

Russel Magnaghi (RM): Interview with Ernie Ronn, Au Train Michigan, December 15th, 1998.

RM: Good afternoon Ernie, could you tell us your birthdate? Let's start with that.

Ernie Ronn (ER): June 15, 1925.

RM: Ok, and could you tell us a little about your, let's start out with your family. Where is your family originally from in the old country?

ER: I don't know the exact, my paternal grandparents all I know is that they lived near the Swedish border and according to one of my uncles they migrated to Ishpeming in 1892, they came with, as I recall, five children born in Finland, and four were born in America, so they had a family of nine. Then my maternal, they settled by the way in Ishpeming, Jasper Street, and Otto Ronn went to work as soon as they got to Ishpeming in one of the mines I believe it was the Holmes mine or the 16 mine I'm not sure and that began the family history in mining. Then my maternal grandparents came they came from that part of Finland called Savo.

RM: How do you spell that?

ER: S A V O. And my mother was born in Finland.

RM: Now what was her family?

ER: Marttinen, M A R T T I N E N, Otto and Ida Marttinen, and three daughters were born in this country. They settled in Negaunee on Ann Street, and since 1892 today there is the fifth generation of the extended family working for Cleveland Cliff, to the best of my knowledge that since Otto Ronn started in 1892 there hasn't been a day of Cleveland Cliff operations on the market range where one or more of the family hasn't been working. And they've got a family history, now that's more than 410 years of total man years. I was born, delivered at the Ishpeming hospital that was owned by Cleveland Cliff at the time and Dr. March delivered me, he was the company doctor, so I was a company bred right from the word go. Then we came to live on Ann Street and where I lived it was a company house and located in small little community like 32 houses, directly between the Moss or the Athens mine on the south, the Negaunee mine on the North I lived in the shadows of them mines and played around them and intrigued by the mines since the day I can remember. A lot of people I guess, they were right, but they say that I was destined to be a miner, but be that as it may, but Ann Street was a community in a small cluster home. There were six or seven different nationalities, and they were like a close knit group,

RM: So they all got along?

ER: Oh it was beautiful.

RM: Who were some of the?

ER: The Fin, Italian, English, Swede,

RM: French Canadians?

ER: I think there's French, yeah the Majoy's [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] were French. And most of them were migrant friends that came from the old country so I got addicted to them, I would talk Fin as good or better than English. I know Finn before English, but they always had time and that for me and when I heard them talk about their life in the mine, so if you go back my seventy three years and the

opportunity to talk to people that had predated me by equal or more time, so I got to meet a lot of people that were way back in the darkest days of mining. And I spent countless days like we are, talking and listening and they were my role models, and are, they always have been. And they had a style of life that I haven't seen the equal of it, they had a kind of simple philosophy that they wanted to leave a better world for people like us that follow them. And better than they found it and whatever job you done you do the best you knew how, it might not be good enough for somebody else but you got to look at yourself in a mirror. And I found out the easiest way to do it is do your best, if you are trying to get by with half an effort your working hard, you're not doing nothing. And I think the most important value they gave me is that in the, in one's life, it is like a card game, you play the cards that life deals you in the best way you can, if you were destined to be a miner you'll do it, and play by the rules as you know them, and you never play the game of solitaire, its always together, and you never deal from the bottom of the deck. And that's my philosophy I, and I was brought up, I found out at an early age to tell the truth is a lot better than to tell a lie because you got a hell of a lot harder licking if you lied. So growing up on Ann Street was just about a half a mile away was an old abandoned mine, deep mine, real dark, green water, used to go down there skinny dipping, we never had slacks or no swimsuits or nothing else, and learned to swim down there and the comical thing down there was we had an old mine plank off the bank that was our diving board, and we would through a white rock where, if you could find a little cosmetic bottle like whole cream, we would throw it in the dark water and then you would swim underwater, you jump off of that board and you jump feet first, and I don't know how we ever got it. But you would cup your testicles with your left hand, you didn't have no jock strap, and you would raise your right hand and hollered "Geronimo", I don't know if it came from that parachute or what but the irony of that is that we were probably eighth grade or ninth grade and our parents took us to Champion Beach, four or five of us, and they had to get bathing trunks and that so we went out there and right away we went swimming and they had a raft out maybe a hundred feet off of shore, we were all good swimmers, so we went out there and we had the trunks but that damn force of habit, we were jumping off of that diving board you know doing the life guard ___asked us where in the hell did you people come from and we told him. And then right on the end of Lincoln Street, the Moss family, they had a real beautiful mansion, it was a mining family, and they had a swimming pool, boy we idolized that swimming pool. We didn't give damn about the mansion but that swimming pool.

RM: Were you able to use it?

ER: No, no, we just looked and not hang around too long. But we went to school, Park Street School and it was about a mile from home, by the way we never rode a school bus we walked back and forth to school, and up to the fifth grade and we had a superintendent lady by the name of Maude Darl [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] she was really strict, and one day one of my classmates Bob Leef [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and I, I think we were about 4th grade, we went downstairs in the boys room, and the urinals were there and we got into a contest there and it wasn't, you know standing in front of the urinal and that, we got next to it up on the wall and see how high you could reach up on the wall, and I don't know how she ever found out, she found out, boy there was no compassion by the year and down there, she had a real ridged ruler, the evidence was still wet on the wall, both sides of the hand, bang bang, both hands. And I swear that I went for four or five years that I never needed a ruler the imprint was still there. When I got older I thought to myself thank god that if she had hit the other part of the body with more force I'd identify that with crime. [Laughter] The only bad memory that I had of school, eighth or ninth grade, Ann street was the other side of the track, we had moonshine there we had

everything. And we had a teacher and for some reason he had no use for miners, and I took vocational course in high school you know I'm never going to be a teacher, well to him that was lazy. It was taking the easy way out. Then right away, those were his exact words, your destined to be a no count period, never amount to a hill of beans, and if you lived on Ann street, that you going to be nothing but another dirty drunken miner, and those were embedded in my soul ever since then and to be casual, to be lenient on him, pompous son of a bitch if I could see him today I would hit him. I mean he was just that terrible. My daughter went to school many years later and another teacher told her in front of the class that the two things he hated worst was the, anybody that was a democrat or union. There's only one in the class that fit both categories and then my son is now a doctor, he was told by a teacher when they were leaving the classroom that, hey Ronn, not call him Jeff, hey Ronn tomorrow you are bringing a hundred word report on unions, what does a seventh or eighth grader know about you know? So he came home and he called me at the office and he was crying, told me what happened, I called that teacher, he worked in the mine during the summer, the laziest damn thing that ever put on a pair of clothes, and I gave him all kinds of hell. I said why did you ask somebody else to write about a dentist or a store keeper? So I called my secretary and I dictated a hundred word to her, I brought it home and I said copy it. The next day he came home with an A+ on it, I don't think he read the damn thing, but that was the best paper I ever wrote. So growing up was kind of interesting and then I was really attached to my grandmother and my grandfather they lived on the other side of the street and they had two or three cows and used to help her in the summer go along the railroad tracks and she'd cut the grass with a little sickle and then tie it with a rope and I'd carry it to the barn, nobody could have ever been closer to a grandparent then I was to them. And right on the other side of the street I had two uncles and their families lived, and so it was an entertaining and then when you got a little bit older and went down Iron Street, and saw the miners on a Saturday night and stuff and life in general is a happy time in my life, and nobody died rich over there but you died with a feeling of much more important than money and I've carried that all my life.

RM: Now just kind of back up here, could you talk a little about the little community on Ann Street, you said that you had your family was there, you had your grandparents, and then two uncles?

ER: And aunt,

RM: Were their other people from the, other Fins from the same town that everybody was from, were they all like from the same place in Finland?

