

Nathan B. Interview
with

Grandpa Bertucci

This is Nathan Bertucci's interview for Red Dust with My Grandpa, Salvatore Bertucci at his house in Ishpeming, MI on February 20, 1993.

ME: When and where were you born?

Gramps: I was born in Ishpeming MI at home 208 South Pine Street.

ME: What were your parents names?

Gramps: Guiseppi Bertucci + Giovanna Bertucci

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

Gramps: Rocco, ^{Anthony} James, Victor, those were my brothers + my sisters were Catherine, Elizabeth, Jenny.

ME: Were you married?

Gramps: St. Paul's in Negaunee

ME: If so when and where?

Gramps: St. Paul's ^{Catholic Church} in Negaunee in 1951

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ME: What is your spouses name?

Gramps: Donna

ME: What did your parents do for a living?

Gramps: My father worked at, started out in the "mines", then he had a grocery store, then he owned a tavern, he had a tavern for a few years, then after that he went and worked for Cohodas, Cohodas was a produce in Ishpeming, then he went to the shipyards and during the war in Washington my mother was a housewife

ME: Where did you go to school?

Gramps: I went into St. John's catholic school till the eighth grade & when I graduated from there I went to high school and graduated from high school in 1948.

ME: Which High school?

Gramps: Ishpeming High school

ME: What special memories do you have of growing up in this area?

Gramps: Well, playing with the kids in the neighborhood

Gramps (continued): we used to have a bunch of 3
lads here were we used to call the
West End of Ishpeming, and we had all
kinds of games, hockey and football and swimming +
going out in the woods and fishing and in the
winter time we went skiriding and played
out in the snow, I was a sickly boy when
I was young, I was born with a defective
heart valve and when I was five years old
I was laid up for about 3 months ^{one year} and a couple
years later I was laid up for another 5 or 6 weeks
and outside that I guess I had a pretty
good life.

ME: What special features stand out in your mind
about the city of Ishpeming and Negaunee
from when you were younger.

Gramps: We used to have a mine by our house, only
a couple blocks away, and they had old pit
mines up on the, oh two three blocks away
the other way oh they all remind me when they
closed down where we used to play all
of the time in the pits, and the ^{mine} cops always
used to chase us away from there but we all
snuck in any way, and I remembered lots of times
when we go on these ^{ore} trains take a ride
halfway to Negaunee ^{on them because} they went ^{pretty} slow and didn't go
to fast and I could always remember putting nails
on the track, and would make files out of the

Gramps: I + would flatten them, and we could turn them into files, I remember one time when we went fishing on the Carp River, and I got bit by a bunch of wasps, and I was with a bunch of kids and we started to go fishing, and I ~~took~~ ~~off~~ was hurting so bad I took off, and nobody knew about it, and they were all looking for me and when they finally found me I was in Ishpeming theatre watching a movie.

ME: How have the cities changed, like anything major?

Gramps: Well they knocked down the old Catholic ~~Church~~ ^{School} now, and there is a gas station there now, that changed, they used to have an Armory, in Ishpeming that burned down, that was a big fire, and it burned right down, they tore that right down and now they got the Senior Citizens there, and where the YMCA is they put the Senior Citizens there after it burned down they used to have railroad tracks running through ~~through~~ Ishpeming all of the time and now they took the tracks out now and Hematite Drive runs through it now, and right where it used to be, is Hematite Drive, the trains ran through town quite often, either the 400 used to go through, Northwestern would go through either passengers or railroad ore cars or gray cars and would always tie up traffic when they came through, and across the street from

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Gramps: the Common School we used to have a liberty stable where they used to haul coal to the different houses we used to have horses there for them all of the time, now there is where they make signs there on that corner

ME: What kinds of things did you do with your friends for entertainment when you were teenagers?

Gramps: We did a lot of swimming, we used to go up to Cedar Lake and when it was summertime we would go swimming up there, and then we would go golf and go on the first bluff and nighttime we would have camping parties up there, with a bunch of guys, and there was one called Tony, we used to like to tell spooky stories, and make up stories about ourselves, and that was pretty cool at that time, and in the winter time we went skiing and tobogganing up at Winter Sports and in the spring of the year when the grass was, the snow used to dry up we used to, us kids start fires sometimes we all got involved in it, one time the cops chased us and caught my brother Jimmy, and he squealed on all of us

ME: Where did the kids like to hang out in town when you were a teenager?

