My Farm Roots: Too deep to get washed away

By: Camille Phillips

This is the seventh installment of My Farm Roots, Harvest Public Media’s series chronicling Americans’ connection to the land. Click here to explore more My Farm Roots stories and to share your own.

In the backyard of Barb and Lynn Handy’s farmhouse on the banks of the Missouri River in Percival, Iowa, there is a single sturdy tree, strong enough to hold a swing. When the river flooded in 2011, the tree held firm against the waters. The Handys are like their tree: flood waters come and go, but they remain. Their roots are too deep to be washed away.

A year later, they are back in their house, settled as if they never left. The Handys and their house both exude a sense of permanence and continuity. They sip coffee from pewter and ceramic coffee cups and reminisce about how they met and married. And as their grandfather clock rang out in rich tones, they spoke about their love for big band music.
music and dancing. “It’s funny how music, your music gets in you,” said Lynn. “I suppose every generation has their music.”

Lynn has farmed the land since he was a little boy and Barb has lived there since they married 52 years ago, so floods are nothing new to them. Lynn remembers other floods going back to when he was a boy before the levee was built. During World War II, prisoners of war were brought in to build up protection against the rising waters. “I can remember one, his name was Marion, he teased me about putting a corn cob in his mouth,” Lynn said. “I think he missed his own children.”

Barb was born on a farm, but moved to town when she was two. Her memories of the farm all came from her friend’s dad, a dairy farmer who wore overalls all the time and smelled of raw milk. “When I married Lynn,” said Barb, “I made him promise to never where overalls.”

When she first moved to the farm, Barb used to look out the window wondering if anyone would come by. But she kept busy by working in town and raising their two daughters. And now she can’t imagine another life.

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