ER: No, not to my knowledge. They, the largest majority were the Finnish people and the Negaunee mine was basically more Fins than any, but they all, well nobody is perfect, but they never, there was no long grudges or that, and if somebody got hurt at the mine or death in the family everybody bled you know, it was a period in American life that I've travelled quite a bit but I have never seen it duplicated, even know with the newer generations out there it is nothing like it was, I mean they are different. Now they all own them homes, they were all company houses, they had no insulation they had real poor wiring, only wood skirting, and your house could be here and there would be a cow barn here, a cow barn here, and another, the barns no more than 25 or 30 feet apart. The outhouses, the lot that I lived in, I later bought the house, but imagine a 50 by 100 foot lot, had a ten room house, two story house, the new part was added in 1902, the new part, then there was a, a lot of the yards had double story barns, people had cows or stored wood or stuff, and then you had the outhouse there and then in our yard, we had nine trees like living in a little jungle, and the all the was just about the color of war it was

the south wind you got the dust and that from the Athens mine and it was from the North that you got it from the Negaunee mine, and infested with rats,

RM: The houses, were, and the barns?

ER: Yeah. And the open dump was only a half a mile away, and in the winter them rats would come around the barns, and in the house they could get in there. That's where I learned to shoot, I used to go down to the dump with my father and lay on the bank and watch them rats scurrying around and shooting them. And for some reason the rats infested the Negaunee mine. When you got underground, the rats were unbelievable, it was like cotton tailed rabbits.

RM: Is it true that some of the miners would feed them and take care of them?

ER: Used to feed them for many reasons, but usually it was to trick them. One of the things they done at the Negaunee mine we'd put a saw, a 3 and a half cross cut saw and lay it on the ground and the ground was always damp or wet and then we would take a copper wire and put it on that and then drape it over a ___ wire, and put food on there. And that hungry rat would come and take that, and get that jolt and he would be jumping up and down and squealing and then momentum would get him off and then he started to a hiding place, oh we got a lot of them, they were brave you put the food right there, especially after a mine shut down or a long weekend, oh boy they were hungry, I poked a bar through many of them and they were ugly, mangy, and ore colored but a part of life. You could be eating your lunch and they would run over your food.

RM: Is it true that the miners wanted to keep the rats because if there were a,

ER: I don't know if, they came into the mine, the Athens mine didn't have them,

RM: Oh so it wasn't all the mines that had them?

ER: No just the Negaunee and the Moss mine, and the Mather mines to my knowledge never had rats. But one thing about the rats, they did serve underground, in the softer mines there is always moving and crushing, you could hear dirt drifting and that normally, and then sometimes you could hear the creaking of the timber, a lot of times when you see the rats running there's kind of, they were inside there, and you could kind of tell there when you saw the rats, pretty soon it would start shaking, like in California the earthquake comes from the bottom, and underground it comes from the top and the sides as it crushes you know, then you just got the hell out of there in a hurry before you get buried up.

RM: So you actually saw this and did this?

ER: Oh yeah, many times the place come down and you'd have to run.

RM: And the rats kind of warned you in advance.

ER: Well up in the sub and that, I don't know if the rats ever warned us up there, because when it started moving we knew to get out. But the rats were a good indication that they were. The miner usually depended on his eyes and his hearing, when you would see stuff, you could always tell when some area came crashing down you would have that rush of air and dust and that.

RM: Now did, living in this Finnish community were any, were there any different traditions, holidays that were celebrated, special foods that the family ate or made?

ER: Well the Finnish people, regardless of what part of Finland they come, they got pretty traditional, you know, more staple you know, meat and potatoes and lot of fish, and butter milk and they made their own yogurt and rye bread and salt fish and so forth, then the Italians they had their pastas and their ethnic foods cooked with wine and English people they had their pasties and stuff like that. The pasties then became a staple all through the area you know, and they all had their traditions and that, that they brought from the old country. The Finnish people they were great people with the axes and saw and stuff like that, and the Italians and French people were masons and rock work, and the whole community we had our own moonshine, as a matter of fact the house that we lived in on that barn, in big black tar letters union, union label, and to me the first time I saw that, it didn't take our labor organization they were advertising local moonshine, union label 50 cents a pint. [Laughter]. Right out in the main street, they didn't have to advertise it locally we all know where to get it from, but those that came from the other side of the tracks they had to find it themselves.

RM: Now did, did everybody make moonshine?

ER: No, no, no some families made moonshine, and wine in the grappa, and other had a few chickens, and the Finnish people usually had the cows and, it's almost a self-sustaining community. You to buy salt and stuff like that but,

RM: Now did the people there have large gardens, large vegetable gardens?

ER: No plots, there was one open field down below I remember my grandfather had a little plot where he had potatoes, and then in their yards they might have had enough room to plant a little bit. And then on the other side of the street between the sand cut and where I lived there is a place there for small gardens and you know, you had to have something to supplement the, because some of the people were working 20 21 cents an hour and 10 or 12 hours a day.

RM: Now did they have, were they producing food, enough food,

ER: Just to get by on.

RM: But to last through the, like the potatoes did they grow enough to keep,

ER: Yeah potatoes and that was a staple and, the grow seasons were that, and it was living from pay day to pay day, you got paid twice a month and the timsters would come twice a day, a lot of the people never had cars or that and they would take your order for tomorrow and they would bring what you ordered the day before and you went to pay the bill when you could on payday. And a lot of the merchants were former miners or migrants themselves and during the real hard times they stood by the miners, they figured that they were going to starve together. But nobody of them migrants died a rich man.

RM: Now with the moonshine was that pretty much, Fins didn't get involved in that?

ER: Drinking [laughter].

RM: Making?

ER: No.

RM: So it was pretty much Italians with distill or making wine,

ER: Some of the Fins made their home brew, you know beer, and then they used to make like a soft drink root beer out of molasses and that.

RM: This was the Fins who were making this?

ER: Yeah. And they all canned, you didn't have no refrigerator, you canned berries and fruit and canned meat. But I always felt that them old grandmas they could make a tasty meal out of a boot, I mean, they always homemade stuff, I used deliver the pails to the mine when my grandfather and dad, I couldn't have been more than 8 or 9 years old and they used to come up for lunch, and I would have to go under the railroad cars and I was dirtier than the miners when I come home, but you know all them old people they them old miners, the Fins and any nationality, they always used to tease me and I could hardly ever leave them, one of their hands would hold up a piece of homemade cake or that, and they would say well I couldn't eat this, honesty I felt, and still do, that they had told their mother or their wife to put an extra piece for that kid that comes. And one thing that, really haunting at that young age, went you went to see and they all had raggedy clothes on and they had already worked four hours underground and then had to climb back up, and their faces were dog tired, and their eyes, the whites of their eyes were like a haunting look, you wonder what's on their mind, what did they leave underground or what kind of hell they going to hit. And out in the nice bright sunshine for that 45 minutes, then go back underground. At the Negaunee mine, when they came up for lunch there was 52 steps from the dry down to the tunnel, and you go back 1400 feet underground on that cage, then you might have to walk in a half a mile or more and then some climb up a 150 or 200 feet on a ladder and then come back at half time, eat, and then go back down. During the course of the day 208 steps to climb, walked probably 2 or 3 miles underground and climb about 4 or 500 feet. I think once I saw that and even before when I saw how they were struggling to survive after they left the mine, I didn't know it at the time but I think that idea of the union was, actually was Ann Street and came to the location in Negaunee and some in Ishpeming, I think everybody would agree that Ann Street was the kind of the, hot bed or the embryo that the steel workers union was formed in Negaunee.

RM: You mean with the people in that area?

ER: It was the first born Americans like my dad and ___ and all of them, and they knew what their father in laws and fathers went through, and the company had beat the hell out of them for 100 years. That they weren't going to take it lying down no more, and that's when they went on strike for 104 days.

RM: This is in '46?

ER: '46 yeah.

RM: Now that we are talking about, we got into the influences that you were effected by, you sometimes hear that the, there was one book that came out that Robert Tremour [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] wrote about how the company was very concerned and Mather introduced a lot of progressive measures to protect the miners, was that really? This happened probably about 1910 so this is earlier, is that kind of the tradition that the miners lived with or is that the story?

