packing department, because they're the people that also supplied us with products for the store. So I really appreciated the opportunity that it gave me. (40:02)

**AA:** So what was the work environment like at Walnut Acres during your time there?

**V:** Very warm, very friendly. I look around, and people cared about each other. Paul Keene would walk past your desk and actually ask about your child by name. And if he heard your child was sick, he would actually make time to come by and find out how your child was doing. Betty Keene was very adamant about our community should have more daycare, so the children could go there and the parents can come freely to work feeling without the pressure of, "Where am I

going to put my child today?” So it was a very friendly feeling from the top down. So I feel like the employees felt the same way.

**AA:** So what was it like working with Paul Keene?

**V:** I don't know if you can tell, but I am smiling. It was wonderful. I can't say enough about the opportunity that I had working with Paul Keene. Paul Keene, I think the thing that everyone will say is the smile on his face. He just was a warm, friendly person. Also, he did feel that he had to make sure that the employees were actually working. He didn't give you slack that way. He felt an obligation to you, that you had a warm, friendly, and a good income, but he also felt that you needed to make sure that you were doing your job.

**AA:** And so what are some of your favorite memories of him?

**V:** My favorite memory would actually be the smile on his face. That was by far the warmest thing that you could see. And this is just—I'm looking for things in my head. Like the community center. That would be playing volleyball. And these things don't always necessarily involve Walnut Acres, but playing volleyball, playing ping-pong. Storytelling. He was the greatest storyteller. And he would tell you about organic farming, and he would tell you about his excitement about that when he was a teacher. And he would tell you about India and meeting Gandhi. And as my husband and I would always say, when we went to any event that was either being hosted by Walnut Acres or going to the community center dinner or something like that, we would always look at each other and say, “Our location is right beside Paul Keene.” Because you knew that you were going to have a good evening.

**AA:** Do you remember any memorable things that he said that really stuck out to you?

**V:** Yes. I do. And my favorite—well, the one that I think everyone would always quote—is, “Pay for it now”—which he meant, “Buy organic food”—“Or pay for it later at the doctor's office.” That's one of his sayings that I always remember him saying. But I personally have one that I got to hear all by myself. And this tells you a little about his character. The community center where I worked in the evenings after working at Walnut Acres, one evening I was going to close up the community center, and the water was running in the bathroom, in one of the commodes. And I felt that it was a waste, so I—you know, you do your normal, you flush it, you try to figure out the issue, but it wouldn't stop. So I called Paul, he came over to the community center, and of course he went through the same things I did, trying to figure out why this was constantly running. So I remember him looking at me and going, “Well, what if I just give it a little kick?” Because we figured there was something stuck in the water thing, that kept it open. He said, “I wonder if I gave it a little kick.” And thus he did. And water just came barreling out, all over the bathroom, just running all over the place. And he looked at me, very calmly, and said, “Well, I learned one thing today. You can't fix a commode by fixing it.” [Laughter] It was as calm as could be. And he laughed. And he said, “We'd better call Donny.” And I can visually see that, because he was so calm, and that's how he was. And he didn't get rattled. He just knew there was an issue, and we've got to fix it. That was one of my personal favorites, because it was only for me. (46:16)

**AA:** So tell me a little more about his impact on the local community.

**V:** In regards to farming, he did educate the community that he felt that this was the healthier choice for individuals to either farm or eat this way. So that was ongoing through lectures, being invited to different dinners, being very active in the community. And the community expanded beyond the small little village. And Penns Creek is a village, it's really very small. It went into the Penn State area, State College, and Bucknell, and Susquehanna, they're all colleges. So he was well-spoken, and he could draw you in. He just really made you, he believed in it so you had to be sucked into it. So that was for the community in regards to farming. And Walnut Acres also started the Walnut Acres Foundation. Many clients gave donations to the foundation, and some of that money went to India to help over in India, because they felt a strong connection after being there. It also started the Penns Creek community center. That's how that got started. And the community center offered to the community preschool, exercise classes, gymnastics, tai kwon do, volleyball, roller skating. So children in this area had a place to go. There was also a kitchen area there, so they could have banquets and so forth in the community center. Paul and Betty Keene tutored children in the community. This was from early on. They saw a need for that, and they stepped right into it. I had one lady that turned out to be a friend of mine. She told me that her brother would have never been able to go to college without Paul and Betty Keene. And I never knew, I didn't ask more questions. I don't know if it was on the financial end they helped him, or if it was just helping him fill out paperwork to get grants or scholarships. But they were very dedicated to farming and education and including the community. (49:35)

