

Interview with Leo Lassard

Marquette, MI

June 28, 2001 French Canadian and Chippewa

Interviewer: Dr. Russell Magnaghi

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RM: Good morning Leo. Could we start out, what is your birthdate? How old are you?

LL: I am 85. I was born in 1914. school there and also the kids were used for chores.

My brother used to take care of the milking of the cows. Also we had to go out and look

RM: Where were you born and where did you first live? in the bushes. Then we had to

take for the bell that they wore around their neck. That's the way we found them.

LL: Sault Saint Marie, MI. That was for a short time. I don't remember exactly how old

I was. My two brothers and myself and my sister all ended up in the orphanage located

in the Upper Peninsula two miles out of Baraga...no two miles out of...I guess it was

Baraga.

RM: Did you have to keep the place in order, clean the facility?

RM: That was Asonence

LL: One of the chores I remember was in the spring of the year the potatoes were all put

LL: Asonence, that's it. had to sort them out, throw out the rotten ones, which was a

small job. One of the things I remember going to school was if you were caught doing

RM: So your background is Chippewa? get a ruler on your waist with the sharp edge

hitting your hand. It wasn't that. That happened to me a couple times.

LL: Yes.

RM: What were the names of your brothers and sisters that were there?

RM: So you're French Canadian and Chippewa.

LL: My brother George was there. He was the oldest. I was the second. Ida was the

LL: Yes. What was the youngest one. There was something to do all the time, either working on the farm or going to school.

RM: Could you tell us a little about what life was like at the orphanage?

RM: Why did your... your father send you to the orphanage?

LL: It was a teaching... I went to school there and also the kids were used for chores.

My brother used to take care of the milking of the cows. Also we had to go out and look for them. We'd go out in the morning and look for them in the bushes. Then we had to listen for the bell that they wore around their neck. That's the way we found them.

Sometimes it was difficult to find them if they were far away or if they were quiet. The was one of our chores, chasing the cows. We also had to work on the farm, planting potatoes and other vegetables. What else did we do?

RM: So your father was left as Jesus with the four children.

RM: Did you have to keep the place in order, clean the facility?

LL: Yes. We were in the orphanage by then time.

LL: One of the chores I remember was in the spring of the year the potatoes were all put into cement room. We had to sort them out, throw out the rotten ones, which was a smelly job. One of the things I remember going to school was if you were caught doing something you shouldn't be doing you'd get a ruler on your wrist with the sharp edge hitting your hand. It wasn't flat. That happened to me a couple times.

RM: So when you came out how old were you about?

RM: What were the names of your brothers and sisters that were there?

LL: Oh, I don't exactly remember how old I was.

LL: My brother George was there. He was the oldest. I was the second. Ida was the third oldest. Walter was the youngest one. There was something to do all the time, either working on the farm or going to school.

LL: Close to a teenager.

RM: Why did your...your father sent you to the orphanage?

RM: Then where did you go?

LL: My parents separated then.

LL: Back to Saul, Saint Marie. We were living with??? my father was a bootlegger.

RM: What were their names?

RM: Tell me a little about that.

LL: George and Alice.

LL: My father used to make beer and moonshine. We used to help him with it. We also

RM: So your father was left at home with the four children. ing that you took into the

cold water and you turn the water on off shot the water into the bottle and knocked all

LL: Yes. We were in the orphanage by that time. bottle of yeast from the beer. That

would wash it out. That's all the cleaning we had. My brother George, he milked the

RM: How long did you stay in the orphanage? d Walter would have to go out and look

for the cows every day

LL: About 4 years.

RM: So when you came out how old were you about?

LL: Oh, I don't exactly remember how old I was.

RM: A teenager?

LL: Close to a teenager.

RM: Then where did you go?

LL: Back to Sault Saint Marie. We were living with??? my father was a bootlegger.

RM: Tell me a little about that.

