



Lydia Faust

Snook, Texas

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Evan Stern: This is Evan Stern, and I am speaking today in Snook, Texas, with Lydia Mae Faust. For the record, can you tell us your name and occupation?

Lydia Mae Faust: I'm Lydia Faust. I'm a retired baker, and housewife. [laughs]

Evan Stern: To begin, could you describe for us your childhood home and tell us a little bit about where you grew up?

Lydia Mae Faust: I grew up on a farm, doing the usual farm chores, like milkin cows and pickin eggs and feedin chickens and shuckin corn. Then working in the fields. I've chopped cotton, I've picked cotton, and I've also helped plant cotton and harvest it, and did most all the chores that—was in a family of—I had four brothers and a sister, and we all worked as a family together on the farm.

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We each had our own chores to do, and it just—just the way I grew up, with working and preserving everything that we grew. Like the fruit and vegetables and everything was—we grew what our family needed to survive on.

Evan Stern: Where was the farm?

Lydia Mae Faust: It was here in Snook. It was my dad's home place. I was really born in Rogers, Texas, on my uncle's farm. When my grandpa passed away, Grandma asked my dad to come help with the farm here, and so we had moved here from Rogers when I was about 12 years old.

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That's when we really did a lot of extra farm work.

Evan Stern: Reaching back into family history, too, can you tell us about your ancestry, where your people came from, and how they came to settle in Texas?

Lydia Mae Faust: My mother's mother, Grandma, came from Leskovec, Czech Republic. My Grandpa Vajdak came from Czech—a little town called Lipa, in the Czech Republic. And he immigrated here from Austria, where he got his passport from.

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They came to Galveston, settled in—Wesley, where my other—my Grandma Vajdak, where she was born, [0:03:23]. That's—I don't know how they met together. I never heard the history of that. But my mother's side of the family, I was fortunate enough to go there in 2014—that's about ten years ago—and we found like my third cousins, from my mother's—grandmother's side, of the family. Which was very interesting. We had a really good time. We still email each other, mail, and talk to each other, and it's really fascinating to find that I have relatives there.

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Evan Stern: How were you made aware of your Czech roots, growing up?

Lydia Mae Faust: That's the only language that I knew before I started school. I knew Czech, only. I learned how to speak English when I first started school. I didn't know a word of English until I started school. [laughs]

Evan Stern: Can you still speak Czech?

Lydia Mae Faust: I *can*, but I'm really forgettin it, because I have nobody to speak it with. It is a lost art, which—very seldom I hear people talking in the Czech language, and I'm forgettin a lot of the words, how to pronounce em. [laughs]

Evan Stern: Do you maybe have a favorite Czech saying?

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Lydia Mae Faust: Well, referring back to the kolaches, I would say—[starts speaking in Czech]—I have to think [laughs]—[pause]—I'm sorry.

Evan Stern: That's all right!

Lydia Mae Faust: [laughs]

Evan Stern: I hate to put you on the spot like that.

Lydia Mae Faust: [laughs]

Evan Stern: I'm so sorry to do that to you. But, if you were to describe this region of Snook where you grew up, where we're talkin right now, to someone like me who has never been here before, what would you say?

Lydia Mae Faust: I would say that we're really a hospitality type of community. We greet people with friendliness.

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We just love people to come around. And although our community is really growing now, with new housing development coming into the community, and it's—it's going to be different than what I grew up here to be. Cause we used to have just two, three little grocery stores; they were

like general stores. There was a blacksmith shop, and a lumberyard, and a little garage that did mechanic work, and a few liquor stores, and like what we call beer joints. But, things have changed. There's none of that almost existing anymore here.

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Evan Stern: Back to the farm, I know you told us about some of the chores that you had—milkin cows; you worked in cotton. But on what occasions did baking happen on the farm?

Lydia Mae Faust: This usually happened on weekends. That's the only time that we really had time to bake. My mother usually did the rest of the meal but she always left sort of the dessert part to me, the baking part. And that's what I really enjoyed. I think the first cake that I baked was—I was only about five years old. I remember that. She had told me what ingredients to use and how much, and I had mixed it together. And I can sort of remember that. [laughs]

Evan Stern: Do you remember her teaching you how to make kolaches?