**AA:** So tell me about the end of Walnut Acres.

**V:** Well, it was a feeling of despair. As you watched each department finish their last day, because everyone didn't end on the closing date. Production stopped before the office department did, and then the packing department ended after the office department did, because it had to trickle down, the orders that came in. It was an emptiness as you walked through the departments. Looking for a light switch. That was something I never had to do. The departments were always lit and working. Because the store worked to the very end, to the actual closure date, so I remember it. We were there longer than some of the other departments. Myself and the store staff would walk into coolers, and the packing area, and find items for the store customers. And it would be darkness, emptiness. Very eerie. I can't explain it better than that word. Dark. So we worked to the closing date. Once the news of Walnut Acres closure went public, the store became extremely busy. You would just see so many people coming from near and far, trying to get their favorite items or stock up on some things. It was extremely sad, because many of these people had become our friends. We knew their children's names, we knew if they were being homeschooled. These clients would tell us what they were planting in their garden. So it was very emotional. I remember Ruth, one of the store employees, putting a tissue box next to the cash register for both the customers and us. I also remember not looking up at customers because I didn't want them to see the tears as they conveyed their bewilderment, their sadness, and their tears as well. It was like mourning a death. (52:48)

**AA:** So what was your last day of work?

**V:** When? That was the actual closure date of Walnut Acres. And it was very exhausting. But at the same time, it was almost like you wanted it to be over. You didn't want, for the couple weeks before that, the emotional feelings that you were feeling. So once again, it was truly like mourning a death. You wanted to move on. You couldn't stay in that sadness, grief, disbelief.

**AA:** What was your initial reaction when you heard that they were going to shut down?

**V:** Well, disbelief was one of it. Obviously we were hopeful when we knew that some of Walnut Acres, a portion was sold to help keep the business running. So it was, it was anger as well. It was anger. Just because you were content, you were happy with the position you had, and you spend 40+ hours doing this. So a little bit of anger.

**AA:** And how did the other employees respond?

**V:** The same way. A lot were sad, because Maynard, if I remember correctly, he started there right out of high school. He probably started there in the '60s. So he had a full lifetime of being in that position. There was sadness. There was a feeling that maybe Walnut Acres executives didn't think things through. Again, when I reflect on this, I always feel like good decisions are not always made when you are under distress, or when you feel or believe others care as much about your goals and ideals as you do. And I feel, when they were under a financial stress, the executives weren't in the best position to make the best decisions. And then you have corporate America coming in and tempting you and feeling like they're going to save you, and you forget that corporate America is quite a bit about greed. With that being said, I'm going to say that corporate American probably helped push organic farming forward, because they saw the money in it. And now you can go to the store and buy a lot of products that, 40 years ago, you couldn't go in a grocery store and see. So that's looking at the positive side. (56:55)

**AA:** So then what did you do after Walnut Acres closed?

**V:** I really wanted to take a break for a while. But I got a call right away from a farmer's market, and they asked me to come and work for them. So I ended up working in a management position for a farmer's market, which was a local farmer who had a produce market store locally. I enjoyed working for the market and the farmer, although it was different in the sense, it was more of a job in retail than a commitment to a way of life. And I'm referring solely to working in the store, not to the farming end, because every farmer I've ever met, whether they're conventional farmers or organic farmers, they all have a commitment to their farming. So I'm really referring to working in the store. But the owners were kind, giving, and they did become my friends. The job was hiring, which was challenging because you couldn't get a good commitment from new hires. Scheduling, running promotions. And then one of the last things I did when I was working for the farmer's market was bring in entertainment farming to the market. This meant bringing in a corn maze. It did eliminate actual crops that we could have grown for the store. It did allow crops for the cattle. But when you're dealing with a small farmer's market, the need for financial stability was very important, and that corn maze was definitely a plus.