ER: What I try to do, what I refer to as book two, I read a lot of Terry Reynolds [SPELLED PHONETICALLY]

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ER: And then in addition to that, some of Burt Boland's writing [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], and Burt is a close personal friend of mine, I got to say that originally I was doubtful and maybe a little bit critical of Mather, 1903 when he announced that corporate paternalism that was the slogan and that he was going to have shower facilities for the men, that was 1903 when he was saying, well there was no showers at the Negaunee mine yet in 1940 and that I know because I went there when I watched the men wash up in little basins. He, I'm saying he tried to do his best, I'm not calling him a liar, but a lot of people, and maybe I'm wrong but I got to be proven wrong, Cleveland Cliff is not a solely owned company, Cleveland Cliff had partners and all of the ore mines they never used to ponder it on their own, and I think in his heart he was right, we are talking about Bill Mather, he is the son, in his heart he wanted to do it, but he wasn't going to be able to do nothing without the consent of Bethley [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] or Steel or any of them. And I think I was premature in criticizing him from that part of it, I credit him when he built the town of Gwinn in honor of his mother, or wife's mother's maiden name, anyhow, Cliff done that on their own, and they talk about pension plans, the miner never had a pension plan until 1954, 6 weeks straight to get it. And talked about company houses and stuff, but anyhow,

RM: I think you were saying that come earlier the company housing was very marginal,

ER: Bad, yeah. And even during his tenure, they done very little repairs on them houses, I bought the house that I lived in when they sold them in 1950, '49 or '50. They used to have a maintenance program once a year they would come by and if you wanted your own wallpaper, you had a choice, you buy the wallpaper and they would supply the labor, or you buy the labor, so most of the people had the company buy the paper because we had two people on Ann Street that would pay per room for a dollar or two, you know, and the only maintenance yearly was they'd have a chimney sweeper come by and clean the chimneys you know they were all wood burning, coal burning, and then when they sold the houses, I bought the 10 room house for 3000 dollars. And, but,

RM: So that 3,000 dollars that was quite a bit of money back in,

ER: Yeah, but you didn't get the lot, they kept the lot. The mineral rights and everything. The, getting back to Mather, I don't have time to show you today but through Burt Boyan [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] he gave me some stuff that through his research and that and one of them documents that Burt didn't give me, too young brothers, one worked in a mine they were remodeling a house in Ishpeming, a couple years ago, and they tore down a wall and they found an unsigned seven page letter hidden in the wall, and you look at it, October 1st, 1913 and they were agents, they didn't use their name or that but they were spying. If they knew you were a union agitator at the mine, they had your so called blacklist and everything else, and when you looked at that real close, I wonder if Cleveland Cliff wasn't being spied on by one of their partners, I'm not sure but they named the Moss Mine there and they named the mine captains, and then ironically at that time, the mine captains were active trying to organize the men, two of them, and if you were a merchant and contributed ten dollars to the union and their effort to organize they had your name there, that you were a union sympathizer. And then true Burt that first 100 days Mather was there and they had telegrams that they sent coded and Burt by the way tells me he got the decoding book and he decoded them for me and he gave me permission to use them and the whole thing comes down to a nutshell, there's a lot of people that are apprehensive of knowing the truth, and I have no axe to grind with Cleveland Cliff, hell they have been part of our family's life, but I

personally think that in order to know which way Cliff and their labor relations are going, you have to know where you've been. And the first 100 years were the dark days of the mine, and if I was, was or had been a top man for Cleveland Cliff my last 52 years I would be proud of seeing what I'm going to write. That sort of you are good people, you have, you've fought us hard but fair, you know that, and back in '46 I was called everything you want to be called, my life been threatened, but you can't deny the fact that in the 53 years almost now, it, the miners and the union, the miners that built the union, a good union to begin with, a great union, and built Cliff from a good mining company to a lower class, that we have come up concurrently, we didn't kill the first ____ they haven't killed the people that fed the goose either and Cliff right now just battled out of foreign steel, they will say that they got no clue what the workers are producing.

RM: Now let's just kind of go back, you mentioned some of the, maybe attempts, were there any attempts in the period from 1900 to 1946 where the miners tried to organize.

ER: Oh yeah, a lot of documentation there. A lot of times they brought in armed guards, militia,

RM: Now you had that in your second,

ER: Either in or it's going to be, and national guard, naval reserve and pinkertons and locally, they had, they called them prominent community leaders, they would ____ if they needed help to starve out the miners or that, all they had to do is give the word and they would come and lift the companies boots and what can we do for you now. Oh they literally beat the hell out of the union there is no denying it, and they had these immigrants trapped. Where are they going to go? They came with nothing, they were making nothing, and they were told if you do like it there is always another boat ready to come over. Many left their families over there in hope to get them here and others if they wanted to leave how were they going to get back home? So the company had it their way, I mean you got to remember a lot of the migrants couldn't speak the English Language and but somehow they stuck it out.

RM: So now how do the, unless you go into that in your book, what was the thing that got the miners to organize in 1946?

ER: The three main issues were recognizing the union first of all, that we were a legal representation, and then union checkoff, an 18 and a half cent, that's all we looked for.

RM: 18 and a half cents?

ER: Wage increase.

RM: Oh increase.

ER: And it took 104 days to get it without formal recognition you had nothing, and to get the union dues checkoff, the company fought as hard as ever because they knew without a checkoff you are not going to get the money you need, break you financially, and that took, that was a critical issue. Then that was followed then by pensions and insurance and then mine safety came, and a grievance procedure.

RM: So these were all things that came in later years and other contracts?

ER: Yeah it's been step by step and figure when I went to work my wages were 62 and a half cents an hour, and now the average is around 15 dollars you know, and add no pensions at all but now they have, and, and that first strike was a bitter one, I mean you had shooting you had a lot of violence but both

sides learned from that, a lot of that stuff was never repeated again. We've had long strikes but we've never had any of that stuff anymore.

RM: What happened there, the company brought in,

ER: In the '46 strike they went out and they encouraged quite a few people to scab our own people and when it came to the make or break point they made a concerted effort to open the Mather A. mine. That was the biggest mine, and they had a truck, they surrounded it with heavy wire meshing and the scabs would congregate in a certain place they would drive through the picket line you know, and the police department and all were there, but mass picketing and that finally broke that down and then the company started trying to come into their senses that you know the tricks of the best ain't going to work no more. And it, and a lot of people don't understand it, that as bitter as the strike was, the day of the strike ended and the men went back to work the relationship between the mine management and the men was as good as ever before. They were all close knit, they had their differences but the problem was who in the hell was the cause of this strike, who was the ring leader, and I still believe after first blaming it on Charlie Stakehold [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and Cleveland Cliff now I've learned and I'm positive the real guys pulling the strings were the partner, not them, and Cliff couldn't come out and say it, still couldn't, but I can. So over the 50 years the relationship has been real good you know, after a while if you time, making sure your letter that I sent two years ago when they had that big family picnic or birthday party at the superior dome, I sent them a letter that if somebody told me that 50 years ago, I would have, your nuts, and I gave him my answer from him too that, it's easy to knock somebody down but sometimes you have to recognize the fact that there is some good being done too.

RM: Yeah sort of to go back to some of the origins of this you were talking about the influence of the Ann Street community and how everybody was together in that. Were the Finns in that community, they sometimes talk about the radical Finns, religious Finns, what side of the,

ER: In our area there might have been a little of that, but I would say most of them were in today's terminology middle of the roaders you know what I mean? Just with the union people that went to church as well as went to the bars, and you know the amount of Finnish people there is, is kind of a different, oh I don't know, different attitudes but in the mines I would say that the older the Fin they were a little bit more reluctant or apprehensive, they had been beaten down so many times that then once the union got in then they would come. Negaunee was basically a union town, I don't know when I grew up they had two legends that in Chippewa language Ishpeming translated into heaven, and Negaunee into hell, so I always said that my father came from heaven and my mother from hell, that I am a product of heaven and hell and that part of Finland that my mother come from they always joke that the people that came from Sovo, they were harder to tame, it took two days longer to tame them than a wolf, so now you know what my background was.