Gramps: In town we used to hang around a place called Gus Johnson, it was a pool hall, everyday before school we would go there and during school hour, I mean during lunch hour we used to hang around there, and nighittimes, and we also hike a ride to Negaunee, and go to the Dutch Gardens, down there, and we would go to the American cafe in Ishpeming would always be a good place to go when we wanted something to eat, and the Youth Center we used to go down there and well looking for girls, that is where I found my wife, and who ended up being my wife, and

ME: Do you have any interesting or humorous stories that you would like to share about the yearly days in Ishpeming or Negaunee?

Gramps: Me and my buddy one time found a refrigerator door and we were going down a hill in the winter time like a sleigh and we were going acro

Gramps: a crossing and a car ran over the, well we got off of ~~the~~ it before it ran over it, but it came close to running over both of us. And another time at Winter Sports, we were going down one of the slopes, and I fell down and my buddy Nicky started laughing at me and he came down and he fell, he ended up breaking his leg, and I was looking for help, and when they found help they put him on the stretcher and took him out and put him on the car and took him into the town and left me walk home.

ME: How old were you when you found your first job and where did you work?

Gramps: I was 14 years old and I got a job at the Style Shop in Ishpeming, that's my first job. I would wash windows and vacuum the shop and make cardboard boxes for dresses and cut his grass at his house,

ME: What stands out most in your mind of your first job?

Gramps: I didn't like it too much, cause of the boss I was supposed to work at his store

Gramps: for a couple days an hour ⁸ and pays me so much but then he wanted me to go cut his grass, when he had acres of it up there, and made me cut it and didn't give me any extra money for it when I had to go in the nighttime to do it. So I quit

ME: How many total years did you work in your lifetime?

Gramps: About 50 years

ME: You ~~are~~ still working right?

Gramps: counting my part time jobs and I'm still working

ME: ~~During~~ your lifetime, where were you employed the longest?

Gramps: Robbins Floring Mill, started in 1950, the same year the Korean War started, and I was there for 43 years well its going on 44 years now

ME: How or why did you choose this career?

Gramps: Well I had to work (laughing), well I needed money so it was a good job to have a full time job get paid ~~at~~ every week on it, and not bad wages at that time, it still aint, and I was going with this girl and I wanted to get married so I wanted to get money.

ME: In as much detail as possible, please describe the main duties of your job?

Gramps: The flooring mill is a plant where they make hardwood flooring, and my job was to take care of the boilers and generators, when they cut the ~~boards~~ ^{lumber} there, making the flooring, they get this sawdust and this would go into these big bins and they make fuel for the fires, to make steam, and that steam would make power for to run the mill, and to dry the lumber, and that was my job,

ME: Did this job require any special training, if so please describe the training?

Gramps: We had to learn how to feed them boilers so they wouldn't, it had steam pressure and if the steam pressure got too high it would pop so we had to learn how to feed it so we wouldn't feed it too heavy, and we always had to learn how to take care of them engines so the bearings wouldn't get burned up and shows how to maintain them and to watch over them so they wouldn't break down on us

ME: What special equipment or clothing did this job require

Gramps: just regular work shoes,
and work pants and a shirt

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ME: No safety equipment

Gramps: Well we had to wear ^{glasses} safety glasses and gloves

ME: Did this job have any special rules and regulations to follow?

Gramps: well we always had to watching the water gauges to make sure there was water in the boilers, that they never ran out, if they did we had to ~~take~~ ^{shut} them ~~off~~ down, we always had to watch the engines to see that they were getting proper lubrication, they ran by oil, if the oil ran dry, stopped running it would burn the bearings so we had to always watch them, and we worked on three shifts we always had to make sure we were there on time so we could relieve our partner, or otherwise they would have to work a double, and they didn't like that too much,

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

Gramps: Well, I was able to take care of a family, and I raised them all up, sent them to school & college, well we had a few tough times, but we always had enough to eat and everything else to go with it

ME: What was most challenging or difficult part of your job?

Gramps: Well to keep the boiler room running all of the time and if they broke down the mill would be

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Gramps: down because they would have no power there, and that would cause a lot of problems @

ME: How did the duties of your job change over the years?

Gramps: Well when I first started here, we used to have to feed the boilers by hand, well not by hand exactly but with pitch forks, and we put sawdust into a blower, that blowed it right into the boiler, and then we always had to make sure it wouldn't blow back at us, if you put too much in, it would blow back but now they got it all automatic, where every thing is feed by electrical power, and they got gauges there that shut it off when the steam gets too high and a water gauges to tell ya if high water or low water, and if the water gets too high, it will shut the engines ~~down~~ and everything down and the boilers down, engines down and ~~everything~~ everything will shut down from it, and before everything was done by watching it, and some thing with the, we used to have bins filled with sawdust where we had to go shovel it and now they got ^{two} big silos, where everything is done automatic and when the bins empty up the automatic

Gramps: Kicks it on and the bins get filled again, and keeps on running till it gets low again then the switch will kick on and fill the bins up again. And now the power company put in some new switches where if you produce too much power, it goes back to power company and they pay the company back the money that they gained from it, and actually the mill is ran by city power, and all the power the generator makes now it goes right back to the power company and they deduct what we use from what we produced and they pay us the difference.