LL: My father used to make beer and moonshine. We used to help him with it. We also had to clean all the bottles. He invented a bottle cleaning thing that you hook onto the cold water and you turn the water on and shot the water into the bottle and knocked all that yeast out. There was also, about a quarter of a bottle of yeast from the beer. That would wash it out. That's all the cleaning we had. My brother George, he milked the cows. All of us went out, well George, and I and Walter would have to go out and look for the cows every day.

RM: This was at the orphanage. What about making moonshine? Did you make moonshine?

LL: No, I didn't do that. All I did was wash out the beer bottles.

RM: What did your father do, sell the liquor?

LL: Oh yes. He had customers coming to pick it up. I sampled it myself and found that it was horrible.

RM: What did he do for a living when he wasn't making moonshine?

LL: I think he was a bar tender in a beer ???

RM: At Sault Saint Marie. After that what did you do? Did you go to high school at Sault Saint Marie?

LL: No, I went through grade school. High school, I never went to high school. I never graduated. But I got along.

RM: What did you do for a job? What occupation did you get into?

LL: A dollar a dry.



LL: The first job that I had was working in a shoe shine parlor, shining shoes for a dollar a day. I worked from 8:00 in the morning until 9:00 at night 7 days a week. My brother also worked there. Through working at the shoe shining parlor, it was located right next door to the theater. I got a job in the theater as an usher.

RM: Just the bottles. You'd clean the bottles. Any other jobs that you had?

RM: Was that the DePaul family at the Soo that had the theater?

LL: I was an usher.

LL: DePaul.

RM: Then what happened after that? Did you work on the ice boats?

RM: What was the name of your brother that was helping you?

LL: Yes, I worked on the ice boats as a porter.

LL: George.

RM: How did you get that job?

RM: So you did that for a while.

LL: Through talking to other people. That was a dollar a day.

LL: I did that until I got a job in the theater as an usher. The theater operated 7 days a week. It usually opened around noon and stayed...the box office closed at 10:00 at night. So it was a long time.

RM: How much did you get paid there? Usually the boat was like that.

LL: A dollar a day.

RM: During this time you didn't sell any of the moonshine, you weren't doing that.

LL: No, I never got a hold of that. As a porter for a while, what other jobs did you have on the boat?

RM: Just the bottles. You'd clean the bottles. Any other jobs that you had?

LL: Then I was promoted to second cook. I was making pastries.

LL: I was an usher.

RM: Decks and tables and whatnot?

RM: Then what happened after that? Did you work on the ore boats?

LL: Yes.

LL: Yes, I sailed on the ore boats as a porter.

RM: Did they feed the sailors well on the ore boats?

RM: How did you get that job?

LL: Very good. Otherwise they wouldn't last. They would get off.

LL: Through talking to other people. That was a dollar a day.

RM: How long did that last for how many years?

RM: So you worked as a porter on the ore boats. Did you have any wild rides in storms on the boats? Well, several years. There would be a lay-off every December until the spring.

LL: Yes, but none that I was really afraid. Usually the boat went like this.

RM: So what would you do in the winter?

RM: Did you get sea sick?

LL: Last

LL: No, that was one thing, I never got sea sick. A lot of people did.

RM: So you made pretty good money on the ore boat.

RM: You were lucky. So you were a porter for a while, what other jobs did you have on the boat?

LL: It was a 7-day a week job. Of course I started in the spring and usually end up in November... I should give you a chance to write some of this down.

LL: Then I was promoted to second cook. I was making pastries.

RM: I can ask questions. So you didn't have any real bad menus.

RM: Deserts and salads and whatnot?

LL: There were some. We'd always have something.

LL: Yes.

RM: But nothing that really worried you. What did you do when you got done? Did you

RM: Did they feed the sailors well on the ore boats?

LL: Very good. Otherwise they wouldn't last. They would get off.

RM: Sop you did that for how many years? While working on the ore boats, what did you

do?

LL: I don't know...several years. There would be a layoff every December until the spring. I'd get back home and loafed. I never had much schooling.