RM: This was a little story the Fins told?

ER: Yeah, and some of them, I always remember Nick Haugenen [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] he said that his father always told him two things he said that you never do, you join the Knights of ___ but that was the kind of the upper crust, or vote republican, I said I never done either. But no the miners in general, I don't know if you read that storybook Christmas '43, Christmas eve is in that book, that really describes it all, that if you went down there and seen that elderly Fin singing silent night, you had to be impressed and you would be hard pressed to look around all them migrants and tell me which was who, and they

were just like that and when they, Christmas all the spirit and brotherhood, it didn't end with Christmas it was always among them. And all those things I wrote that was the one that I really, you know, that brought back the memory.

RM: One more thing on the past there you've mentioned that that was Saturday night in Negaunee, could you describe some of that in detail?

ER: It was a hell raising night, every mine seemed to have their preferred bar, the Moss mine men used to like the Manhattan bar, some of the Athens mine men used to like Tony's bar, Harris's bar, the real confirmed miner drunk they liked them all, they didn't discriminate. But the one that had, a man could write, Vick Polumaki [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] he had a bar around then and lumber jacks and the miners they just flocked in there it was a hell raising thing. Saturday night Vick had all he do and once he opened the keg of beer the tab was almost left open, and one story, and I know the two women, Saturday night they got into a hell of a fight, pulling each other's hair, tearing at their clothes, pretty soon they were on the floor rolling and fighting, so Vick watched it long enough and he took one of the lumberjacks on the other side of the bar and the lumber jack was drunk, Vick told him he said take a glass of that cold beer and splash it up in her ass, he said they will quit fighting. So the lumberjack didn't say nothing he took that glass of cold beer and got off his stool and went, pretty soon the target presented itself and swoosh the fight ended right there. It didn't faze Vick, and the back of this bar looked like a jewelry shop, lumberjacks would come in Friday night, they would be broke Saturday afternoon. They would hop their watch and then Sunday they would get back to the mining camp and then the next time they would come in they get their watch Friday night, they would have it for an hour or two, and then the chief of police, what is that show, Andy Griffen, they guarded what was in the trunk, it was the same they would go there and drink and then get up the next morning and go to work. And Vick always told the story of one of the old lumberjacks came in with a dirty hangover and asked Vick what's good for a hangover, and Vick said the best thing for a hangover is cold water. The lumber jack looked and him and said oh the best won't do much for me I drink so much just give me anything from one them bottles up on the shelf. [Laughter]. Yeah there would be fights and stuff but summertime the doors would be open and somebody come by with an accordion or something and you know, then you could play the old nickelodeons for a nickel, and then there was some people come down with their little box, they sell pasties and stuff, it was a rocking and rolling time and at one time I think you could get legal liquor and that outnumbered the churches about 5 to 1.

RM: The bars.

ER: Yeah. Churches were seldom full and the bars were always full. And they both served their purpose.

RM: Could you talk a little about the history of the manuscript. The first one and the second one, how did you come to write it, what were the circumstances that got you to write that manuscript?

ER: 1979 Cleveland Cliff, I think it was Burt Boyan [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] asked me to write a story when they published the Mather mine book, its right there, and I wrote the story and then Dr. Elsinga [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], I went to see him in his official office, and he told me that his wife Kay had read that and she said well you got to tell him that he got to write more. Well then our office in Negaunee for many years was the ground floor, the people would just stop in, did you remember so and so, why don't you write it we would like to know. So it was all that kind of encouragement I had never had no idea, hell I don't have the, do it all to write, more or less it's a favor to people, I hear that if I

wrote something here you take that, well then it kept building, building, building, more and more people and somehow the word got out and when they published our story in the market monthly then I really came out with the rest of the book and I wrote the rest of it. They had a real yearning for that, what I tried to cover in that first part, and in the second and if nothing else comes out of it maybe somebody better qualified than that would get the ___ write it, I can write it the only way I know how and that's from my personal and my own heart. I would never, I would never, try to varnish it or tarnish it, if I done anything to, against my conscience to tell it, fearing what others would think about it or how others would want it, I would be doing a disfavor and a dishonor to them people and I would never do that. I soon be put in jail for Christ's sake than do that, there is no intent here to harm anybody but to let the people know that there is more to iron ore mining than investors and management. The fact that, and I have always said this and when Mr. Burt found that ore in 1844, that ore was more a tinker's dime and that day, but then when Mr. Jackson and all the investors came to put money, that wasn't work a tinker's dime either, together they didn't mean a damn thing. They needed people to go down there and get it. Now the people that went down there to get it didn't mean nothing without the other two, trying to point out that it took three, and we have eulogized Burt long enough and I'm not taking away any credit from him, nor am I taking any credit away from the big mining executives, but I am looking for a fair shake for those people that have been forgotten, and not to put them up on a pedestal, the miners did never wanted to be put on a pedestal, they never looked for prominent or, it was, they recognize us for what we were.

RM: In your years with dealing with miners and in the mine and so on, did you ever hear of anybody even at a distance or anything, any of the miners ever writing about their experiences in the mine?

ER: There may be, just yesterday, one of my former directors he wrote a book about away from the mines, I haven't even read it yet, he retired many years ago he lived in Wisconsin and just what I glanced at it, it's a little different, it's more like my second book, this first book is more the human, there may be, I've seen a few books you know, some people write on the research like Terry Reynolds [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], he wrote from his own heart, and I am writing from my heart.

RM: No that's what I am talking about has,

ER: Not around here that I am aware of, Leo Lefonse [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] been doing a good job, Leo he has been appearing before different groups, a lot of artifacts you know, and I understand Leo has a few video tapes and that and he has been doing a real good job. Leo, to my knowledge never worked underground, he is speaking for his uncles and other people, Leo has worked for Cliff for a long time but he has been on surface, but if there is, I got to say I'm not aware, somebody that was in my capacity, see I worked 28 years for the international union and before that roughly 14, 15 years active in local union and so forth.

RM: So you were in terms of your career then you started working the mine?

ER: '43, a week after my 18th birthday, and then I left the mines February 1st, of '59 and then went to work for the union, and I retired from the union in May 1st, '87 and to my knowledge the other stockmen that worked in Negaunee, Jack Paul [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], Jack worked for about 20 years, Dominic Jacobetti worked 10 years for the international. Leo Puse [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] worked about seven, Leo never worked underground, Leo is in real bad health now he is in the nursing home now, and same parallel, I don't believe there is anyone that has been there as long as I have.

RM: Now getting back to your manuscript we have been talking about, so you went and you [tape skips]. You went and you got this encouragement to write it, and what was the process, how did you write it?

ER: Sometime in, for many years I never went out for lunch, I would be in the office for an hour, and I would take scrap paper and I would write, and I would put it on the side.

RM: This wasn't for the book this was just for,

ER: At the time I had no intention of writing a book, just kind of memories that people are asking and stuff,

RM: Reminiscence.

ER: And gradually felt that oh you got to write a book, you got to write a book, you got to write a book, and you got to do it before it's too late. I didn't know if they knew something that I didn't know. So then gradually, then finally when I got all that stuff,

RM: That was about what year?

ER: I finally make the decision to 3, 4, years ago, 5 years ago. What I did was I called Dr. Elsinga up because I knew Dr. Elsinga was interested and I knew that they had worked on Charlie Stakel's memoirs,

RM: How do you spell Stakel?

ER: S T A K E L. He was a general manager for many years, and I asked him if he would be interested that I would bring him all this stuff, I brought it over something, not that big of a box, him and Kay get working at it, and then they got to help Dixie Franklin [SPELLED PHONETICALLY]

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2 SIDE A

RM: Okay.

