

# Meet Renee Varra at 6 Garden C...rview (2023-11-11 15\_22 GMT-7)

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grandpa, cousin, work, area, broomfield, house, motel, farm, uncle louie, cattle, mom, branding, grandfather, bars, grandparents, married, family, moved, connection, good

00:04 David Allison

All right, Rene, thank you so much for joining me today. I really appreciate you being here. I wonder if you could start by just introducing yourself with your full name and just a little bit more about yourself.

00:14 Renee

My name is Renee Varra Lewellyn and I am a descendant of the Varra family. I was Frank Varra and Audrey Varra's granddaughter

00:26 David Allison

Wonderful, thank you so much.

00:27 Renee

Yeah.

00:28 David Allison

So can you tell me a little bit more about growing up or maybe your earlier memories of your grandparents, that sort of thing?

00:38 Renee

Grandpa was always working and he was a rancher, cattle rancher and things looked a lot different than they do now. It was always just fond good memories, always of my childhood growing up there, . tons of cousins to play with. And Grandpa, all his tractors. Grandma was very active and we drove her nuts, all us grandkids. (Laughter) But it was just a different world, a different day. And it was a simpler time. It was nice. It was just nice. 96th Street was just two lanes, and all the Varras lived on that road. And that's why they call it Via Varra now

01:31 David Allsion

Yeah...so when you say all the Varras, do you remember kind of like, what the kind of arrangement of the homes and the kind of people that were there, outside of your grandparents?

01:43 Renee

Yeah. On the corner of Dillon and 96 was, on the south side, was the Schreiders. And I believe it was Otto Schreider. I'm not sure, but they were related somehow, I'm not sure. Then my grandfather's farm is still there. And then there was Paradise Lane and my cousin, Chris and his wife built a house at the end of Paradise Lane there. And then Uncle Jack, on the opposite side of the street, had his gravel pit, but his house was on the same side. It was on the east side of 96. My cousin Jeanne and David Shaklee had a house built next to their parents' house. Uncle Louie's house was next door to that. And then on Carbon Road was the big red ash rock that I thought looked like a chicken, so I called it the giant red chicken. But the cattle was there and that's where we learned how to shoot our 22s as kids and then storage check. Okay. Yeah. But that used to be a through street. That was the back way to Broomfield from Louisville.

03:08 David Allison

Nice. I guess I never thought about that being connected way up there. Yeah, interesting. So what were some of the things just that you can remember being like things you do for fun when you go out there and that sort of thing?

03:24 Renee

We had such an imagination, but the cousins? Well, the cousins would always.....I had a cousin, Sammy, I have a cousin Sammy, we would just walk from her grandparents' house to mine. And we were just playing in campers and play on old equipment and machinery that was no good just sitting out in the field or in a shed. My Uncle Louie gave me a little baby chick and I named him Mork because it was in the 70s. (Laughter) And I went to school at St. Louis Catholic school in Louisville. And so I put my baby chicken, Mork, under a laundry basket because it was a beautiful day and I get home and the basket's turned over and there's feathers everywhere and my dumb dog, Blue, ate him. But, every scar I have on my body is from the farm.

04:28 David Allison

Yeah.

04:29 Renee

So getting thrown off a horse or getting bit by a dog or my dog tripping me. It was always something out there.

04:35 David Allison

Well a lot of pointy, rusty stuff on a farm.

04:38 Renee

You know, I was just a klutzy kid. But Grandpa had all the kids pretty much work. The older cousins worked with Grandpa side-by-side. And I know if there wasn't anybody around and Grandpa needed some help, I was nine and he had a Dodge pickup that was an automatic, so he would have me drive alongside the ditch there during irrigation season. And I remember, as kids, when we were cutting, when he was harvesting grain, the older cousins would let us sit in the grain bin, and the grain would come down out of the chute and we would eat it. And that was Indian gum, because it would turn chewy

or whatever. But yeah, just walking in the field to the railroad tracks and our imagination would just take us wherever.

05:33 David Allison

That's amazing. What do you remember being some of, I don't know, indicators or that things were kind of changing in the area

05:49 Renne

The Mall

05:50 David Allison

The Mall?

