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Marion Miller, Oral History Index

Marion Miller

Marcia Lair

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Interview with Marion Miller conducted by Marcia Lair

February 27, 2020

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00:00:01	Introductions and general information - 2/17/2020
00:00:57	Born in Reed's Memorial Hospital, Cooper, TX, 1/15/1941; the oldest of 4 children, named after father, Manton Marion Miller. Mother was Melverne Baker Miller. Melverne's sister, Hazel Eileen Baker Wilson, along with her husband, Ray Wilson, had a grocery store. Melverne had a beauty salon, Melverne's Salon, in the building behind Miller's Pharmacy. She had grown up in Sulphur Springs, TX. Marion's siblings – Whitney Miller, William [Bill] Wade Miller, and Sharon [Sherry] Miller.
00:02:45	All four children born before the end of WWII – childhood memories of the war years
00:05:18	Married a Delta County girl, [Ann Ray Miller], who was an "Army brat" – spent her first 13-14 years overseas in Japan and Italy and various bases in the US. Her father retired from the U.S. Army and their family moved back to Shiloh in Delta County.
00:06:05	Married in 1969. He went to Pharmacy School at University of Texas and worked in several pharmacies as part of his training; Ann Miller had a job teaching at the university. He graduated from Pharmacy School in 1974.
00:07:38	Moved back to Cooper, TX. Worked at several pharmacies in the area, including Miller's. Had first son, Mark Miller.
00:08:40	History of Miller's Pharmacy. From 1911 to 1923, it was on the North side of the square by the Grand Theater and known as Northside Pharmacy, owned by C. A. Warren. Tom Snell owned two other pharmacies in town, Hooten Drug and City Drug. The Farmers National Bank (which failed during the Depression) occupied the building that would become Miller's Pharmacy. Description of the building at that time.
00:10:00	In those early days, doctors owned the drugstores and dispensed medicines with the help of clerks. Description of procedures.
00:11:32	Beginning of Miller's Drugs. In 1923, his Uncle Greaver L. Miller finished a 6-month Pharmacy course, which enabled him to get his Pharmacy license. Along with Marion's grandfather, A. P. [Andrew P.] Miller, and Floyd Lane, Greaver bought the Northside Pharmacy from Sam Morgan [Samuel Elkanah Morgan] and Charles [Goforth] Pratt. Renamed it Miller's Drugs.
00:13:00	By about 1930, businesses on the square had moved around, and the main traffic flow was on the south side of the square. Greaver Miller bought the Farmers National Bank building and moved the Miller's Drugs. History of the sign.
00:15:20	1938 – Uncle Greaver bought a new bar, new booths (had put in the soda fountain in 1930), a new Buick, and had a son named Jimmy Miller, one of two sons (Jerry [Gerald L. Miller] was the other son. Both sons worked at the soda fountain as teenagers. Description of the "soda jerks" of the day and the soda fountain as a hangout for teenagers at night and local citizens on weekends.
00:19:15	About 1950-51, local businesses began getting air-conditioning. Memory of Marion and cousin Jimmy Miller helping to install air-conditioning in the drugstore. People began coming in to get cool after shopping or after a movie on Saturday nights.

00:20:10	1955 – Saturday night patronage decreased – people left town early to watch a new, popular television show called “Gunsmoke”.
00:20:50	Childhood memories involving his father and the drugstore. When he and his siblings were old enough to work, father paid them \$.25/hr.
00:23:20	Memories of working at the drugstore while in high school. On his mother’s recommendation, his father would close the store on Sunday mornings to allow for church attendance.
00:24:40	Description of how pharmacists made up medications; memory of watching his father make “powder papers”, using a mortar and pestle and combining various ingredients to make liquids or creams. Very few commercially-made medications available before the mid 1950’s.
00:27:60	Father [Manton Miller] always thought ahead to attract more customers. 1948 – bought ice cream machine in order to compete with the new Dairy Queen in town. 1949 – bought a snow cone machine after seeing one at the State Fair; proved to be very popular. Description of the process of making snow cones.
00:30:35	Fall of 1949, father [Manton Miller] bought a 1949 ford with the money made from snow cone sales during the summer. Memory of family trip to Lubbock, TX at Thanksgiving that fall – very cold – the car didn’t have a heater.
00:31:22	1965 – Civil Rights legislation changed how customers were served. Description of service before and after the Civil Rights law was passed. No trouble.
00:33:00	Operation of the store when Marion was growing up: Description of making their own syrups - saved money. Description of process of getting, grinding, and storing ice. How they came up with names for various drinks. How they made and stored various kinds of ice cream
00:41:00	Changes in preparation of and obtaining medicines prior to 1950 to the mid-1960’s; instead of pharmacists making powders and compounds, more medicines were commercially manufactured and patented. Led to the rise of manufacturer’s reps visiting doctors and pharmacists to push their company’s drugs. Also necessitated the classification of drugs containing opioids, etc. Description of the classes of “controlled substances.”
00:44:54	Further changes in the 1970’s – first generic drugs available about 1974; prior to 1970, no insurance plans to pay for drugs, no pharmacy technicians to take care of clerical duties.
00:45:43	Marion’s father, [Manton Miller] was probably one of the earliest pharmacy technicians. Began working for Greaver Miller when he was a teenager – learned every aspect of the business. In 1945, Manton bought the store from Greaver and partnered with a registered pharmacist, Sam Alexander. Partnered with various registered or retired pharmacists through the years. The last one was William “Wild Bill” Urban, hired in 1963. Sold the store to Marion in 1984.
00:47:32	Memories about one of his father’s partners, Chester Gibson, a retired pharmacist from Alto, TX, and his wife, Inez.
00:51:04	Memories of times prior to the late 1970’s, before the advent of box stores such as Walmart, and before grocery stores began stocking traditional drugstore products (hosiery, gift cards, shampoo, toothpaste, etc.), when drugstores carried a number of products not found anywhere else.
00:55:02	Memory of all of the town pharmacies borrowing from each other to fill prescriptions.
00:55:45	Memories of some of the women hired to help at the fountain cash register, and various other duties: Margie Talley, Beatrice Stanley, Mabel Wheat, Patsy