ER: The manuscript that you got now is basically the editing of Dixie Franklin [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and Dixie you know she lives in Niagara, Wisconsin, and she is busy and that so there is a lot of delays and she picked what she thought you know, and if you go through all of it and compare a scribble there and typing you probably see the equivalent of another book or two in addition to what she, in other words it could be a book, 1 a 1 b, but and then after that was done when I had prepared something like that red one I gave you, that's what I gave Ellwood, and Ellwood right off the back after he looked at it that's when he asked me if he could give the university a ___ and Ellwood was one of the more, supportive, him and Dr. Elsinga [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] that the book would be published one way or the other but I said what would do I know about it, I still don't know nothing about it.

RM: Now was that, no the manuscript that you gave to Ellwood, was before, Dixie Franklin?

ER: Yeah, and in there I got a copy in the office in Negaunee because I got too much paper I asked them to hold it there and in there, there's a intermix what was one book too and what was one book one and now the thing is in book two to try to take out everything that, and it's going to be, whoever is going to edit the second one they will have a chance to look, some of it might be appropriate to put even in book two, certain segments. You don't know what others know about book one.

RM: So then this came then to final stage was just sent to Ellwood then gave it to or brought it to the NMU press and then that's kind of the,

ER: No, who we brought it to at Northern but he tell me we were talking one day, see I took Ellwood and Dixie Franklin and Dr. Elsinga [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and his wife, I took them on a tour of Negaunee. So they knew exactly the area that I was talking about. You know that when they see Ann street they know where I lived they know where the mine, to give them a more idea. And that's when they started about publishing the book and Ellwood said well Northern has a book ___ and then the other suggestion was Cleveland Cliff has that publishing house in Cleveland where they get most of their publishing and, I do believe they checked with some others to get some ideas but right now it looked like they centered in on Northern. There was a time a couple years ago, there was one party urging me to let it go to Wayne State you know, and I got nothing against Wayne State, but I talked to, if there was going to be any value in the book in history it should be on locally or whether it's Northern or some other publisher out there. So that is where she stands right now.

RM: You started out now years ago you had no idea you were going to produce two books really?

ER: No I, once Dr. Elsinga [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] looked at it, and I told him you know there is two requests, what it was like growing up I tried to fill that one first, and the other one that's where the idea that two books, actually there's a third one really should be written but I don't have the time, but and like I say that if it gets some of these people the information that they wanted, it's all worthwhile, as a matter of fact, even if it didn't its worthwhile to me, just to relive the past and I have no regrets. And what paper you see right there I'm exaggerating a bit, but if I say that every piece of paper it'd fill five of them boxes, I never dreamt someone wanted it.

RM: And you are saying the papers for the books?

ER: Yeah, a lot of handwriting there, Dixie Franklin [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was like you never wrote that out by hand and I said you better believe I did.

RM: Now where are the, now you said you had some papers in Negaunee?

ER: These are the papers in the second book, I'll check with her maybe tomorrow and if she is caught if she is really busy Christmas time in the evening you know if you want I can take them and get them to you if you want to have some secretaries type and once that is all done if you are interested in, if you want a better feel for it after you look at the material, if you got people there that want to start looking at it and editing that with the possibility of putting out another book we can go from there.

RM: Now one thing that sort of comes to mind here, and I am sort of thinking out loud, if there are two books, I don't know should they, I mean they could be published as two volumes, not as two, you know you have two separate books but you could have volume 1 and volume 2, you could give it a general title and then each one Volume 1 would be given one title and the Volume 2,

ER: And that would be published different times but,

RM: Right, right,

ER: That's up to you people. And like the title might be, a good title,

RM: What are some of the titles that you've had go through,

ER: I remember writing a letter on what it was like living in the shadows of two mine shafts and working in the dark world underground, but that's a long title and that,

RM: So living in the shadow of two mine shafts and working in the,

ER: Working in the dark strange world underground. But the 52 steps, see everybody was impressed with them, see when I was a kid when I went to it looked like a heck of a long stairs and there was no , the first night I went to work June 22, I actually counted them, 52 steps, and that was to the cage and then underground.

RM: Any others? Do you have any other titles or something over the years?

ER: Best title maybe it would be the work of the most incompetent [laughter].

RM: It's probably in the book, could you tell us what it was like the first day when you went into the mine, kind of describe that experience?

ER: It's in there but, when I stepped off the cage, first of all when you went into the cage, you know and that cage went real fast, and when you went by the level it just, that little lights and then when you stepped off the cage you go straight into maybe 60, 40 watt bulbs hanging here and there, damp and dirty, and there is little trucks there with timber on them, some stuff to go up, a big pump house on the side, pumping water, what did they say 10,000 gallons a minute out of the mine. And we were told, and when you went underground hell you had all clean overalls and boots and we were told to wait until the boss took us in after everybody else went it, and then when he walked,

RM: Now were you all new, now was everybody new in that crew?

ER: No, I believe was probably in the modern times, probably the youngest man to go in, because I went 18 on my birthday I got examined and I went to work a week after. And one of my classmates was 6 months older than I am so I think I was the youngest man in the 40's to ever go. Before that they had 13, 14 year olds. But anyhow my first job was inside, they had these water ditches that ran from inside taking the water out where the pumps were and that water ditch was used, miners would throw their scraps and their dead rats, and that was your, and on the level that was your toilet facilities, you didn't have no restrooms or water wash up, and our job, Kenny Anderson [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and I, we graduated together, to work, one would go in that ditch and scoop out a pail full of that mud and muck and hand it to his partner and he would dump it in the little buggy, and at the end of 8 hours we were the dirtiest bloody guys in that mine, we were ringing wet, and I wrote in the book and I really felt that when it came time about quarter after 7 in the morning, to go back out shaft, I said that some son of a bitch moved that shaft double the distance and then the 52 steps were at least a hundred and even the walk home, I got home I had muscles I never knew I had and my mother said you got to eat something, I ate a little bit, into the bloody bed and slept, but it was a comforting feeling one week out of school and I had already earned 4 dollars and 50 cents for working only 8 hours a day and the world was my Oster and the only thing that could stop me was Roosevelt calling me to the army. Anyway that _____. Yeah it was, and every day was a new experience and the story about Christmas Eve 1943 I had been in the mine 6 months and everyday was a new adventure and the strong feelings I had towards the miners was everyday growing stronger and stronger and them old timers they took you under their wing right away and be careful now, don't get hurt now, and the first lesson they gave me was whatever you do find yourself a dry ass, what do you mean dry? Get a piece of dry cardboard from the dynamite box or short

piece of plank that when you sit down to eat that you're not sitting on damp ground, for hemorrhoids and that. Right away get yourself a dry ass.

RM: Were there, not that you've kind of brought up that term and then there was another one you said what about, you mentioned, something about the shaft, go, something about go out the shaft?

ER: That, see the shaft house that is where the cage was, the miner always called it you go out shaft at the end of a shift you go back out.

RM: Were there any other terms that, were like special terms they used in the mines?

ER: Oh there were quite a few.

RM: I'd be interested, say them, you know and explain them.

ER: I do believe there is a glossary with that,

RM: Oh is there, oh in the book? Okay.

ER: Oh they had,

RM: Were there any off color ones that you didn't put in the book?

ER: Yeah.

RM: Could you give them to us?

