

Ryan Bannon's
interview with
Charles Bannon

The date is February 21, 1993 and I am interviewing my grandpa Charles Bannon on Bannon Cleaners and we're doing the interview at my grandpa's house.

me: When and where were you born?

grandpa: I was born outside of Hook ~~outside of~~ near Manistique in ~~the~~ March 21, 1921

me: What were your parents names.

grandpa: Mary Bottz Bannon was my mother's name and Walter Scott Bannon was my father's name

me: What are the names of your brothers and sisters?

grandpa: Theres Roy, Ivan, ~~and~~ Wilard, ~~and~~ Betty, Clinton, Gladys

me: When and Where were you married?

grandpa: I was married in the Trinity Lutheran Church in 1946 in August.

me: What is your spouses name?

grandpa: Betty Pauline Oie

me: What did your parents do for a living?

grandpa: My mother died when I was about two and a half years old along time ago when my father, I'm the youngest boy in the family had a candy store and a pool room and then he left that and he went into the dry cleaning business before World War II in about

1915, 1917 that was in ~~Maistigue~~ Manistigue 2
and then the fumes, the early dry cleaning fumes
were quite toxic and for health reasons he went out
and ~~he~~ bought a farm and that's where I was born
on a farm in Kooks outside of Manistigue and then.
Do you want to go into the present day with how
they made a living.

me: I have to ask a couple more questions, where did you
go to school.

grandpa: Negaunee ~~High School~~ well several schools in
Negaunee but I graduated from Negaunee High
School in 1942

me: What special memories of growing up in this
area?

grandpa: Well, we, for the greater part of my childhood lived above
the dry cleaning shop on D street in Negaunee
and we were raised in the downtown area right
in between Cornish town to the west, finally to
the north, I talians in the past location so we had
multilingual childhood. We used to collect
whiskey bottles and sell them back to the illegal
moonshiners for five cents a piece, that's how
we got our money to go to the show.
We knew at that age, ~~and~~ I must have been
Ten between eight and Ten, during prohibition and
we knew all of the men who made illegal
whiskey in town, so that's how common it was.

me: How old ~~you~~ were you when you got your
first job?

grandpa: Very young. We used to brush down the cuffs at the dry cleaning plant in those days all the pants had cuffs on them so you'd take down the cuffs and brush out all the sand and debris and for that we got ten cents we could go to the show with that but that was for our own family. I never worked until well after World War II we worked in the family, we waited on customers in the shop, we learned to deal with customers and the public so it was very easy to meet the new people. Later when I was in high school we used to pick up and deliver dry cleaning, pick up rugs for cleaning and things like that, but I never had any experience outside of the family until well after the war.

me: What types of duties did you perform on your first job?

grandpa: Well I just mentioned some, we also helped in the cleaning room itself because the cleaning solvent is flammable it was in a separate building in the rear made of

out of cement and bricks, and steel, but we used to help taking clothes out of one machine and putting it in another and the delicate clothes were hung up in, what they call a dry kiln, and the fumes in there were terrific, but the garments that were so delicate couldn't stand to be tumble dried they were hung in this room to deodorize when we say dry clean it was actually it was immersed in a solvent, but it wasn't water so they called it dry cleaning.

me: What stands out about your first job?

grandpa: How hot it was. The pressing machines and the dry cleaning dryers were all steam heated and we always had a big boiler, in fact the boiler ~~furnished~~ furnished heat for our upstairs appointments. I used to go delivering and a lot of people couldn't speak english in those days so you had to learn to count in various languages but every one learned to count in American money real quick.

me: Please describe your experiences in the navy.

grandpa: Well, I enlisted in 1942 shortly after graduating in fact I think it was July and because of previous military training. A place up in Sault.

Ste. Marie called CMTC Citizens Military
 Training I had a basic ~~knowledge~~ knowledge of
 military discipline and drill and then when
 the National guard were ~~made~~ mobilize in
 World War II before hostilitise started and when
 the guards went away they formed a militia
 Michigan State Troops and because several friends
 from I shpeming and ~~Negaunee~~ Negaunee who
 had gone to this camp we ended up being
 sergeants because we knew more about
 military discipline and presedure than the World
 War I soldiers who were too old to go in
 the draft so we had people who were old
 enough to be our parents in our platoons
 and squads, of course ~~there~~ their nose was out of
 joint but we thought that was pretty good.
 Then I went into the navy the Great Lakes
 Training Session, bootcamp, after bootcamp we
 got a short leave, came home and went back to a
 service school, I was supposed to be a carpenter
 but there were too many carpenters so they said A-K
 are now machinests so we went to a machinests
 school, when we finished that they asked for
 volunteers for P.T. boats, everybody asked whats th

