EPISODE DATE: 7/24/12

EPISODE NAME: Evelyn Grace Geer’s book: *The Lepine Girls of Mud City*

Today on *Across the Fence* a book that explores a Vermont family and their love for Mount Sterling Farm. We will learn about the Lepine Girls of Mud City who raised their famed jersey cows and embodied Vermont's agricultural traditions. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us; I am Judy Simpson. Joining me this afternoon is the author of a new book that traces a Vermont farm family. The three girls in the family taught school and travel the world one even worked for President Johnson but all three returned to Morristown where they worked and lived off the rich Vermont landscape. Joining me is the author who has written about the Lepine family it is a pleasure to welcome Evelyn Grace Geer. Thanks for joining us.

Evelyn.: You're very welcome.

Judy.: How did you get to know the Lepine family?

Evelyn.: My brother was sugaring on their property. They had 150 acres that they grew up on and spent their childhood years on. When my brother took over the area and was raising his family he built a sugar house. So I would be sugaring with my brother the children brother's children my son Sean they would combine the sugar and they began bringing the wood up to my place that Gert cut with her own chainsaw. They loved to handle wood and over the years they were just wonderful friends. And while I was in college I took care of their mother Imelda.

Judy.: Tell me about the family, who are they?

Evelyn.: They are group of wonderful people. Their parents emigrated from Quebec. They've been through poverty, and are well educated. Very generous to the people around them. They are neighbors. They started the Morrisville community garden for people who do not have their own property. They have plots and taught them how to garden. They are philanthropists. They just are really cool people. The women no holds barred they're going to do it are going to do and they're going to do it well and enjoy life while they're doing it.

Judy.: So there's the parents and how many children?

Evelyn.: Five. Marie, Therese, Gert, Jeanette, Lorentz, excuse me and Andre.
Judy.: So they grow up at a time of the depression. People do not have a lot of things. They always had plenty to eat and plenty of fun.

Evelyn.: Absolutely. Their mother really taught them how to make the best of everything and whatever God bless them they made more of. The mother was a wonderful gardener and she learned how to knit and make cane chairs and can their food make their soap. She did it all. She used to take them to church in a sleigh and warm there feet with rocks. Whoever went to church got a chocolate bar so they'll want to go to mass. She gave them their whole sense of morality of enjoying life and taught them if they want something they've learned how to make it. They made their own baseball out of wood. Of course Jeanette was laughing about it it's a miracle we didn't kill each other with that ball.

Judy.: Right it seems like a good idea at the time a wooden ball?

Evelyn.: Until it broke the window and momma was sure to tell them they have to find another softball. Her memories are wonderful and I think the children of today are going to enjoy reading it just as much as the adults because they can look at the way life was climbing trees and chasing butterflies was.

Judy.: how you spend your time.

Evelyn.: Yes and picking berries swimming in the waterfalls and catching trout with a bucket they are making your own sled and using your own imagination.

Judy.: It's interesting because it's about a family but there's also a lot about history and Vermont's history.

Evelyn.: It is. When I wrote the story it was very important to me to embody the family with the culture. I did a lot a research on Lamoille County. For instance Lamoille County is named Lamoille County because Samuel de Champlain was making the maps he came across what is now the Lamoille River and he saw seagulls flying overhead and he thought I will name it Lamoit for seagulls and he didn't cross his tees. So when his map maker got a hold of it he put on the map Lamoille. There's that history but it's also juxtapose to what the conditions of the world were World War II. They are listening to radio spec them those are big form of entertainment when they could really use their imaginations. FDR comes over the radio to announce that the United States has bombed the Pacific. How the families and especially the Lepine family and what was going on in Vermont with our Boys being sent to Italy where they had to ski as soldiers to get into certain areas. To talk about the Green Mountain boys the Civil War and the Revolutionary War and how Vermont fit into that as well. It is like a fabric to a quilt or whatever or just piece it all together and that's more colorful because of that.

Judy.: The girls probably describe themselves as farm girls but they really led extraordinary lives. As they left the farm for various reasons for some pretty amazing reasons and then came back. Tell us about some of the adventures the girls had.

Evelyn.: I'd love to. Janette was in the potato field and it was back in the day when Pan Am were flying bluebloods and the aristocracy and the movie stars and Janette said to herself I want to be up there. Didn't she get in her little automobile and drive to New York City and she was interviewed being bilingual and a beautiful woman and very intelligent she was hired. Her route
was South Africa Europe and the Orient. It's funny because back then Pan Am Stewardesses were the most desirable. Crème de la crème. And she was supposed to wear her girdle for she said it never did and they didn't know the difference. Have course issues and such great shape from working out the farm. Gurt she graduated from Johnson State College and back then when there was only about 60 students it was called the normal school and it was mostly women who are going to be teachers and she was teaching up in still hollow and was just out in the woods with her brother when the sap was running when she got in the schoolhouse and said recesses kept getting longer and longer. She'd be playing ball she didn't want to go in. She said something came over her and she thought about being out in the woods and she said I could swear and I couldn't sing there and I wanted to be out in the woods and their one of two the farming and she had an award winning jersey heard that she milked. Janette milked on one side of the barn and Gurt milked the other. Two Ella Fitzgerald with an old painting of Paris tilted. It was great moments in their doing the dishes. She loved to be in there. And like that she worked until she was 92.