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Lydia Mae Faust: Yes, cause that was almost every—every weekend, when we knew that family was coming over, that was a necessity, to always have what we call svačina which was a brunch, a lunch, like, that we served them, that was always to have kolaches and coffee or tea or whatever. And afternoon, say, around three, four o' clock, you always had a svačina [laughs]. Usually I helped mother with either the bakin part or the fillin part or just observed how she did it. And it just became somethin that I wanted to do on my own. After—I had worked out a few years out in the public, because my husband, when we got married, we did some farmin together, and we had some bad years [0:09:13], I needed to find a job.

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So I went and I worked at a chair factory here in Caldwell. But that also got sort of—I had to travel, and I didn't like to travel in every morning, leaving the family behind. It was a family—my husband worked for a postmaster here; he was, at that time. And he had a general furniture store. Anyway, he asked me, would I help him open a bakery? And I jumped at the chance, because I loved baking at the time. And so, that's when I opened up—started working as a baker, for him, and making kolaches.

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And I remember that I brought my own—he didn't have any utensils or anything to really start with. I had to sort of guide him what all I needed, so I brought stuff from my home—bowls and pans and stuff—and baked my first batch of kolaches there. He had bought what we called a pizza oven at the time [laughs] and we used it for several years [phone ringing] of baking. That's how I came into professional baking, after that.

Evan Stern: What can you tell us about what made the kolaches you baked there—first of all, was this 1968? What year was this?

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Lydia Mae Faust: Mmhmm, yes, that was in 1968 when I started that. It really—you know, I had to make the bigger quality of kolaches; you had to adjust your recipe to make bigger batches and make sure that everything worked out. And it took several times to probably mix a [laughs] perfect batch! [laughs] But it helped—I had help from probably my mother and my aunts; they all gave me suggestions. “Hey, you need to try this. You need to try that.” And you know, when you go back like the lab work, you do try different things, before you put it out. And it took me

several different things to use. Like, what kind of flour to use, and what kind of butter to use, and how many eggs.

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It just—you have to work with all of this to really come out. And it took me probably a few years to really come up with a more perfect recipe.

Evan Stern: What would you say is a perfect batch?

Lydia Mae Faust: It's one that—I always like to describe the kolach, when you bite into it, and you feel it that it sort of like melts in your mouth, the dough, you have a perfect dough.

[laughs]

Evan Stern: Can you tell us, too, a little bit more about some of the ingredients that you used in the early days?

Lydia Mae Faust: Well, of course, when we milked the cows, we had the milk. We had the sweet cream. We had the butter. We had—and we used to—made our own cottage cheese. This was another art. You have to really know how to make the cottage cheese.

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You have to heat the clabber to perfect temperature, and then you [laughs]—we put it in what we called—in those days, flour came in cloth sacks. So we used the sack to put the clabber in, after it was heated, and we hung it up probably a lot of times on a wash line to let it drip out. And that's how we made our cottage cheese. But then there was other things that we used. There were the peaches that we harvested. There was pears. And of course we brought out prunes. And that was basically the ingredients that we used at that time.

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Evan Stern: At your peak, at the Snook Baking Company, how many kolaches and bags of flour would you say you'd go through in a typical week?

Lydia Mae Faust: Ooh. That was—usually anywhere from six to eight, maybe ten 50-bag bags of flour. And eggs—I don't know, maybe 15, 20 dozen. And milk—we used—I used dry milk, there. My memory sort of faded right now [laughs], how much, but anyway—and depending on the time of the year, too. The holidays and everything, that's when your quantity of baking went up.

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Evan Stern: What was your typical day like? If you could take me through your typical work day at the Snook Baking Company, when did it start, what all did you have to go through, and when did it end?

Lydia Mae Faust: Usually would try to get there between four and five o' clock in the morning. But when you opened up, you'd—I started with mixing my dough, first thing, and getting things organized for the day run. Usually I didn't open the doors til 7:00, but there's some friends here that knew that I was there, and it was sort of a relief that I wasn't there by myself that early in the morning, that they did come in for coffee, and they'd sit and read the paper or something. But [laughs] it got to be a community meeting place for a lot of the men.