05:52 Renee

Yeah, StorageTek should have been, but I was too young then. but ya know, the mall. That's when grandpa said, "you can't stop progress." And right now I feel like I'm being squeezed out, pretty much, because I have 50 acres. What that used to be, well, there's a lake on it, but it was near the Monarch mining camp. That's where Via Varra is, and Terracina and all those apartment condos. Yeah, so yeah. The Mall.

06:26 David Allison

Yeah, that really was the signal, and that it was quick.

06:29 Renee

And it changed fast after that, everything did,

06:32 David Allison

Yep. What was your grandfather's.... We have one of his oral histories in our collection. That's wonderful to listen to.

06:40 Renee

I'd love to hear it.

06:44 David Allison

It's fantastic. Yeah, we'll share it with you. But what's your kind of perspective? You know, you said he, you know, said he can't stop progress, that sort of thing. But any other kind of, what was his kind of take on what was happening around the area where he was.

07:00 Renee

He was ornery, he said you can't stop progress, but he liked to still cowboy. And you know, shoot his gun off on city limits. (Laughter); You know Chief Dillon as one of his best friends.

07:20 David Allison

A buddy, yeah.

07:22 Renee

Yeah, that was hard for him to not be able to go out there and just shoot off his gun. And just, grandpa was just a man's man. He was a cowboy. And oh, I don't know.. It was...well, when, after they sold them all the land for the mall, he built a house for grandma. And they moved into it for a while but grandma missed the farm. So then they moved back to the farm. So yeah, you know, you can have all this money whatever, but you go back to your roots.

08:03 David Allison

Still where you are today. Yeah. Yeah. So I was thinking too about what you know about, or what you recall, about the Varra family. Kind of why your grandparents ended up in the area and maybe even before that, some of the family history. If you know it, if you can share it.

08:27 Renee

What I do know, it's all here to our family tree, but grandpa's parents were from (Rakim and Delphi)???. And his father came over first to work in the coal mines. I believe it was in Fort Collins, though. And then later, he sent for Christina and Albert. Albert was the oldest and he was born there. I don't know much about (Rakim and Delphi)???. My mom has been there and my son has been there, also. I have their marriage record right here, their marriage certificate. But there are still Varras and (DeAndreas)?? there. I believe they moved to Fort Collins and homesteaded there because I think they are in the homestead registry as well. I don't know when they moved to Broomfield. But I know that they had a hard life on 96th Street. Their house was, I think, it was across, it was on the east side, or I'm sorry, the west side of 96th. And I know the fire department tore it down or burned it

09:49 David Allison

As a control burn, right?

09:51 Renee

Right. Yeah, it was like training. And, but I can't imagine having 13 children, but they had them to work, you know. Uncle Louie has a great oral history with Boulder County that describes their childhood. Pretty accurate, I guess, pretty accurately, it's fascinating. But Grandpa, I know grandpa was 17 when he married my grandmother and grandma said that he had a pickup truck and there was another girl that was kind of interested in him. So she said, you have to marry me and they drove to Boulder, with his brother and sister. And Boulder wouldn't marry him because grandma was only 15. So they drove to Brighton and the J.P. there, married them.

10:43 David Allison

Wow.

10:45 Renee

Yeah. And she didn't have to get married, but I just can't imagine being 15 and just eighth grade education.

10:53 David Allison

Yeah, yeah, Different times, different times.

10:57 Renee

Yeah, different times.

11:03 David Allison

So tell me just a little bit more. I don't know if you're able to, your personal story. So you know, your connection with your grandparents is one piece of the story. But then, how have you seen the trajectory of your life in this area?

11:22 Renee

I want things as they were, you know, I just always, I think I wish things wouldn't change. But my grandfather was always kind. I I don't know him any other way. Same with his brothers and his sisters. They were always just so kind. And you were never a bother, it seemed. When they were branding and you'd say, "Grandpa, can I go with?", he never said no. And, you know, today, people, you know, they don't want to be bothered. Grandpa never said no. Or Uncle Jack, he'd be you know, cussing out somebody or complaining about somebody about business or something, and then he looked up... "Oh, Hi, honey, how are you doing?" You know. And they were all just so kind. There's Aunt Jenny, all his brothers and sisters that I knew, were very kind and sweet. And, I work in Louisville and I'll try past Aunt Katie's house and, just the connections there, the memories were part of just the places. I look through this and see Grandpa and Tom Dillon and you know, and it just was a good feeling that you belonged and that you were loved and cared about. And I just don't.... .. this is my home. This is home.