	Douglas. Reasons why Mabel Wheat became a legend. Mabel and Duane Allen of the Oak Ridge Boys. Story of trip to see a Texas Rangers game.
00:58:07	Examples of jobs performed by the family at the pharmacy: mother Melverne, wife Ann, siblings Whitney, Bill, and Sherry [Sharon], cousins Jerry and Jimmy Miller, and his children [Mark, Andy and Meredith].
00:59:01	Description of Saturdays at the pharmacy: business determined by the movie theater hours.
00:59:52	Story of his children helping at the pharmacy. Meredith got a pharmacy tech license and was hired at Daugherty's Pharmacy in Highland Park, TX. Also worked in Patient Assistance for Amerisource Bergen, and McKesson Corporation, top drug wholesalers. Currently works for Boston Children's Hospital.
01:04:12	Description of Marion's current work with compound medicines, checking ingredients, etc. Discussion about compound medicines and insurance, etc.
01:06:40	Discussion about Mabel Wheat's contribution to the pharmacy.
01:08:30	Stories about family members – antics, skills, etc.
01:12:24	Advice for future generations – don't give up on your goals – diligence & perseverance.
01:16:33	Family history of money – [Felix Grundy Miller, 1815 – 1880 & wife Derinda Loving Miller, 1824 – 1873] – one of their sons, William Lewis Miller [1841 – 1905] was a very successful farmer around Needmore; he & his wife [Nancy Jane Moore Miller] are buried in Shiloh Cemetery. Their son, A. P. [Andrew P.] Miller [1872 – 1925] inherited quite a bit of money; was the father of Manton Marion Miller [1912 - 2002]. A. P. died young – left money to his children, giving them enough to start out with.
01:17:32	1977 – Lundy Hooten sold Hooten Drugs to Marion & Marion's father, Manton Marion Miller. Marion and Joe Cregg, a Hooten pharmacist, worked at the Hooten location. Marion & his father operated Hooten Drugs until 1984, when Marion bought out the interest in Miller's Pharmacy.
01:19:50	1986 – story of revamping the Miller's Pharmacy building & the building next door to separate the pharmacy from the soda fountain & combining the furnishings of Miller's and Hooten's Drugs. Hired Buddy McKim to do the work. 8,000 bricks from between the two businesses were cleaned and used on the front of the new city hall and fire station.
01:22:10	1987 – bought first computers for the business. Tammy Barr, an employee & computer science major at A&M Commerce [East Texas State University], set up the computerized system for the two combined businesses (Miller's and Hooten's). 8,000 brick from drugstore are in the front of the new fire station.
01:24:08	Hired Kris Shaw part-time, trained as a pharmacy technician & became a certified pharmacy technician. Worked at Miller's Pharmacy for 22 years, until 2007.
01:26:35	During those years, family also worked at the store. Wife Ann experimented with buying & selling products and displays. Children Mark and Andrew delivered products, helped at soda fountain, etc.
01:28:25	2007 – Changing landscape of pharmacy business nationwide (changes in insurance procedures & changing fee payments, etc.) His 2 relief pharmacists, Lundy Hooten, Jr. and James Ward, wanted to retire. Father, Manton, had been a fixture even after he retired, helped wherever he could – passed away in 2002. In 2007, closed Miller's Pharmacy and moved the pharmacy files to WalMart in Commerce, TX. He and Kris Shaw went to work at WalMart Pharmacy.
01:37:15	Possible plan to make the Miller's building into a museum.

01:37:60

Stories about the years that he operated a bus stop out of the store, about 10 years.