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The farmers came and had their coffee in the morning, and they took off for work. But [laughs] that was the part I really missed when I did close. [laughs]

Evan Stern: If you can remember, are there any stories that you can share that maybe illustrate—I know Snook is a small town. Can you talk about the place that your bakery served in the community, and how it provided a space for interaction?

Lydia Mae Faust: Oh, let me think. [laughs] Well, like I say, it was a meeting place for people to come and probably discuss the world problem [laughs], which they probably couldn't solve anyway but [laughs]—but it was—it was a meeting place for a lot of the, like I say, the farmers, the business people.

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They came and just talked about their day, I guess. I don't know what. And you caught up on a lot of news, from around in the community. It was just a place that people liked to come, and had a cup of coffee. At that time, a cup of coffee was 25 cents. I remember that. [laughs] And they would—they'd do pot after pot, but sometimes they didn't even get charged for the second cup, but they donated money anyway. So, it came out. [laughs]

Evan Stern: Reflecting on your years there, are there any meaningful interactions or stories that you remember having with your customers that you can share?

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Lydia Mae Faust: Well, there was one fella, I wished I had recorded him. Cause I forgot the places he said he did this, but he [laughs]—in the early days when he was younger, he had a still here in the community somewhere. And he had peddled it [laughs] to I think Dallas and Houston or somewhere. And he had told me the story about that, and I sort of was young at that time; I thought—just didn't listen too well. But that was one of the stories that I wished I would have listened to a little more, and knew—what actually—where was it? Because he said it was here in

the community. And I would have wondered, where was it? [laughs] To this day, I still wonder, where was it? [laughs]

Evan Stern: Are there any memories you can share about any of your old-time Czech customers?

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Lydia Mae Faust: Well, I had a young guy come to me this past week, that just told me, he says, “I knew when I came to the bakery, y'all talked to me in English, but when I sort of turned around, you all started talking Czech and I knew y'all were talkin about me!” [laughs]

Evan Stern: Moving a few years ahead, as I understand, in 1983, the Homemakers Club in Caldwell asked if you could bake them some kolaches. Could you tell me about that and how it inspired you to found the Caldwell Kolache Festival?

Lydia Mae Faust: Yes, that was—I had belonged to a—well, I still belong to the Extension Homemaker Education Association. It has really changed names from the Homemakers, but it's still the same organization.

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Anyway, that was the year that I first bought the bakery, myself. And there was an adjoining county that had a pie contest, and the Extension Homemakers said, “Well, we'd like to have some kind of contest in our county.” So they jumped on, since I had the kolaches, could we have a kolach contest? Because there were a lot of Czech women that did bake kolaches here, in the county. So that's when we had a kolach contest at the courthouse. I remember this one lady, she

was very good at bakin; she made peach kolach which she won in. Anyway, people were askin— this was in connection with some kind of harvest festival that was like in fall of the year.

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People were asking, where could they buy kolaches. And this friend of mine called me, she says, “Do you have any kolaches left over at the bakery, or can you send some here?” So I had made I think around 10, 12 dozen, and I had brought them there. And they had packaged them like four to a package. And they sold them. So that’s where the idea of a festival was born for the next year. [laughs]

Evan Stern: What memories can you share with me about the festival’s first year?

Lydia Mae Faust: Yes. I sort of forget where it was held, but we formed a committee and they had asked the committees that worked in different areas to get music and entertainment, and contacted bakers to sell kolaches.

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I don’t think it was on the street; I think it was out in some building there, in Caldwell, that they had opened up to bring their kolaches, and where they were able to sell their products. I think that was the first year that I had entered also, and I had won the professional trophy at that time.

Evan Stern: The festival has been going on now for—first of all, what can you tell us about what the festival is like today?

Lydia Mae Faust: [laughs] It has really grown. I think this last year that I still worked with the—I’m not on the committee anymore, because I thought 34 years was long enough on there!

[laughs] But I still work with the bake show, which is a part of the festival. And we had over 150 entries last year, which they said is one of the biggest kolach bake shows now in the state.