12:55 David Allison

Yeah. And when it's a connection that goes back, you know, generations and has a tie to the land in a way that's, you know, I think different than, you know, a suburb, that sort of thing. It's a strong, strong connection, for sure. What are some of the characteristics or things that you think, you know, we need to recapture or try to, you know, as things change, what's the heart of that community for you?

13:28 Renee

I think everything, it's not connected, I don't feel a connection anymore. It's sad. I think we need to have that small town feel, still. And I think we've gotten away from that

13:49 Renee

Things.... the change that is happening like to the mall, the first banks, I don't know, it's a lot, a lot of change. And it just doesn't feel hometown or small town anymore. That's sad to me. Yeah.

14:10 David Allison

Yeah. Yeah, for sure.

14:13 Renee

We can still be big and have growth. But you know, if we had some, I'm not sure, community things, or I don't know what the answer is. But I'd like that hometown, that small town, community feeling where neighbors are kind to each other. And yeah....

14:32 David Allison

Yeah, supporting each other, figuring out what that looks like. Yeah, that's a tough question. It is a town of what is it? 75,000

14:44 Renee

Yeah, we're just growing and growing.

14:48 David Allison

Yeah. Yeah.

14:51 David Allison

Is there anything about Broomfield that you could think of, that is the history of Broomfield, but it's not in the history books? If that makes sense.

15:03 Renee

Yeah. I don't.....is the Monarch mine, but is the town of Monarch?

15:10 David Allison

Yeah.

15:11 Renee

Is that in the books? I mean, I'm not sure.

15:13 David Allison

I think there's usually a mention of it because of that disaster you know, right. Beyond that, it's not a lot.

15:21 Renee

At work, I have Google Earth Pro. And to see the layers from the years is interesting. Oh, well, I think that is.. let me think .Well, I have some things in here that about when grandpa solved some murders and things that happened here in Broomfield Yeah.....while he was an investigator with Boulder County.

15:58 Renee

You know, I don't know. That would be something I'd have to ask my cousins about, too.

16:07 David Allison

Do you remember, and I'm pretty sure in that interview, if I remember right, with your grandfather, he did talk some about some of those murder cases that he worked on, you know. He had some ,you could really tell, that he was invested in and really committed to, and getting it done, which is really neat. I'm curious about kind of the farm work and what would happen there .You know, there are different scales of farming,right, and certainly at different times, probably in the past at different scales, but what did that look like at your grandfather's farm?

16:49 Renee

Well, my mom when she was a little girl, apparently it was a dairy farm. And I think Grandpa was the first dairy farmer in the area to have glass pipes, homogenized. And my mom's job was to clean off those glass pipes as a little girl and one time she knocked a spider off with babies, that's what she said. And then I know it as a cattle....him raising cattle and the smell. The smell was.... It was good to me. I liked the smell. And after that, it was alfalfa. After the cattle, I know he had a bull, a Texas Longhorn, Diablo; there was an article written about him. He was a crazy bull, just by himself, a big Texas Longhorn with huge horns. And he was retired by then, but it was just alfalfa. You know, he sold the best hay in the area.

18:00 David Allison

Yeah.. How was that? Do you know how it was irrigated? Or what kind of process was for that?

18:05 Renee

Yeah, he irrigated it with (Goodhue)?? and farmers and South Boulder Coal Creek. Because now my cousin and I are doing the same thing.

18:20 David Allison

Yeah, you have alfalfa hay, too?

18:23 Renee

No, my cousin moved into and bought Grandpa's farm.

18:27 David Allison

Okay.

18:29 Renee

My cousin Kevin. And he's now farming and cutting the hay. And I irrigate with my shares and he irrigates with his son, but we share with each other, I'll loan him (a line) ?? , or whatever. And I get my hay from him, for my horses.

18:46 David Allison

That's fantastic. Do you remember if they were extra laborers that they needed anything like that, people coming through or it was all family?

18:57 Renee

All family. Yeah. To my knowledge. it was. Yeah, I don't believe we ever hired anybody out, except maybe a farrier or something for the horses. But the grandkids, they did everything, well the boys did.

19:16 David Allison

Yeah, farrier work's pretty specific. That's for sure. Yeah.... Yeah, I was thinking, too, about just the farmland in Broomfield. There's not a whole lot of it left and that's for sure. I know there's a farmer that does work on some of the open space areas. That's, you know, still under cultivation.