ER: When they put timber on, set a timber, I think you know what they would, then when you raise them up you call them sraggs [SPELLED PHONETICALLY]. A miner, that round timber would have to take an axe to you know flatten out a surface and then they would take two measuring sticks, you know two simple sticks, most accurate measure in the world though, never doubted. And the guy up on the stage he would take, and he would tell the guy down below that's cutting, he would say well what kind of a bevel do you want? It would have to be just a little, or female hair bigger than the medium, that was the term you used, a female hair on the most intimate, that was yeah, that's how you told, I don't know who the hell ever measured them but that was per us. And then the other thing they had, if you had a work in a tight place, confined, like maybe that high, and you would have to be bent over drilling, or shoveling, you know what the term was for that? Like a dog f***ing a jug [laughter]. You know you just couldn't, and then if you went into a place and if you, after a blast if you knocked down a lot of timber and that, miners would take one look at that and say just like whore's grief. We had done it before, I never asked them what they meant, the only thing I can figure, they used that expression that the whore done everything that she done but nobody ever paid her for it, and the miners wouldn't get paid, they would get company comp but oh there were a lot of colorful things that, and but that was the way of talking. And if they told you, you know today everybody is so happy and civil, and perfect language and politically correct and that, if they told you to go out and screw yourself, that was almost a statement of endearment, you know what the hell! And it was just colorful language but everybody understood it. And you take a lot of the Finland, you know what the hell, a lot of the Italians you know, they knew the bad four letter words but they knew the other two, hard work. And, one of the hardest things to, you can't duplicate the conditions on surface, I don't care how you try, you know what I mean? And you can't really comprehend, like now you go to the Empire in Tilldone, marvel at that, back then they didn't have video cameras, and if they did they wouldn't want to show you some of them. And

two of them, they all had them colorful stories, two I remember. And used to have lots of accidents, you know, years ago, and the tow of the stories I remember them telling me about, one day, first thing in the morning, a miner got killed and they brought the body to surface and called a Hearst over and the Hearst, they were horse drawn at the time. They said the guy came with the Hearst and they put the body in there and didn't make no move or that, what in the hell are you waiting for to take him to the funeral home? No, he said, I'm waiting for a full load. Then the other was, a guy got real hurt bad underground, they brought him up and now it was the ambulance that came, horse drawn ambulance, and brought him up and told the ___ said hey you got to get that to the hospital get going, and he said yeah as soon as the horse got through eating. But they tell that story, there is a lot of meat to it too you know. And years ago when a man got killed in the mine, that mine wouldn't work for three days until the day after the funeral.

RM: Oh.

ER: There was no funeral pay or nothing, and the company didn't have the guts to stop it either. And they said one time they use all their own stories that the miner got killed and his partner hid him, the body in one of the old working so they could get a full half in, get a full. But these are the, then I tell the story in the book about Mike Pickla [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and Mr. Holm [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], the sort of day, I think with a soft hat, but anyhow, Illiot [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was the general manager too and he had come underground with the superintendent and some other big wheels, as soon as they got up the latter, they could see at the end of the drift one man sitting down, and somebody, the other man standing above him, holding something over his head, what in the hell is that? So when they got there they said Illiot [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] almost fainted, Mr. Holm [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was sitting on a nail peg, a chuck had come down and hit him on the head and partially bald you know, well you know how the blood looks on the, Mike Pickla [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was standing about him holding a piece of fuse and his card bard lamp, melting the tar out of that fuse, ___ that cut.

RM: Oh.

ER: They said Illiot [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] said what in the hell kind of barbaric, you got to take him to the doctor, get him up, ___ said you be for doctor? No I'm no doctor. Then shut up. Illiot [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] turned around and said, there something more barbaric and by god kept, that hot tar, and pretty soon the blood stopped, on with the hat and go back to work hope there is another chunk not waiting for him.

RM: So there, you could almost write a book on just stories that were,

ER: Almost every one of them stories are in that book.

RM: Sort of a folk, a folklore.

ER: That is what I am trying to tell, this sort of the work life down there. And how, and I know once the final book is out you know, a lot of stuff I can't redo, but I think some younger people when they go through that if they ever want to make comparison they might see the makings of more than another book.

RM: Well I think the other thing that when you have this stuff and people will be, in the future, will be in the future because they have the material to look further and to use the material to maybe tell the, write a whole history of,

ER: Yeah see, everything that I write in this is personal, and the only reference I make is like the Terry Reynolds articles and should I write big Burt for him, I give him a lot of credit, ___ use anything I want. And that, whether it's right or wrong or bad or good it comes from inside.

RM: With dealing with history, this would be called a primary source, you were a person that, you were there you saw it, so that becomes very important when you are looking at, when you are doing the history of mining and so on, to have that record, and that is the important thing about your work, that its yours.

ER: And there are, a lot of the old people what they talked to me about and I don't know if it is in this book or, I wrote about Christmas '43, well then when I went overseas, you know landed in Naples, and when we were driving through Naples I could see old Italian couples sitting on the, and you know wondering what the hell went on, little street urchins propositioning their sisters and mothers and what they do for cigarettes or candy, seeing grandmothers fighting over garbage carrying two pails, one for any pets they had and the other salvage for feed. And I always thought that in the mines, like World War II, was raging on here you might have Italians working next to English or you know, in the old country they were fighting each other and what they were thinking of, like the, a lot of the Italians for example, they had their American born sons or grandsons fighting in Italy, how do you know if they are shooting at old family members or old neighbors, but there was that strain but it didn't show. And I always think of them older Italian people in Italy thinking the same thing that what they are here for. So the three, four, different Christmas's that been embedded in me, like I said the other day that it is ironic that the decision whether the book is going to go or not comes in December, because my dad had told me Christmas Eve that he was dying and experiences over in Germany, and underground, they all even now, like 55 years since '43 if you put that radio on right now and they were playing Silent Night you see ___ all over. And I think of Mike Pecla [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] singing that song,

RM: So this was a good time of the year to,

ER: It was later on that,

RM: That's good. Now let's see, what are some other points, I'm kind of going back because I took some notes down, you said you mentioned just in passing that in the early years they had 13, 14 year old kids working the mines?

ER: Well John Flaven [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was a neighbor of mine and he was the same age as my dad, he went to work at one of the mines in Ishpeming at 13. And John would have been about 98 now, 95 maybe, so yeah there's a lot of, and I think my uncle started at 16. Then you had the other side of the coin, Oscar Ordinen [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] when he came from Finland he went to apply for work and he lied his age, he figured that he was too old to get a job, so he lied by 10 years. Well then I got a call from Pies Copla [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] that was on staff already, they said Ernie we got to do something with Oscar, he passed out underground, he was 75! You know years ago they didn't retire, until their bodies gave out, they had no social security, no workers comp, no pension, so they worked until they just couldn't hack it anymore. And then they went home just hoping and praying that they

don't become a burden on their family or friends and that they never go to the poor front. See then they didn't call it senior people or nursing, poor house and they were that proud that they are not, and I think the 30 some houses in our location, I can think back to a time that every one of them houses had either a widow or an elderly miner, and either their sons or sons and wives and daughter and husbands moved in with them. It was a break for them too.

RM: So they could, they wouldn't have to pay for housing and they could take care of the parents, and their only thing in life was to live to die I mean they didn't take no vacations they didn't have no money to hope for, and the only travelling that most of them done was to the hospital if the doctor didn't come to see you at home or to the cemetery when they were buried, I think I wouldn't be lying if there were two, three women that never left their yard. You know they would bring the groceries there and but you never heard of locked doors or nothing. Hell all them houses had what they called scouting key and you could go the dime store and buy them for a dime. You know the way we were brought up, and I remember my uncle Axel [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], TV came out with that ad, they showed a young boy being put in a prison cell, do you remember seeing that, and they closed the doors and they said don't make a good boy go bad take you keys out of the car, boy my uncle riled up, he said you don't have no god damn right to take anybody's car if the door is open and the motor is running and a man's wallet is on the seat, you got no bloody business, so why are they putting the blame on somebody else for? They were strict on that.

[TAPE STOPS, THEN RESTARTS]

RM: Yes, Ernie, could you tell us a little, you were telling a story yesterday at lunch could you tell us about Burchass Garden and the tray?

ER: We were, __ in the town of Berchtesgaden, that's down at the base of the mountain, and they sent our squad up there, machine gun squad, seven of us, to go up there with the ideas that when the armored divisions went through there the Germans were in route and they stuck to the road and to see if any of Hitler's private guards and that were still hiding up there.

[END OF TAPE 2 SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 2 SIDE B]

ER: So they drove us up as far as they could go, then we had to climb up there and as I remember we went through a window.

RM: Was it all blown apart?