ME: Did any other family members work for the same company?

Gramps: Well all my sons worked there for a little while, in the summertime, my son Terry, there one summer, was it or was it two summers and my son Joseph worked there one summer, and my son James worked there oh about 5 months before he went to his job he got from his college, and thats it.

ME: Did your job put you in any dangerous situations? If so, please describe them.

Gramps: Well we got to big generators there that - u

Gramps: on steam, and they got pistons there, and one day a piston rod broke and broke through the wall of the piston, and I was just walking past it, and it shot all of that steam out of it, and I was lucky enough that I was close to a door too run out because if I was there I would have been scalded to death, and another time I was feeding the boilers, and we were short of fuel and they bought some from a different outlet and it was like dust and that thing blew in my face, and caused an explosion right in front of the boiler, and it exploded and we had a few fires in the bins itself, in the olden days there, that caused a lot of gas from the burning of the sawdust

ME: Please describe what your co-workers were like?

Gramps: well when I started off, my foreman, when I first started for the first 15 to 20 years, we got along pretty well together, he was always good to me, he gave me a lot of overtime and fish we used to go

Gramps: fishing and everything with him, and the other lads were all pretty good except for one, who caused a little trouble he liked to drink, and I had to relieve him one night, and when ~~at~~^{I went} there, he was, everything was plugged up from the fuels, we used to feed the fuel by and all he did was grab his bucket and go and all the steam was down in the boiler, the engines were pounding, the pump was making rackets, and it was one big mess, that was about the worst mess, and we got fired for it.

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

Gramps: One time I was packing a pump, and I had my winter jacket on, and my coat got caught in the gears and pulled me right to the pump, and I couldn't get out, I was stuck there, and lucky for me, I knew enough, to pull my arms out of my sleeves, and I got out and I was all marked up on my back end, and I had to go to the hospital

Gramps : and for interesting things we used to have Christmas parties every year and me and my wife were on the committee ~~every year~~ ^{all the time}, and we used to have, make up the dinners, and toys for the kids, and we had dancing there, and we had a good time every Christmas

ME : At any time ~~at any time~~, did you feel like changing careers? Why or why not?

Gramps : Never really wanted to change careers, I was satisfied at working there, because it was close to home, and it was on three shifts, never get bored going from one shift to another, when I was younger, now I am getting tired of it of course after 43 years, and I enjoyed it but now I am going to call it quits.

ME : Did you receive any special awards from your employer and were you recognized in any way for your job performance?

Gramps : We got attendance awards, but that was it

ME: During your days of employment and beyond, what have been your favorite hobbies or leisure activities? Do you have any special stories about them?

Gramps: I used to fish a lot, and for hobbies I go swimming and I remember one time I was fishing in the basin there, and I could here a lot of noise coming through the woods, and I was on one side of the river and a bear came to the edge of the river, and he snarled at me and I saw him, and he just turned around and went one way and I grabbed my pole and ran the other way.

ME: Have you ever been involved in any clubs, organizations, or sport leagues? If so, please describe them.

Gramps: I was in the St. Roc Lodge for 40 some years I was in the Lodge for 35 years

ME: What do you do in St. Rocco's?

Gramps: Well it is more like a, I don't know how

ME: What do you do in St. Rocco's?

Gramps: Well we meet about 4 times a year, and it is mostly to tell ya what's we're planning to do, and a we have a meeting 4 times a year, and every summer we will have a celebration, start off going to mass in the morning and take a parade through town, and after the parade we will have a picnic at where we will play bingo and all kinds of other games and Italian games, and stuff like that

ME: What kind of games?

Gramps: One game is called Mahonla, what is that, Momura and games for kids there are all kinds of different games or games, just what you have generally kids play. Every year before the celebration they ~~about~~ have a bidding on the flag, there were three flags they would bid on One was the St. Roc Flag, one was the St. Anthony and the American Flag, and the biggest one would go for would be the St. Roc Flag. That was the highest bidding one, and it could go up to, who knows what, sometimes over \$100 just to ^{having the honor} carry the flag,

ME: What special events do you have in St. Rocco's?