well it was very hush hush service at that time nobody could tell us what it was but they said the boate could go over 100 miles per hour which was a great exageration, but we volunteered for that so we were sent out to Boston and ~~went~~ ~~to school~~ wait ~~to go~~ for enough room in the school in Rhode I sland to learn how to operate torpato boate when we finished our training of 16 weeks we were sent to New Orleans to pick up our boate ~~we~~ each squadron had 12 boate and we had 6 boate when you reported there so we had to wait for the other 6 to be finished when they were all assembled we went across the Gulf of Mexico down to several navy bases because we could only stay 36 hours at sea because that was our cruising limit. Then we went down to Miami to a shake down that's to find out the flaws in the boate and fix them and let the young men become familier with the boate before we went out. Then we went ~~out~~ to South America, Jamaca, and India, Beranchia and then to Panama, there we waited for a ship, big standard oil ~~the~~ tankers and there

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they put 6 boats on each tanker 2 tankers
and they were sent over seas but they didn't
have enough room for all the people on the tankers
so we followed in a landing craft the first
available transportation, the LCI, Landing Craft
Inflatable, and we went all the way to Panama
Bora Bora, Suva, Suva, Bangl Bangl, Espiritual Santos,
New Caledonia, and from New Caledonia we went
up to Guada Canal which was then a rural
area after the great fighting was done there
and then we were transferred from the
landing craft to a torpedo boat and brought
halfway up the Solomon Island chain, and
we were transferred by night from one
boat, squadron 10 to a permanent squadron,
squadron 20 and from there we went up
to Bah Island, and Central parts of the
Solomon Islands and finally up to the
front were the Ogenville, Empress Augusta
Bay, and then we patrolled there
for several months and then
withdrew to the south so we

could get to both sides of Oganville that is ~~where~~ ^{where} we were first, you could only patrol one beach, one shore then we went up to invaded Green Island, How deep do you want to go into that?

me: It doesn't matter it can be as long as it has to be.

grandp: Well ~~the~~ coming from Oganville to Green Island we were ~~assigned~~ assigned a job of sounding the ~~harbor~~ harbor before the invasion of this horse shoe shaped island and it ~~had~~ had a small island across the mouth of the horse shoe, and this small island was the only island we could land on because of the cliffs so the boat I was on had the job of going in between the shore batteries and go up and down the beaches S shaped to see if there were any mines or underwater obstructions and the operations had code names for everything popular songs and the order for commence

number 1A was goodbye now so we went in 9
one boat stood of the harbor and one
stayed 10 miles out at sea so if you were
sunk the other boat would try to rescue
you and if that didn't work the
third boat would go and radio the
fleet that was coming in and say there
were survivors and we were told to
go to a coconut oil distillery was a
wreck and they said ~~if~~ you go in
that place there and stay when
the ~~pre~~ invasion bombardment
you won't get hit and when we went
back after the invasion the whole
island was tore up.

grandma: What are you talking about the war
for?

grandpa: Well he asked me about it ~~the~~ Mrs. Bannon
This is my wife gnaging at me.

We could see coconuts growing on the
beach and you could see the guns
follow you in and follow you
back out again but nobody fired
because we had a rule were the

the game hadn't started yet, actually
 the Japs never fired on the first wave,
 they mistaked us as the first wave,
 We went up to New Gini, myself and
 eight men were left on an island
 called Nunios Wendy a Dutch island,
 formally held by the Dutch, and we were
 left there and the squadron moved up
 to the Philippines we weren't supposed to
 go home but we were left there for
 3 and a half months, nothing to do but sit on
 the beach and watch the coconuts
 grow. I then came home, got a 30
 day leave, went back to Boston
 and back to Rhode Island and there
 I became an instructor at the P.T. boat
 Training Center and then the war ended
 in August 1970, after the war was over
 we were sent down ~~to~~ Brooklyn
~~to~~ Navy Base in decomposition and
 I was discharged December 15, 1955.