19:41 Renee

Yeah, Allen Green. I know he has cattle out there and he's still in Broomfield.. Because the boundaries are?... Yeah. He cuts hay; well, he was cutting hay on my grandpa's. But, I think it's all leased in Boulder County is where he cuts hay and he has Angus. But he learned from my grandpa.

20:12 David Allison

That's part of that community piece, too, where you're training people too and when you're doing that, just right along beside him and harvest time comes, you need as many hands as you get, anyway. So

20:22 Renee

Yeah, or branding. I know he used to get together with the Hogan boys and they would castrate the calves and brand and cauterize and I remember the smell was in my throat. That was not a good smell, but he never said no, that we couldn't go with them. That was fun.

20:41 David Allison

Did you have a special shoot for that? Or like, different fencing that they used or anything?

20:48 Renee

I don't know. For branding? Yeah, the calves though? No, they would just take them

20:54 David Allison

Right out in the field.

20:56 Renee

Yeah. Yeah. I've got pictures of that.

20:59 David Allison

Yeah. Yeah, it's a tough task.

21:02 Renee

Cuz I lived in Chicago for the first eight years of my life. My mom was a flight attendant in '66 for United. and then met my father and they married in '68. And then we lived in Chicago, and then we moved back in '78, I believe.

21:24 David Allison

Very good. Very good. Anything else that we haven't talked about that you wanted to share or have been thinking about?

21:36 Renee

I can't think; no, just thank you for having me and being interested. I wish I had my cousins with me. They probably have tons more. But....

21:48 David Allison

That's a good story. So yeah, if you have any more, shoot an email my way.



21:54 Renee

Oh, I know, my cousin Deanne would love to have some input, I'm sure.

21:58 David Allison

Yeah. Yeah, that'd be great. And really, you know, helps tell that story better. And you know, I love hearing the farm stories because it's a time that is so quickly going away. And that people, just I feel like, so many people just have no connection whatsoever and it's hard to recapture that unless you hear the stories straight for people that did it and know it.

22:28 Renee

Yeah, like Garden Center. I mean, there. This whole area was like this. When the Manor Motel was here. Oh, gosh. I remember. I used to bartend there. Yeah. When I was just barely 21, I think.

22:44 David Allison

Wow. I'm curious, who came to the bars then?

22:49 Renee

Oh gosh, It was working folks. Yeah, my mom did and Dale (Bashline)???. She was married to Dale Bashline. And Louie was always there. And then it was a hotel also, but I never stayed in the hotel. And it was a diner. They had a great greasy spoon.

23:13 David Allison

Yeah, yeah. That's right over here where the Walgreens is. Yeah, basically, like just maybe a little bit to the west.

23:18 Renee

Oh, yeah, that would be nice to see some pictures of that.

23:21 David Allison

Yeah, I think we've got a couple of here in the archive, but some of them are like, it's just looking down 287 and you can kind of see it on the side, not the full building kind of thing.

23:34 Renee

And then, Jones Taxidermy. Oh, yeah. I think that was Scott( Pancott's)?? family. He's a local rancher, too. Well, he's in Boulder. Yeah, there. I forgot about that.

23:50 David Allison

Yeah, the Broomfield Manor. Was it a hotel or a motel or both?

23:53 Renee

The Broomfield Manor? It was a hotel, uh, a motel. It was a motel.

23:50 David Allison

Okay. Yeah.

23:53 Renee

It was definitely a motel.

24:01 David Allison

With exterior?

24:03 Renee

No, they were interior rooms. Oh, is that what the difference is?

24:01 David Allison

Well, I don't know.

24:03 Renee

No, I think a hotel is a little bit more..... one or two stars more?

24:09

Yeah. But it definitely was a motel, but the rooms were interiors.

24:19 David Allison

Yeah. And that would have been probably by the 80s, like late 80s, early 90s, when that went out?

24:25 Renee

Yeah, I think so. But he still owns the land, I think. Yeah, And the apartments are there still?

24:33 David Allison

Yeah, there's a number of apartments over there.

24:35 Renee

Yeah, and the police station was right around the corner.

24:39 David Allison

That's right.

24:45 David Allison

.Yeah. Well, very good. It's been a delight talking to you. I really appreciate it so much.

24:47 Renee

And thank you so much

24:48 David Allison

Thank you so much