ER: No, no it was perfect shape. And went in there and, beautiful spot and I just gave my son a, I had just drawn a color print sketch of the fireplace that they had built in there, and he took it to Arizona and he is going to try to get it, it was already fading and that, but anyhow, we sat there and had a fire in the fireplace and a big round table there as I recall. And something like lounge chairs, and hell we sit around the fire and we figure what the hell if there's any Germans here they will look for us you know, what are we going to find? Well anyhow it dawned us that we could get a souvenir, what the hell we are up here, so we started scrounging around and we went, the upper floor and a little flight up, we found some real big beeswax candles about foot and a half high and 2, 3 inches, a lot of German swastika armbands and stuff. Then we could hear noise in the elevator shaft. People working down there, or we didn't know

what was down there right away that must be some of the Germans down there, hiding in that shaft. What else can you do but I think there was a fire extinguisher there and one of the guys took it and threw it down there and we heard a voice that wasn't German. Who is the dirty son of a bitch that is throwing, nobody told us that the engineers were down there trying to repair that elevator shaft. Then anyhow, the dining room was a long narrow room and just had a table in there and chairs, it had 13 chairs on either side, and one at the end but not the opposite end. So we got to look for something.

RM: So now I think you mentioned, the French had been in there before and,

ER: We didn't know it at that time. So we started tapping on the oak wall with the butt of our gun and you could see a real faint line perfect carpentry you could hardly see it unless you got real close with that candle, so we put a bayonet on the guns and pried it open, and as soon as we got that out there was just like a foot locker standing on end, and a kid by the name of Tiffenteller [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] from Birmingham Alabama, he said, he was kind of a nervous guy his wife had got a baby after we got overseas, he said, god damn it what if we find Hitler in that, I said we will go down in history I said that we would be the luckiest, well anyhow we took it down and then there is another oak silver wear chest, you know and we were trying again, and it was empty, as we were monkeying with it, from the bottom out came these drawers, each drawer had almost that color, velvet red or maroon, and each one had a tray so there was 8 trays that I recall and only seven of us, so as the sergeant then I had two, well we were there and then a day or two after, the day after, our coronel, from what did they call, special services to the army, he came up to a group of reporters, one of the free French woman, and she is the one that told us a couple of things, that the free French had gone through there and they had looted everything, the art work, and they didn't take good care of it, and they overlooked that part of it, and she told us that she understood and that dining room table, everything was custom made, but Hitler some reason, 13 on each side, but he never wanted to eat facing somebody at that table. Well then that Coronel, he was probably a month or two that, over that he had come from America, but he wanted to influence us with his rank and stuff and he got P'd off that we didn't salute him and all of that garbage. And he saw the trays and he demanded and he said I'm going to take them those are civilian loot, and I said yes, Hitler is the pope too, and he said I'll see that you are never going to get him you know. Do your thing. So then when we got done, and it's a real nice captain, captain Phillips out of South Carolina, our company captain, and he knew we had the trays but for some reason he came up and he nicked named me Fin, Sargent Fin, he said hey Fin, I want that extra tray, just the way he said it you know I said, you'll never get it back, he said I'll search your bloody duffle bag. So he went on a three day pass to Paris, well then we had our first Lieutenant Robert A. Tanner, RAT we called him Lieutenant Rat. He was a triple A ball player in Maine and he never drank or that, and they used to get a monthly allotment for liquor and he would give it to us, and he came up to me he said hey Fin, he said Phillips has gone to, on a pass he said get your guys to wrap them trays up he said I will censor them nothing went out with the censor, so I told the guys and I said wrap them up and so I took my two and wrapped them separately so I went to the company office there and I said here Rat, you put your own address on this one here, no no he said I didn't mean that, I said no what the hell am I going to do with two? The guy said you are a right man, I said that the others ones are so god damned smart. So quite a while after Phillips asked me if I was tied of carrying the tray, you know, I said the tray is in Upper Michigan I said I already got confirmation, he said how in the hell? I said I just got it, I always said that if he found out Tanner and I would still be over there peeling potatoes. [Laughter].

RM: Okay and this is the tray here?

ER: Yeah, yeah. Somebody said they should have taken a picture and put it in the back of that book, because look at the initials on the,

[TAPE STOPS, THE STARTS AGAIN]

RM: Get your comment, and if you feel it's too critical we can drop it, how did, when you were working in the mines and with the miners and so on, was there any view or perception of the miners about an institution like Northern Michigan University, did they, it was just kind of,

ER: Yeah, you got to remember a big majority of them miners that first lived among and worked among, a lot of them had little or no form of education, my mother for example, four grades of school. I don't know if my grandparents had any. Some of them were you know conformation school, church and I always remember one of the old Fin said that the only school he had was two weeks of conformation school. And he said there was two ways of getting through it, study or making wood for the stove and he said I done the latter. And Northern I think was called Normal at the time and there was a few of them miner's sons that got there but the you know a lot of people, they might be right but I can't agree with them, they figure that the miners were crude and rough and rugged and no account and whatever, and they had no self-worth or self, I take it, I'll take it different, I say they showed more self-esteem and self-worth than anybody under the most cruelest and dangerous work, they stuck it out. They didn't run and hide, and they, and if they run across a problem, cave in ground or something, there was no textbook to go to or no expert, they had to solve it themselves, and they were not, that proud that they didn't go and ask somebody for help, so there was very little interest, not that they were against it but they feel that others do it, and I support, I could have gone to college, it would have been hard but like I said I think I was destined to be a miner. And once I went to the mine and the union fell in and when they asked me to go to work for them in '59 well, I done it and like I said I do respect people and really commend them that go to college and beyond and learn but in my work, with the union and with the miners, that there were others to do that. Especially dealing in the union whenever you lose self-respect, or mutual respect or responsibility or reasoning whether you are talking to a fellow worker or company you're not going to go very far. You can stand jaw to jaw with somebody calling each other everything in the world. But just back off and never, never too old to learn and I did write one story it isn't one that's been printed yet, but what I try to do in the second book is how I come to believe in what I believe in, in negotiating and I use the example of when I was about seven or eight years old the worst enemy I had in the bloody world was onion. And there was no way I was going to eat a pasty with an onion in it. And I put that law down to my ma, I said ma you got to make my pasty special, leave the bloody onion out. So she started making pasties special, and in my pasty should would put a toothpick in it so I could tell the difference, so boy I won that point, I showed her. So when I, coming home from the service I had wrote home that the two things that I want eat the most is a pasty and fresh eggs. So I come home on a train at midnight the next morning as I remember, there was either 9 or 12 eggs that I ate, poached eggs, and the next day was going to be a pasties. So the next day I got up and couldn't wait for a pasty, if you've ever smell pasties cooking it's a bloody torment. And so I went to the picket lines and stuff to visit people I come home and there's the pasties in the oven, and I couldn't wait to get them out, she got them out, she usually cover them with a damp cloth to let them soften and I couldn't wait and I inhaled one right away, hotter than hell, I had to eat it with a fork not the traditional way, so then I ate two more, I ate three of them for supper so I went, and oh Christ I, it was seventh heaven, so before I went to bed I ate the fourth one, so I laid in bed that night, holy Christ, my second night home now I had my eggs and I had my pasties, who could feel better? So the next morning I got up it dawned on me

that how come, she must have another method of keeping track of my pasty you know, I don't remember a toothpick, so I, next morning we were having coffee and I was too full to eat anything so I said ma how come you could tell that my pasty, you know, that you didn't have a toothpick, and I could see kind of a smile come over her face and it was after I made that ultimatum you know I wasn't even going to trust ma, she'd have two bowls, she would put the potatoes and the meat and salt and pepper in it, and then she would take it out of there and put it in the small bowl and that was mine, no onions I it. And after I watched her a couple of times you know I said she won't forget, so they both kind of laughed. And they said that's the same pasty you ate before I said like hell. Yeah what happened? She put the onions in the bottom of that big bowl that I didn't see it, you follow me? And I had onion, she said the only difference in your pasty and ours was that bloody toothpick. So I said that a kid with a twelve grades of education ain't half as smart as a mother with four. And I wrote that story and then from there then I went as a single guy, I had the priority of a camp and a gun and then when I got married then I had the priority of you know, your girl at home, insurance and house, when our responsibilities come and our life evolves, priorities of a single man change and, if it is good times the sons want more money like I did when I was a single guy, and when you are married you want insurance and that and when you are old you want pension, and you can't satisfy anybody, but then when you got bad times and the son is laid off, you get the pensions, he is going to go and the father's job is more secure and maybe the son will come off of layoff and they are all happier. And a lot of the younger generation you got to get it today and no tomorrow, and I point out that even though when we got married in '49, '48, we had a hope of owning a house one day. And May 4th, 1998 I finally owned that house. I got a owner's notice from the bank that my mortgage was paid. Don't expect everything overnight and the most important thing is you got to learn you got to do something by yourself.