Groups: Every year, the day before, night before parade they would have a dinner, all the members are invited, their wives, and any Italian friends, relatives, they would go there and have this feast, have a speaker there, and we would have music after the dinner, and the day after we would have the parade and picnic. Way back it was entirely different than it is today, way back we would have a big, big celebration there, start off early in the morning and we used to have greasy pig, where they would grease up a pig and have a bunch of well, first there would be for a team up trying to catch it, and then other times they would have a greasy pole, where they would try to reach the top of the pole, there would be something on top of the pole, to see who could reach it, would get it, and it always would end up with 4 or 5 guys getting together to finally get it, because nobody could do it by themselves, and they had all these contests for kids watermelon contest, sawdust contest, groom contest nipple bottle, where we would fill it full of soap and whoever could drink it the quickest

Gramps: ¹⁹ Then we used to have dancing there, Italian dancing, and we had drinking and partying up there, and the music was generally Italian music, and we would have these Italian ladies doing different Italian ~~dancing~~ ^{dances}.

ME: What were these ages?

Gramps: Some of them were about my age now when I was a kid they were (laughing) they used to seem like they were old, but I would say about 60 years old, and a lot of these mothers would have their babies with them, dancing with them, and everything and it used to be a lot of fun and then at nighttime they would have fireworks at the end, at the end of the day they would have fireworks.

ME: Why was St. Rocco's organized?

Gramps: It was organized so the Italians could get together and to help each other out, because in them days, when people get sick, there was no insurance ^{or help} in those days, so they would get together and the lodge would help a family ~~is~~ ^{that} ~~needed~~ was having problems by donating money or helping out in other ways to make it easier for them, then the lodge

Gramps: had a sick benefit they would give so much a day, to help these people out that they were sick or out of work, they would get so much a day until they get back in work, wasn't much, but it was something then they had a death benefit there, for when they died they gave you so much money

ME: How much money a day did you get for like the sick benefit or death benefit?

Gramps: Back then I guess it was one dollar a day then it was quite a bit, but now they cut that benefit out and they made the death benefit higher now so it could help the person, the family out when a member dies

ME: Who can join St. Rocco's?

Gramps: Anybody of the Italian descent could join as long as your parents are Italian, and your son was part Italian, I mean the wife could be a different nationality but

ME: What age do you have to be to join?

Gramps: I think it is 18 to be a member

Gramps: then if you're an older age if you, say join when you are 50 you can be an honorary member but you wouldn't be under the benefits

ME: What benefits do you have?

Gramps: We used to have that sick benefit, but when they quit that they increased the death benefit which is \$2500 now, if you die the family gets \$2500, and if anybody dies in the lodge, all the members will go to the funeral, or wake

ME: How long have you been in St. Rocco's?

Gramps: 35 years

ME: What relatives do you have in St. Rocco's?

Gramps: Well it first started when my dad belonged to a lodge that belonged to the St. Anthony Lodge and there was two Italian lodges in Ishpeming at that time, and they finally decided to get together and they made it into one lodge and called it St. Rocco St. Anthony Lodge, and my father was one of the starting members and old ma Uellala was one of the starting members

Gramps: of the lodge ⁷² the St. Rocco - St. Anthony
Society

ME: Are all of your sons in the St. Rocco?

Gramps: Yes, all my sons are in it, my son Anthony,
and Terry, + Joseph + Jimmy.

ME: When was St. Rocco's Started?

Gramps: It was started before I was born, I don't
know how many years before it was quite
a few years.

ME: What are the fondest memories of your
working days and career?

Gramps: All the friends I had there, I used to
like the summertime where we used
to sit in the car and listen to the radio
outside of the boiler room there, especially
on after noon shift and the Christmas
parties we had.

ME: What products did the flooring
mill make as you are working there?

Gramps: Well know they are making basketball
courts for all over the world, all the courts
they played the olympic basketball games

Gramps: were made in, well I'll say about 85% of them were made in the flooring mill here and colleges all over the country all the colleges by their flooring from the mill

ME: Where you a member of a union? If so, which one?

Gramps: I don't know the name of it anymore, Woodworkers Union and I was in there only for a little while, and then they voted it out

ME: If you had to do it all over again, would you choose the same career? Why or why not?

Gramps: I probably would, because I wouldn't know what else to do, I've been there so long and haven't been educated to do anything else and I like the job

ME: In closing do you have anything else you would like to add?

Gramps: Oh, that I have been happy with my life, I have a good family, and I was never

Gramps : really laid off, I had full employment
for only I never had it for about 2 ^{months} ~~years~~
out of a whole lifetime, that I never
really what I had to worry where I got
my income, I am happy about that
and always was a nice warm job I
had I never had to freeze or worry about
where my paycheck came from

ME: Well thank you very much for this
interview

The End