Me: During your lifetime where were you
 employed the longest?

grandp: Cleveland Cliffs, I was a maintenance man
 distract repair group then I was
 transferred to the Filden from
 the Filden to the general's
 shops, Brownstone I stayed
 there till 1985, but I also
 worked as a foreman in Escanaba
 for the drycleaning ~~of~~ shops
 after going to a drycleaning
 school in Silversprings, Mary
 land just outside of Washington
 D.C. previous to that we
 were in business in Marquette
 for a while a branch of the
 Reguance Bannon Cleaners.

me: What was the most rewarding part of
 your career?

grandpa: We had a very broad experience because
 we used to go. We meaning the
 Central District maintenance used
 to go to all the property work.
 when they had major repairs

overhaul or wrecked new buildings we did that. I always have enjoyed the mechanical maintenance but that way we got to meet a great ~~was~~ number of people at the various ~~prop~~ properties. The last thing I worked as at the Gilden was a shovel mechanic big electric shovels and I enjoyed that because it was outside work but tremendously big pieces of equipment that you worked on.

me: Could you describe some humorous or interesting events that happened during your career?

grandpa: When I worked for the family off and on at various times in my career as a foreman at the dry cleaning ~~department~~ department in Escanaba, Escanaba Steam Laundry ~~to~~ we had 28 girls, we always said girls ~~no~~ no matter what their age is, 28 girls and 4 men in the department and I always was amused at the fact when a girl came in and said I got my ring they never said I got my engagement ring but each girl thought there was a little pink cloud ~~was~~ up in the sky with a ribbon and it had a

ring hanging on it and when she got her
 ring all the girls would run over and
 look at it and your job as a mean boss
 had to make the girls go back to
 their work and they'd sneak a look
 at it but when the training of
 new employees was part of your
 job was to hire interview them & hire
 them I worked there for $3\frac{1}{2}$ years
 before I went back to the Reguance
 shop and then when I was married
 not too long afterwards, we lived
 in Escanaba and lived in Marquette
 but maybe later I will think of
 something funny, Many of the humorous
 stories I have ~~to~~ concern the
 boy scouts myself and another man
 Imer Lingquist were scout masters
 together 23 years and we had
 lots of fun with the boys one
 comes to mind is passing their cooking
 test and the boys wouldn't get the best
 of wood and they'd light a fire and
 there would be smoke and their nose
 would be running and smoke in their
 eyes and hand all dirty from handling
 the charcoal, and one of the boys

come up and says, we allowed the boys to call us by our first names, Carlisle he says hows this, I said these scrambled eggs are terrible, He said there not scrambled eggs their pancakes. another boy had a working merit badge very hard you had to cook for 4 people for a whole day breakfast lunch, dinner, for supper he had rolled bread on a stick called twist biscuit dough it was done real good, browned and they made a salad out of edible plants and we ate that and they made a stew it was a very good stew, boy you got a little more of that and he says yeah theres a little in a pan so he tipped the pan and something went cap up on the plate I took the fork and picked it up it was a handkerchief he had used for a hot pad ~~down~~ he says I wondered where that went

me: Overall what are the fondest memories of your working days?

grandpa: I enjoyed the work in the machanical field. When I was in the Brown Stone

we worked on big pumps and huge bearings in fact one of my jobs was to make bearings out of babouit it a alloy of copper, tin and zinc. It was melted in a pot and you made forms for these big bearings some were 3 feet in diameter some were 4 and you poured this molten babouit into these forms then the machine would take them out and machine the fine surfaces I really enjoyed that and working on some big hydro pumps that drove certain conveyors into all the power plants the same engine was called oil gear pump was used to twist on the ships gun turrets and also tanks ~~but all the same~~ could deliver a great amount of high speed pressure that was one of our main jobs so that was a main part one of the most enjoyable parts was when we had to go to a refresher school at the Mather A and we went to school and they upgraded our welding and it had instructors out there and all of us were maintenance people for years eventually it evolved into training new people

me: Have you been involved in any clubs, organizations or sports leagues?

grandpa: In high school I played some football but I was 5'10" and I weighed 135 pounds and I played fullback which wasn't a good but my main sport was track, I was a 1/4 miler and some 100 yards but I was a little to light for 100 yards by the time I got my skinny frame moving I was better off in the long distance I was a boy scout in high school in those days it was very common for boys to stay in the scouts until they got their eagle badge they had to be in college just before they turned 20 I was a leader in the boy scouts for years we had many adventures, canoe trips, winter over nights, summer camps, I enjoyed teaching it was very rewarding

and of course I belonged to the veterans of
foreign wars their mostly making parties now
me: Who started Banner Cleaners and in what
year?