RM: So what would you do in the winter? Community, the Chippewa community over at the

Soo?

LL: Loaf.



LL: No. In fact, people thought they were a little down on the order of Indians.

RM: So you made pretty good money on the ore boat. ... But my background.

LL: Yes. It was a 7 day a week job. Of course I started in the spring and usually end up in November... I should give you a chance to write some of this down.

LL: The thing is we were considered low life people. You didn't say there was any

RM: I can ask questions. So you didn't have any real bad storms.

LL: There were some. We'd always have something. ... if they knew you were, that you'd be called that. So that was when you were growing up, pretty much throughout

RM: But nothing that really worried you. What did you do when you got done? Did you return to the Soo and develop a job there? ... over there?

LL: I didn't do anything. I just loafed.

RM: In the off season. Then when you got done working on the ore boats, what did you do?

LL: None whatever. No. Of course, there are different classes of Indians. I don't have

LL: I went back home and loafed. I never had much schooling.

RM: Did you...interact with the Indian community, the Chippewa community over at the Soo?

LL: No.

LL: No. In fact, people thought they were a little down on the order of Indians.

Actually, I didn't look like an Indian. My skin was white. But my background...

RM: It wasn't wise to publish it at that time?

LL: The thing is we were considered low life people. You didn't say there was any Indian in you. They'd all say you were stupid.

RM: So there was a lot of prejudice against the Indians, if they knew you were, then you'd be called that. So that was when you were growing up, pretty much throughout your life. What do you think of what's happened to day over at the Soo with the casino and all the expansion of the Indian community over there?

LL: They're some smart Indians.

RM: Do you benefit from any of that?

LL: None whatever. No. Of course, there are different classes of Indians. I don't have Indian blood.

RM: So you're not on the role then.

LL: No.

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LL: Yes. I did work for the automobile company, but I can't remember what year it was.

RM: Was it your father's family or your mother's family?

RM: Buick is there.

LL: Father. My mother was English...no not English.

LL: Buick, Chevrolet, DC Spark Plug.

RM: Irish? Scotch?

RM: So you worked there for a while.

LL: Scotch. McKenzie was her name.

LL: Yes, I worked at Chevrolet.

RM: And she was from the Soo as well.

RM: The spark plug place?

LL: She was from the Soo.

LL: DC Spark Plug. I hope that's where I was. If anybody reads this and checks

RM: What did you eventually do in terms of...or did you work on the ore boats all your life?  
through. The records go way back. They would be in the 20s.

RM: The 1920s is when you were doing that?

LL: No I didn't. I moved to Flint, MI and I got a job as a shoe shine boy. Shoe shine parlors opened up at 8:00 in the morning and closed at 8:00 at night. That was for a dollar a day plus tips. You should have given me some time. I would have sat down and wrote some of this out. It comes to your mind easier.

RM: How did you return to South Sault, Maine from Flint?

RM: Maybe I can...you were in Flint. Did you ever work for the automobile companies

LL: The Buick Buick I worked for in November until spring.

in Flint? You shined shoes, did you do anything else in Flint? Any other...

LL: Yes. I did work for the automobile company, but I can't remember what year it was.

RM: Where?

RM: Buick is there...

LL: Yes, I stayed there most of my years.

LL: Buick, Chevrolet, DC Spark Plug...

RM: When did you return to the Upper Peninsula?

RM: So you worked there for a while.

LL: What year did you just finish?

LL: Yes, I worked at Chevrolet.

RM: You were working down in Flint in the 1920s.

RM: The spark plug place?

LL: Yes.

LL: DC Spark Plug. I hope that's where I was. If anybody reads this and checks through. The records go way back. That would be in the '20s.

RM: The 1920s is when you were doing that?

LL: Yes. When you were growing up in the Upper Peninsula, were you an altar boy?

RM: then did you return to Sault Saint Marie from Flint?

LL: The boats didn't operate me in November until spring.