Woman speaking (Mostly likely Ernie's Wife): I remember when our son went to medical school, then we would have had like three Mercedes Benzes.

ER: But the thing people today seem to forget that, and you know that by demanding you ought to get it and not do anything yourselves and there is one thing I learned many years ago, that in the union, if you are going to get any benefits the two most critical things in the world is that you got an employer and that you got something to negotiate over, you're sitting in the corner all day writing letters like to Santa clause it ain't going to work.

[TAPE CUTS OUT, THEN CUTS BACK IN]

RM: Okay.

ER: When I went to confirmation school, in what ninth grade, eight grade whatever, and you went two weeks in the summer right after school ended in June, and we had a new minister in town and he was a pompous brother anyhow, and I never liked him then and since then, but anyhow we had a recess during the morning and right away two of my buddies, one of them he must have been over sixteen, anyhow one of them had his dad's car, we drove down to Queen Mine, the swimming hole I told you about, and that kid come out with a water pistol, about that big, a plastic liter, seven notches, you could fire seven shots or press it you know, and hell that good coffee cup for water. So we were down there and that old mine pit was cold all the time but in June it was almost ice cold, so we filled a gun, the idea that was when we got back to church, the boys sat in one pew and the girls in the next, the idea was to pelt the girl in front of us, you always had one girl you picked on you know. So we got back to church about 20 minutes late, the minister didn't take too kindly to that so he gave us all kinds of hell for being

late, so you couldn't have timed it better with a naval observatory clock, he had moved that little altar up close to the pew, and we were on the ten commandments, he was lecturing on the ten commandments, and Russ you couldn't have timed it more perfect, he got to taking the Lords name in vain, well his head was down like that, well then my two buddies start wrestling over that gun, now the chance was too ___ in front, when they were monkeying with that gun that bloody lever when all the way down, that cold water went all over the crotch of my buddy's pants, he jumped up brushing that off Jesus Christ look what you done now! The rest of that day, all we seen are the shoelaces and the floor, did we pray. Oh never forgot that, Jesus Christ, if he had picked any of the other ten it wouldn't have been quite so, I never forgot that. [Laughter]. So I learned two things in grade school were we had that pissing contest, I learned never get into that kind of contest again, and then the other one never take a water gun to church. I don't know, we lost use for that minister, the '46 strike he got up at the church and he told the congregation that the miners were wrong, they should go back to work, not being paid the 18 and a half sense, and we had one of the staunchest church members by the name of Pete Larson [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], he told the minister he was leaving the church, the minister always stood out for it, he asked the minister if he ever heard the bible, that minister is a pompous brother anyhow, and it really hurt him, so Peter told him what section of the Bible, as long as that strike was going on Pete never went to that, he walked to Ishpeming church. And that, same Pete he had been a hell raiser during his youth, a few old timers told me that, then he had taken religion, and I was tearing down an old whore house in Negaunee, a hundred fifty dollars I was paid, it was on cave in ground, and tearing it out, so Pete and Hakey Harvey [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] were working next to us and Pete heard me swearing, and Pete had a habit he would come over and he would tap you on the shoulder when he talked to you, and he wore them little round metal rim glasses and, he told me he said you shouldn't swear like that, I said Pete were you always this religious? He didn't know that I knew his background. I said Pete you know what I been doing the last couple weeks, no, I said I been tearing down that, Rosie Blare's [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] old tour house, dismantling it, I said just the other day I was tearing the plaster out of one of the upstairs bedrooms and taring the wall paper off and written on the plaster, that Pete Larson played his accordion here in such and such to date. He looked at me you know, and there was no such thing there you know, but you could tell from his expression that he was thinking of, did I leave my writing, and he used to play the accordion and go the blind pigs, the blind pig where they sold illegal booze. So I told Pete that I understood that you play accordion at some of the old blind pigs and that, so he looked at me and said oh my son, is that really what you do, done yesterday, he said it's what you do today and tomorrow is what counts, I said Pete you might be right. I said until I start writing notes on a whore house wall and playing accordion in an illegal bar, I said I got to catch up to you, he laughed and he said oh boy. [Laughter]. But he was a strong union man.

RM: When the strike was on that way, did the various church take positions,

ER: Most of the churches were neutral on it, but for some reason that minister he was kind of new in the area, and he never, you know, the church at that time had the younger more liberal, and the conservative, and the conservative had hired him, and then later they got a younger guy, but then the conservatives got rid of him because he was too liberal, and the real, some of the unsung heroes, the '46 strike it was the merchants who contributed and a lot of the bosses did too but theirs was kind of covert you know, they'd put a quarter, or a half a dollar in for coffee or a soup kitchen.

RM: Ok what we will do is to ID the photographs here, and this is photograph number one,

ER: And you want from left to right?

RM: And do left to right.

ER: My daughter Marsha, son Jeffery, international steel worker president I. W. Abril [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], Beatrice, and myself.

RM: Okay and this is number two.

ER: International vice president Joseph Malony [SPELLED PHONETICALLY],

RM: And what was this event?

ER: Oh the dates are pretty hard, well wait a minute, we had the centennial I think in 1965, that was at the Negaunee centennial.

RM: This is photograph number three.

ER: Okay from left to right Dom Jacobetti seated, Dr. Edgar Harden, Stew Harrison [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] president of Cleveland Cliff, and Joseph Maloney.

RM: Now who is Joseph Maloney?

ER: He was the vice president of the united Steel Workers, the international vice president. This is Joe again.

RM: Okay this is number five.

ER: That is Michigan governor John Swainson,

RM: Okay and then I think number six we don't have to mark because it's already identified so we are okay. Number seven is also marked, number eight is also marked, number nine.

ER: The president of Cleveland Cliff.

RM: And that's probably?

ER: That same evening, '65.

RM: Okay ten is marked, eleven is marked, twelve, number twelve.

ER: That's me.

RM: Thirteen.

ER: That's the union hall in Negaunee that has been renamed for me.

RM: Fourteen.

ER: That is Michigan governor Romney, oh Stew Harrison [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and Governor Romney,

RM: Ok and that was the?

ER: The centennial.

RM: And fifteen?

ER: Left to right, this guy with the ___ director of district 29 Detroit, myself, Peter Vinsoni [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], and Walter Mondale [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] vice president.

RM: And that's, what year was that?

ER: That was the year Humphrey [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] ran, I forget the dates sometime.

RM: '70. Okay sixteen is marked, seventeen is?

ER: Joseph Maloney that was centennial again.

RM: eighteen.

ER: That's me at a legislative conference at Marquette Holiday Inn, I don't remember the exact time of that. We used to have them almost biannually.

RM: Nineteen.

ER: That's Joe Maloney again, that's his official picture

RM: Okay Twenty.

ER: Now I can't remember all of these but this is, this was the swearing in ceremony,

RM: Okay maybe just go along and where you can identify somebody and then just say skip if you can't identify them.

ER: The guy on the left is Bald Neil Cleveland Cliff, John Ciscos [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] he was a union man working for White Pine, skip, next was Stan Lowter [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] worked out in Wyoming, skip, next one was Gordon Miner [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] he worked for the copper, Rogers Martin [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], myself, skip one, state health inspector from New York but I don't remember her name, the next one was from New York, and the guy with the mustache is Brandon from North Carolina, and skip one, and then the last guy was J.P. Mooney [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] he was a union rep from the west.

RM: This was what year?

[END OF TAPE 2 SIDE B]