grandpa: Well, as I ~~was~~ started to say it was started
pre war my brother is 83 years old and
he can't quite remember what year it was
started in. He can remember the candy store
because he was just tall enough to reach
in and steal candies that's one reason my
dad quit the candy store but he went into the
business when his health failed because of the
fumes he went 4 years on a farm he inherited
heavily in some sheep that were going to
a ~~graze~~ graze on the cutover land after logging
the sheep got some kind of a box that went
through their nostrils and into their brains
and we lost considerable money on the
adventure. He belonged to a club called the
Knights of Pitties he went to a convention and
everybody said if you ever see me in the
Neguance way stop into my camp around
Manistique when you said camp they meant
logging camps so my dad thought all these
guys were big shots that owned lumber camps
but it turned out that all these guys owned
hunting camps.

so he was going to go to ~~the~~ Munising or Negaunee
 but he decided on Negaunee and he opened
 a cleaning plant we were only there a short
 while and the city gas blew up one morning
 lighting a cooking fire my mother and brother
 were badly burned and died my dad was off
 work for a year and a half I was very young
 not yet 5 years old and it was renovated after
 the fire and is still in existence today on
 the south side it is the last building
 on the street a little small building
 which was formally a youth center
 then my dad bought another building
 on the other side of ~~the~~ sunberg block
 a Johnson building and he enlarged the cleaning
 business and at that time we used to have WS
 Bannon ~~of~~ Drycleaning, Dyeing, alterations,
 and Tailoring on a big sign that was
 what the building was known as long
 as my dad lived we moved from Brown
 avenue to above the cleaning shop in
 1932 or 1933 and my dad died in 1936
 and the business was taken over by
 my sister and brother they changed
 the name to just Bannon Cleaners
 and they had a pickup shop at the
 in Ishpeming.

and the reason they had dying in those days was because people would wear their clothes so long they would be all greasy around the cuffs then when they were clean the roll left they looked shabby because the dye deteriorated so ~~long~~ a lot of the time we would clean them and if they wanted they would send, ~~so~~ for a while they did their own dying but that was a craft in itself, so they would send the dry cleaning down to the dye works in Milwaukee they would ~~use~~ dye them and then they had to realter, sometimes they shunk so my mother they said was an expert seamstress. They stoped dying and tailoring started measuring suits they did that until ~~the~~ the early 30's the only repairing they did was patching and things they changed the style of drycleaning many different times but the wash and wear ~~one~~ came in, now at one time there was 3 different drycleaners in Nequamee and 3 sometimes 4 in I opening and when the wash and

wear leisure sites came in and they had
 a couple of coin dry cleaners they
 don't have them any more they went out
 of business so the business slacked off
 so that when I see I want to dry
 cleaning school in ~~Delaware~~ Silver-
 Springs but the pay rate was such
 a large family so I went into
 well I went into a couple of things
 well the first time I worked at the first
 Pellet Plant by the research lab
 and I stayed there until the big layoff
 in the 50's and we were layed off and
 hired back ahead of your seniority number
 to a pellet plant but I went back to
 cleaning for a while and eventually
 went into maintenance ~~at the~~ and we
 supposed to ~~start~~ started at the machine
 shop but they said they had a better
 deal at the district maintenance we
 worked tremendous hours
 I never did go back into ~~the~~

the cleaning ~~the~~ business again but
 the plant itself closed down 1968
 they were going to sell out but at that
 time ~~the~~ nobody wanted to get into
 the cleaning business so they junked
 100% of pieces of equipment I ~~was~~ saved
 a few pieces for sentimental
 reasons but now they have the
 quick cleaning modernizing in
 before 9 out before 5 its almost like
~~as~~ a home automatic washer just
 put the clothes in and there ~~cleaned~~
 in a chlorinated hydrocarbon which is
 well some of them have been out-
 lawed carbontetrachloride and
 perchloroethylene that was used
 for a while per meaning 2 atoms

fore whiled was doing the ~~the~~ maintenance for the box and working for CCI at the same time but that was kind of much because maintenance sometimes we worked as high as 48 days without a day off working 12 hour shifts they finally got the thing straightened around so they didn't have to do such work. The operators were more skilled and maintenance people were more skilled so they finally ended up with more human type scheduling. We used to joke the ideal husband is to work lots of overtime in a pellet plant and your wife's next husband is going to be sitting on easy street.

me. In closing do you ~~want~~ have anything else to add?

grandpa: Only that I'm the lucky grandpa of 11 wonderful grandchildren everybody says what do you do to keep busy? Well one thing is that it doesn't take much to keep me busy and another thing is that I've seen more basketball, baseball, soccer, and concerts, and recitals in the last 3 years combined, all in all its Mrs. Bannon considers herself so lucky to have me and 11 ~~grand~~ grandchildren

Thank you