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It's really interesting, cause people still come and want to participate in this.

Evan Stern: So the festival has been going on now for close to 50 years. Looking back on the last several decades, are there any favorite memories of the festival that you care to share?

Lydia Mae Faust: Favorite memories. Well, yes.

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My husband and I were crowned king and queen of the festival in 1999, I think. Then there was—this past year, my granddaughter was crowned kolach queen. So it sort of runs in the family, doesn't it? [laughs]

Evan Stern: What do you look for when you're judging a kolache?

Lydia Mae Faust: I look for the texture. I really don't—didn't judge. I keep the books. Because if I participated in a committee, or baked kolaches, I didn't want to be a judge. I just figured that was not right. I did help with the books, or keeping track of the entries and stuff like that.

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But—I forgot your question. [laughs]

Evan Stern: That's all right. I think you already—because you already answered it. Because you really don't judge kolaches, I gather. But even then, I know that you haven't—you weren't

working as a judge, but looking back on the festival, are there any particularly strange kolache creations that you remember?

Lydia Mae Faust: Well, there was one that sort of stuck in my mind, was a turkey and dressing. And I just couldn't picture that being a kolach! [laughs] Then there was a kiwi fruit one that was sort of odd, because I never would have thought of doing one with a kiwi. [laughs]

Evan Stern: Speaking of the turkey and dressing, how do you feel about the fact that in Texas, people call savory-filled pastries kolaches?

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Lydia Mae Faust: Can you ask the question again? [laughs]

Evan Stern: Oh, sure, no problem. How do you feel about the fact that in Texas, people call savory filled pastries kolaches?

Lydia Mae Faust: Well, to me, it's—everybody's trying to make some kind of different filling, which really isn't the basic kolach that we were raised up to use. Really the prune kolach was the first kolach ever invented. And it just—to me, it's not the basic kolach that it was called. Like I said, the turkey and dressing one, it just doesn't seem like that would be a kolach.

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That's more of a—something else they want to invent. [laughs]

Evan Stern: By the way, too, I'll say that if you ever want to take a break or you need some water or anything like that, it's perfectly fine. Just let me know if you're gettin tired and we need to take a rest at any point. I know you said that a few years ago, you did take a trip to the Czech

Republic. Are there any stories you can share with us about how that experience impacted you? And did it in any ways inform your views on baking?

Lydia Mae Faust: Yes, because I was really surprised at what they call a kolach there nowadays. A lot of them resembled a cookie. And it just—there was very few places that I found that really made kolaches like we make em here, or what our grandmothers had taught us how to do em.

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Somehow—I don't know if they don't have the right ingredients there, or what it is, but it just wasn't what I would think was a—or, did we change? Most of them, I remember from the beginning, my grandmother made em like in a pie shape, and cut em like into pie wedges. And some places, they still did that there.

Evan Stern: Interesting. And, reflecting on all of your years, what is the most meaningful batch of kolaches you can recall baking?

Lydia Mae Faust: You mean, for who? [laughs]

Evan Stern: Well, yeah.

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Lydia Mae Faust: Gosh, there were so many. I know I made a lot for weddings, and other organizations. Probably the most memorial ones that I would think is baking for A&M students. They come out and for the organizations they would order kolaches and then resell them at A&M for their fundraiser. That was probably some of the most meaningful, because here again, I was connecting with young people, keeping the culture up.

Evan Stern: I was going to ask this later, but I know you've taught many classes on baking kolaches in recent years. What lessons do you try to instill in your students?

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Lydia Mae Faust: I try to instill the texture of the dough, and to know what the dough is supposed to look like, when—to have a fine feeling of the dough. That's mostly what I try to—so they see what their product look like when it's finished. If it's what it's supposed to—when they compare it—when they have the workshop and several of them working together, they can compare each other's doughs, and they can see their mistakes and maybe they've done it differently.

Evan Stern: Why is it important for you that the tradition of kolache baking is maintained and preserved?

Lydia Mae Faust: Because it's a dying art. Young people aren't interested in it like we would have been in our day, to learn something.