Judy.: And another sister worked in Washington?

Evelyn.: Actually two of the sisters did. Marie did and Therese. Therese worked for our wonderful Vermont Senator Aiken for about 25 years and he was such a popular senator that his second campaign only cost $17.00. Vermonters just adored him because he did so much for getting electricity out into the hills. He was not about to sell Vermont down the tubes. He really instilled in the people that the land was much more important than consumerism and I think that was happening at the time when people were starting to buy on credit and Vermonters never went for that. Neither did he. Marie when she was 18 and World War II was going on of course our boys were fighting in the war overseas and the recruiter came from the FBI up to People's Academy in Morrisville and recruited her and her girlfriend. When they graduated from high school they took the train from Morrisville to Washington, DC with their mothers’ blessings and they lived in a boarding house. Marie was trained by the FBI to study fingerprints and they're both in Washington Therese and Marie when FDR passed away. They recalled his body being taken in the carriage and the mourners. That probably had very interesting lives and I would say their characters are icons.

Judy.: They all ended up back at the farm?

Evelyn.: They did and it was a farm at the time after pa died the boys left. Lawrence went out to a hog farm out in California and Andre became an AG professor in New York. It was just the women and they did it all. They were the vets they fixed the tractors and one day a fertilizer salesman came to the door of the barn looking for the man of the house and Gert loves to tell the story she came out and asks me if she could help him and he said he'd come looking for the boss. She said you are looking at her. He goes you know, the man. She says there is no man. And they had a wonderful time and of course I talk about the auction in the book when they had finally decided it was time to give up because Janette had had a bad fall in Austria skiing and her knees were giving out. It was time for them to do other things.

Judy.: They were what age at this time?

Evelyn.: They're in their sixties. They had the big 10 split the stripes and the auctioneers and trucks were coming in from Idaho and California. The New York Times wrote it up and compared the jersey herd of Mount Sterling cows to Jackie Kennedy's pearls at auction. I say in
the book but Jackie's pearls are faux but the cows are real and they all had names. They did talk about that day. There was a fire when the barn down but they always rose up from whenever they're given and I like that they shared mama's recipes.

Judy.: Yes there's recipes of the end of the book which is great.

Evelyn.: The traditional French Christmas pie and mama's ragu and shepherd's pie.

Judy.: She lived into her nineties.

Evelyn.: She did. I believe she was 95. They had a wonderful tribute to her at their art gallery which is in Morristown Corners. They named it for the first citizen of Morristown, Jacob Walker. They had a lovely tribute and they had her hooked rugs and her chairs and poems all the little children wrote about her and they had piggy banks she had quite a collection. Of course they raised pigs for quite a while that's how they earned a lot of money to buy the land of the next farm. She was a wonderful lady and when I took care of her she used to say her rosary in French. She passed away had a wonderful life and a peaceful death and at the highlight of the book I talk about how the girls have conserved over 1100 acres of Vermont farm land. That's their legacy to the world; this land can never be developed. And part of the Catamount Trail is on their land that they've conserved.

Judy.: And there are still cows on their land?

Evelyn.: Oh yes there's jersey's the farmer took over of the farm and the girls have two acres and a 19th century farmhouse where they still live full of antiques and art neighbors are always coming in to sit and talk and you know to pick up some syrup. They're still in their house and there are still cows.

Judy.: Are you writing another book?

Evelyn.: I am.

Judy.: What is it about?

Evelyn.: I am very enamored with history and this particular book is a novel. The name of it is Tuscan Dreams and All that Jazz. It’s a book I started years ago but it begins in Italy my very favorite place to paint and my main character Gabrielle it's about how her father's a fishermen and passes away at sea and she is taken in by a bootlegger and how she comes over to the country and I get into the history of the bootlegging era. I am hoping to get that finished within the next six months.

Judy.: Wonderful. I've been speaking with Evelyn Grace Geer she's the author of The Lepine Sisters of Mud City: embracing Vermont. As always we encourage you to visit your local library or you could ask for the book at your favorite bookstore. You can get information online goat in history press.net. Thank you so much for joining me today.

Evelyn.: You are very welcome.
Judy.: It's been great talking to you. That's our program for today thanks for joining us I'm Judy Simpson will see you again next time on Across the Fence.

Across the Fence is brought to you as a public service by the University of Vermont extension and WCAX TV.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. University of Vermont Extension, Burlington, Vermont. University of Vermont Extension, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating, offer education and employment to everyone without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status.