**AA:** And so did that farm grow organically?

**V:** The owner of the farm was a conventional farmer, and we had very open discussions on my feelings in regards to organic farming and his into conventional. And as time passed, because our friendship did grow, they were very much more open to the organic idea. My stay with them was only for two years, and of course when you are raising anything organically, there is a transition. I do know that after I left they expanded to farming some other little farms, so I'm not sure how much—it sounded like they were going towards the organic side of things. But they ended up opening a little restaurant, and when I went there to visit and have a meal, they were buying very much local. Their menu was about local, and organic products that were on the menu. So they were definitely gearing towards that. I also, when I was there, that's one of the things I did. I bought from distributors that I used at Walnut Acres. So I could bring in organic items to the store, along with the conventional produce. So this was actually warming, because it brought back familiar faces that shopped at Walnut Acres, and they started to come to Ard's for their organic produce. And organic eggs, and other items that I would buy in that were organic. When I was there, I also started a CSA program with an organic program, and that became very successful. They were moving into that ground of introducing a lot more organics to the community.

**AA:** And how long did you work there?

**V:** I worked there for two years, until I was offered a new position.

**AA:** And then what did you do after that?

**V:** I went into working in finance. I was the office coordinator for a financial company. (1:02:19)

**AA:** So would you say that there was a connection between Walnut Acres and the back-to-the-land movement of the 1970s, or the hippie counterculture, or the environmental movement? Any connections there?

**V:** Definitely, yes. There were connections. I'm going to say, I just look at the people around me, and they were more about being earth-friendly. So yes. And then, because Walnut Acres was—when I say Walnut Acres, I mean Paul Keene, and I'll also say Bob Anderson, because that was his son-in-law—they would be part of Pennsylvania sustainable agriculture groups, so they definitely were involved in programs that promoted at local, state levels, and even federal levels about organics. So yes. They were definitely involved.

**AA:** How important do you think Walnut Acres was in providing a market for organic farmers?

**V:** Very important. And I look at the business plan, and maybe it wasn't, I'm sure they thought of their business plan, but when I reflect, the business plan was great. It started off slow in 1946, but you encompassed local farmers to have a place to bring their products for them to manufacture. And then you had, not only the manufacturing, instead of trying to stay so local in trying to sell the product, which always hurts the little farm markets, they made a catalog and sent it out country-wide. So from local farmers to widen that net to farmers that could ship the raw materials to Walnut Acres for manufacturing—breads, granolas, what have you, through the

catalog. The business plan was fantastic. So yes, it had a big influence on what was happening in the organic industry. (1:05:11)

**AA:** How would you say that Walnut Acres impacted organic farming in Pennsylvania and beyond?

**V:** Well, they worked with the local government. They worked with the state government. And they worked with the federal government on different levels, trying to get things passed, trying to define what organic was. The big one, especially in PA, was the Pennsylvania sustainable agriculture group. And I think that was in the '90s, '92, '93, somewhere around there. And that became big, because now you had a network of farmers who could all network, and you also had that being an influence on the political system. So it definitely helped the Pennsylvania farmers, as well as farmers countrywide.

**AA:** So what do you think are the most important aspects of Walnut Acres history to preserve and pass on to future generations?

**V:** I know for me, I have to say, I can't separate Walnut Acres from Paul Keene. Paul Keene is Walnut Acres, and vice versa. So I feel probably that pioneer attitude, the innovator, the trailblazer. I think those are important to remember about Walnut Acres, because this was a time when it wasn't the norm. And then the fact that Walnut Acres just continued to strive for a balance with nature, using methods and materials that resulted in the lowest impact to our earth and our fellow human beings even. And then on a business level, I find that we have less caring in our business industries, and kindness, and the lack of knowing that you are responsible for the employees. And that was the mindset of Walnut Acres. So I think that those are things that should be passed on.

**AA:** Is there anything else you want to share before we end the interview?

**V:** Once again, Walnut Acres and Paul Keene are the same to me. And I have to say, Paul Keene had been encouraging, caring, concerned, and respectful to the employees, the community, and to the land. So it was my privilege for me to be part of the Walnut Acres family.

**AA:** Thank you so much, Vivian, for sharing all that. (1:08:48)