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Young people just fallin away from it, the younger generation. They're not interested in doin it. And that's what I like to keep it up. We do have a group here that *are* interested in it, and that's because their grandmothers were, and it's still in the family. And so there's a little bit interest in there to learn the art of it and not let the culture die.

Evan Stern: Just going back a little bit here, what caused you—when did you step away from the bakery, and what caused you to step away?

Lydia Mae Faust: I had—when I had the bakery, it was a—I had a lunch counter, and the business was very good, but I was sort of gettin burned out.

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And, I had an opportunity—a buyer came by and was interested when I said I was probably interested in selling it. But at the same time, my mother was in a rest home, and I had to be taking care of her. And so, I thought this was an opportunity there to sell the bakery and just—leave it. But I really did miss it. [laughs]

Evan Stern: Yeah, and how was that process for you, selling it?

Lydia Mae Faust: It was—it happened to be to my niece, when I felt like this was—being in the family. And, it worked out. They runned it for a few years. But too, they got burned out on it. Cause it's long hours. It's really long hours in there.

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If you want the business to succeed, you gotta run it at least six days a week, open.

Evan Stern: And I'm sorry, too, what year was it that you sold?

Lydia Mae Faust: 1995.

Evan Stern: 1995. And when did it close down?

Lydia Mae Faust: It closed down—let's see—I don't remember how long Robert had it. It had to close down in about 2015, somewhere in there. I think about 2015, sometimes, it closed down. Because my niece had sold it to a guy, and he didn't make a go of it, and so, he just closed it up.

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Evan Stern: You opened it in '68, so there was something for—if it closed in 2015, there was something there for almost 47 years.

Lydia Mae Faust: Yeah.

Evan Stern: How is it for you driving by that building now today?

Lydia Mae Faust: Memories. Memories. [laughs] More memories. [laughs] I can still picture myself there at the front door. [laughs]

Evan Stern: I know I've asked a few specific questions related to memory, and it's a hard question to answer, but do you have a favorite memory of the bakery?

Lydia Mae Faust: Yes. Probably havin my grandchildren come when they'd come to visit. They were there, and they were always eager to feel the dough, and start workin.

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I'd always let em have a part of—a piece of the dough and they could play with it. And then later on, they wanted to work and so I told them, I said, "First thing you gotta learn is to wash dishes." [laughs] Or sweep the floor. That was their first jobs. [laughs]

Evan Stern: I think that's a smart tactic! I see that you have here *Southern Living* on your—that you've brought this magazine out here, and you have this article in *Edible Houston*. What did it mean to you to see yourself in these publications?

Lydia Mae Faust: I was a little bit probably surprised, and maybe even embarrassed that people were interested in me. [laughs]

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Evan Stern: What are your hopes for the future?

Lydia Mae Faust: My hopes are that the kolaches will continue being made, and that families, the Czech families, are carried on, carry on the culture with their families. And that it won't be a dying art.

Evan Stern: I know I asked you why it's important to maintain, and you said because it's a dying art. What would be lost, if kolaches were to go away?

Lydia Mae Faust: It would be—the type of kolaches that we're used to here, in Texas, it's a dough, and it's—more it's like a bread, or roll, sweet roll dough.

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And it's hard to imagine if people would want to change it to a different kind of dough and call it a kolach.

Evan Stern: Just kind of moving towards the end here, kind of whomever I'm speaking with, I like to ask this question, but looking far ahead in the future, after you've left this Earth, say decades in the future, if someone wants to go somewhere to commune with your spirit, and get to know Miss Faust, where should they look? Where should they go?

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Lydia Mae Faust: I don't know. [laughs] I just—I just really don't know where they would wanna go, but I would really ask the lord to guide them, in the right direction. [laughs]

Evan Stern: But is there a place that's—that you feel represents your—where *you* go, that you played a big part of, or you left an impact, that you feel you're tied to?

Lydia Mae Faust: I would say check out your archives, your family history, and see where you really came from, and where your ancestors came from.

Evan Stern: And why is it important to know where you're from?

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Lydia Mae Faust: That's in your bloodline. You should know where it come from. [laughs] Like I was interested in where my ancestors came from in Czech Republic. I found my grandmother's home place, her house that she was raised in. And it's interesting to find out. Not just to know it, but it's interesting for you to know, what it was like.