RM: Getting back to the orphanage, were you treated well there? Except for getting hit

RM: So you worked in Flint. Did you stay in Flint the rest of your life? Or did you move?

LL: Yes. I wouldn't say we were mistreated.

LL: Yes, I stayed there most of my years.

RM: So it's a pleasant memory for you. Were you able to leave the orphanage and take

RM: When did you return to the Upper Peninsula?

LL: What year did we just finish? *hole period. It was difficult to get a safe home, but there were 4 of us.*

RM: You were working down in Flint in the 1920s.

RM: Did your father ever visit you?

LL: Yes.

LL: I think I remember him visiting us once. He came up with a friend of his and had an

RM: Are your brothers and sister still alive?

LL: Yes. They're all scattered all over.

RM: Did you...when you were growing up in the orphanage, were you an alter boy?

LL: Yes. I learned the Latin Mass. *live in Marquette for a period of time*

LL: Yes.



RM: Getting back to the orphanage, were you treated well there? Except for getting hit on the hands with the ruler?

LL: Like nuts or berries?

LL: Yes. I wouldn't say we were mistreated.

LL: Oh yes. We went out and picked blueberries. They were used for the meals at the

RM: So it's a pleasant memory for you. Were you able to leave the orphanage and take trips home? Or once you were there...

RM: So that was how of the jobs, talking about the different jobs you had at the

LL: No, you stayed there for the whole period. It was difficult to get a ride home, but there were 4 of us.

LL: Yes, and like I said, my brother was in charge of the cows. We planted the gardens.

RM: Did your father ever visit you? apples and...

LL: I think I remember him visiting us once. He came up with a friend of his and had an old Ford. They came in to see us.

LL: No, there weren't any pears, but I remember lots of apples.

RM: When did you move to Marquette?

RM: So you'd pick them and they would use the apples for the...

LL: There again...if I was writing the history...

LL: Apple sauce.

RM: You'd get it then. But you did live in Marquette for a period of time.

RM: How about apple pie?

LL: Yes.

LL: Yes.

RM: When you were growing up, did you ever go out and gather things in the woods like nuts or berries?

LL: Yes, we did. It was not sufficient. It provided everybody with food that was living there. Who were the priests up there? Capuchin Fathers? Franciscan Fathers?

LL: Oh yes. We went out and picked blue berries. They were used for the meals at the orphanage. There was about 20 or 30 boys there, all young ones and in their teens.

LL: There were nuts. I don't remember what order they belonged to. If you went to the

RM: So that was one of the jobs, talking about the different jobs you had at the orphanage.

RM: Alright, well I think I got everything I wanted. Is there anything else you want to

LL: Yes, and like I said, my brother was in charge of the cows. We planted the gardens, potatoes and we had an orchard with apples and...

LL: No, that's about it.

RM: Pears?

RM: You have sons and daughters?

LL: No, there weren't any pears, but I remember lots of apples.

LL: Yes, I have two kids.

RM: So you'd pick them and they would use the apples for the...

RM: Do they live in Sault Ste. Marie or here in Marquette?

LL: Apple sauce.

LL: They live in Marquette.

RM: How about apple pie?

LL: Yes. Well this has been very interesting going some of this background. I know you've told me about it a while back, and I wanted to get it up here. It was very

RM: So the orphanage was self sufficient. It provided everybody with food that was living there. Who were the priests up there? Capatian Fathers? Franciscan Fathers? Were there nuns?

LL: There were nuns. I don't remember what order they belonged to. If you went to the library and looked up the old newspapers or whatever...

RM: Alright, well I think I got everything I wanted. Is there anything else you want to comment on that I haven't asked, that you remember?

LL: No, that's about it.

RM: You have sons and daughters?

LL: Yes, I have two kids.

RM: Do they live in Sault Saint Marie or here in Marquette.

LL: They live in Marquette.

RM: Okay. Well this has been very interesting getting some of this background. I know you've told me about it a while back and I wanted to get it on tape. It was very interesting. Very good. Thank you.