

A DOLLAR AND A QUARTER A DAY

Just off of County Road 581, south of Ishpeming, Michigan, lives Bill Wood. Behind his house flows the Escanaba River. His property was the home of many types of animals. He used to keep horses, rabbits, and even goats in his care.

He said things were much different during the Great Depression. "Prices were much less," he stated. "Hamburger was fifteen cents a pound, eggs were fifteen cents a dozen, and bread was ten cents a loaf."

There were ten children in Mr. Wood's family and he was the only one with a job. When I asked him what he did, he replied, "I worked in a bakery. A dollar and a quarter a day, twelve hours a day, six days a week."

I asked him what he did for entertainment and he answered, "Went out, ski ride, skate, go fishing in the summer and go swimming. We made our own skis out of barrel staves. The entertainment you had was what you made yourself."

Mr. Wood went to school at National Mine when the principal was George Annala and the superintendent Walter Bath. He also recalls what the buses were like. "It was just a big truck with a box on the back, covered over, benches in it to sit on. So you kids got it pretty good!"

Mr. Wood told me that there were ten children in his family and they often had troubles with food. "We raised all our own vegetables, had a cow, made the hay for the cow and got the milk from the cow." But obviously, many times this wasn't enough for a family of twelve. His father also hunted, which helped them.

I learned much about the work camps. Some of the things he said were about the W.P.A. and the C.C.C. and that they were established during F.D.R.'s presidency. "F.D.R. started C.C.C. camps, W.P.A., C.W.A., N.Y.A....they're all different work programs. When one would run out of money, they would start another one. They would allocate more money. It was all government money, just to keep you working. It paid forty-four dollars a month. You just existed on it."

Concerning the C.C.C. he said, "They planted trees. I had a brother that got into that and they sent him to Wisconsin. He stayed there. It was just

like an army camp. Every once in a while he'd get a ride home on the weekend. There was a good many with him. It wasn't lonesome. You went to work every day and planted trees. It was just like being in the army. You had rules to go by. There was quite a bit of discipline. You had to go to bed at a certain time at night. You had to behave, you know."

Mr. Wood also told me things about C.C.C. "They would give you a plot of land so you could go and cut your own wood on it. If you had a car, you were not allowed to drive it. If you had a telephone, you had to take your telephone out. They didn't allow anything like that. It was just like I said, it was just existing. That lasted quite a few years and then it started to pick up when Franklin Roosevelt got in and it boomed then for a long time after."

"Was the automobile important to your family?" I asked him. "Well, if we had an automobile we wouldn't have to walk. We used to walk from National Mine to Ishpeming to do our shopping. We would carry a bag of groceries for three and a half miles. If we wanted to go anywhere we'd walk. We just had to walk. Unless you were on the road walking and somebody came along with a car that maybe had a little money. Nobody had a lot of money, but some were better off than others."

I learned many things from Mr. Wood. I couldn't possibly imagine what it was like living during the Depression. I don't think I've ever gone to bed hungry. Imagine going to bed hungry almost every night. I feel lucky to have enough to eat.

Paul Casimir