Evan Stern: Do you have any final thoughts you just care to share?

Lydia Mae Faust: Thank you for comin by and wanting to talk to me about all of this. It sort of brings back my memories, which I haven't really thought about for a while. But it brought back good memories for me. And I just hope that some of these memories will be carried on to other people.

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Evan Stern: Well, Miss Faust, I thank you so much for sharing with me. It has been an honor to speak with you.

Lydia Mae Faust: Thank you. Děkuju vám velice [0:40:14] [laughs] Thank you very much. [laughs]

Evan Stern: We did get a Czech lesson, after all!

Lydia Mae Faust: [laughs] Bez práce nejsou koláče. That's it! [laughs]

Evan Stern: What is the saying?

Lydia Mae Faust: Bez práce nejsou koláče.

Evan Stern: And what does that mean?

Lydia Mae Faust: Without work, there are no kolaches.

Evan Stern: Without work, there are no kolaches. [laughs] That's very true! [laughs]

Lydia Mae Faust: [laughs]

Evan Stern: I will just take a moment to consult my notes, just to make certain there aren't any—I feel like we covered everything that I was curious to ask about. I will just ask, what can you tell us about the house we're talking in today?

Lydia Mae Faust: Okay.

Evan Stern: Because I asked about the farm. What's the story of this house here?

Lydia Mae Faust: Well, my husband and I, we bought this in 1953, from my aunt.

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She had it for sale. And we were looking—we were just movin around rentin at the time and we were lookin for a home. And so we bought this place. At that time, it was about two acres of land with this, and this house. We bought it for \$3,000 at that time. And it was—we added on to this house since then. It was a two-bedroom house, and a kitchen, and living room. And we have—during the years, we have changed—added on, cause the family grew. I have—we had three boys and a daughter.

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Also this house, it had a cellar under the kitchen part, but we never used it. It was—we filled it up, because there's a creek back of the house and it floods. And really—in 2017 when Harvey came through, my house got flooded. I had about three, four inches of rain, of water, all through the house. And I had to redo it. I had financial help. I raised the house up—about three years after that, I raised it up a whole foot, so ever since then, I think it flooded one more time—the water came up, but it never got in the house, because I had it raised up.

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But yeah, this house, it's over I would say 100 years, most part of—the center part of it.

Evan Stern: I'm so sorry to hear that you had to deal with that. Harvey hurt a lot of people, and I'm really sorry to hear that you were one of em.

Lydia Mae Faust: I haven't been able to redo a lot of it in here. The floor needs redoing. But I'm—I'm satisfied what I have. [laughs]

Evan Stern: And actually, if you could give one piece of advice to a large group of people, what would you say?

Lydia Mae Faust: About what?

Evan Stern: Just anything. If you could give a piece of advice, just—anything. It can be about anything.

Lydia Mae Faust: Well, to me, I'm blessed with just having [phone ringing] this many years, being here, and to enjoy life.

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And, always think of helping others more than yourself, I would think. I love my community, and always want to give more to other people than I have myself.

Evan Stern: I think that’s an important lesson. And speaking of lessons, one question I meant to ask you was, what’s the most important lesson your mother ever gave you in the kitchen?

Lydia Mae Faust: Boy, there were so many! [laughs] Probably always to try to keep things clean. And use what you have. Don’t try to bring—try to use what you have in—equipment, or ingredients—make use of what you have.

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Evan Stern: If you were to go back in time and have a conversation with your grandmother, what would you like to ask her?

Lydia Mae Faust: How did she do this? [laughs] How—? You know, like this past week, I had made some sauerkraut, and it didn’t quite turn out. “What did I do wrong, grandma?”  
[laughs]

Evan Stern: Again, thank you so much, Lydia. I’ll go ahead and let you go after all of this. But I just had to get a few more in there, after all that.

Lydia Mae Faust: [laughs]

Evan Stern: I thank you so much. This has been wonderful.

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Lydia Mae Faust: Well, I hope I’m not too embarrassin! [laughs]

Evan Stern: Oh, not at all.

[End]