

①

CHAD MAKI

Interview
with MARY LOU FLAA
(MY GRANDMA)

ME: Hi, I'm Chad Maki and I'm going to interview my grandma Mary Lou Flaa. The Date is Feb. 15 and I'm doing this at my house.

ME: Grand ma, when and where were you born?

Granny: I was Born in Ishpeming at 713 East Empire Street July 15, 1934.

ME: what were your parents names?

Granny: My mothers name was Erma Brunvall and my fathers name was Mario Salvador.

ME: What are the names of your brothers or sisters.

Granny: I had one sister who died when she was three months old ~~at~~ never, really new her because I was only a year and a half old. Her name was Shirley Ann. My brother is byrs. younger then me and his name is Frank Salvador and he still lives in Ishpeming.

ME: Are you Married?

Granny: Yes, I'm married to Jack Flaa. He's also from Ishpeming. He live about 1 1/2 blocks from me. We went together for 3 yrs. and then we got married. He was a graduate of Michigan Tech University. And at one time employed by Cleveland Cliffs and is presently employed ~~in~~ for F. E. Smith Castings in Iron Mountain.

ME: When were you married?

Granny: We were married on March 6, 1954 at Bethel Lutheran Church Ishpeming, Michigan.

ME: What did your parents do for a living?

Granny: Many years ago when I was small, my mother worked at the H. W. Bozzard Co. which is now the mall in downtown Ishpeming. And my father work for Cleveland Cliffs Mining company. He worked in many underground mines. when they became defunct, He became employed by many open pit mines and ended his career at the Empire mine as a truck driver.

ME: Where did you go to school?

Granny: I went to school in Ishpeming. I graduated from Ishpeming High school and had no further schooling.

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

Granny: Well, I guess it was a place where everybody felt free, kids used to congregate in the evenings and play games and sit on the corners and everybody just had a good time. We didn't have a lot of the modern conveniences we have now, we didn't have snowmobiles, T.V. VCR'S, or Nintendo games. But we always seemed to find things to do and nobody seemed to want anything in particular.

Granny:
(cont.)

It wasn't the material things that counted. We just generally enjoyed what we had. We used to go out skiing in the winter, walk out to the ski hill. With borrowed skis or skis we had bought second hand. My first pair of skis were 7 ft. tall and were jumpers and I was only 5 ft. tall at the time so you know what kind of a ski situation that was but we just had fun. And we didn't have binders. We would cut pieces of inner tube put our foot in the slots and tied the inner tube around our foot and that would be our binders. And we would walk home at the end of the day carrying our skis tired, but happy and have supper and then we'd walk down to the ice rink and skate for a couple of hours and that is how we spent our ~~time~~ winters. And we quite often ~~we~~ went sledding, that is a thing of the past. There was a great sledding hill right at the corner of our block which everybody in town knew, it was called John Pete's hill we'd get 40 and 50 kids out there at night sledding and we'd have fun.

ME: sounds like fun.

Granny: It was. A lot of cold weather, a lot more snow than we have nowadays, but it didn't seem to bother anybody. We'd be bundled up, went out and that was it.

ME: What special features stand out in your mind of Ishpeming and Negaunee from when you were little?

Granny: Well, I often thought about that when we left this area and I remember that we had a lot more stores in Ishpeming than we have now. Cleveland Av., Bank St., and Main St. were filled with stores and offices. Many womens dress shops and hat shops and a lot of businesses. There were a lot of Doctors offices and lawyers offices downtown and several dentist's offices and it was a very busy town. Negaunee also had more than it does now but it never seem quite as bustling as Ishpeming of course I suppose we were prejudiced. I remember when we were kids and we use to go to the Negaunee High School Basketball games. I guess we were very nice because they had an old school that wasn't kept up as nice as our beautiful Ishpeming High school and we used to allways while we were cheering yell, "Your gym is just like a crater Box, it's small and crumbly." So I guess we weren't very good sports. But the Ishpeming High School was beautiful. I dated a fella from Negaunee and he used to tease me about it because we had a reputation of having to walk up and down the halls single file and practically march. Well it wasn't that bad. There were rules and we followed them. ~~But~~ we were very proud of our school.

ME: How have the cities changed since then?

Granny: ~~Oh~~ Oh my! The cities have changed. We have more parking lots, than businesses. The downtown is dying unfortunately. It's really nice to see the "strip" shopping area and eating area that's growing along US-41 Near the Cooper Lake Road. That area is building up and those of us who remember Ishpeming the way it was are very happy to see all this happening. But the downtown has gotten to be a pretty sad place. And Nequaunes downtown like wise is doing nothing.

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

Granny: When we were teenagers we were much like the teenagers nowadays. You always hoped you had a date and even if you didn't, one of the big hang-out places was Auntie's Cafe. It was right across the street from the Mather Inn, which is Ishpeming's big hotel which is right now I guess under renovation. And Auntie's was the place where everybody congregated, boys and girls alike and you sat there and we were very hard on her business. I'm sure because a group of people would sit and use up a booth and maybe order a large fries and a coke and sit there all night which wasn't good for her business but she never kicked us out and we always had a good time.

Granny: And another thing that we used to
 (Cont.) like to do is what we referred to as
 "buzzing the gut" ^{If you were out with} somebody that had a car
 you'd ride around & around the streets
 down town and just see who else was down
 town and who was walking and who else
 was in cars and when you got tired of
 "buzzing the gut" then you'd park and watch
 all the people walking on the streets and
 talk to those you knew. Sometimes you
 could while away to or three hours
 doing that.

ME: Do you have any interesting or
 humorous stories to share about the early
 days of Ishpeming and Negaunee?

Granny: Off hand it's hard to think of
 any. I've thought back many times
 and thought it was rather interesting
 on the debate team for the Ishpeming
 High School and would occasionally go
 out of town debate meets and I
 recall many times getting up and
 walking to the bus station to meet
 as a gathering place to go to our meet.
 In the winter time especially walking to the
 bus station at about 6:00 AM. And I was afraid
 of the dark any way so I would walk down the middle of the street

Granny: Because I felt that was the
 (cont.) safest and I think everybody in those days
 had a "Big Ben" alarm clock because I could
 hear those out in the middle of the street as
 they were going off. When I was walking
 down the quiet street in the early morning,
 when I was growing up, my family would go on
 a lot of fishing. My father was a great
 fisherman and so we spent a lot of our weekends
 sometimes with other members of the family
 and we would go sometimes on overnight
 trips and we would just camp out in the
 out of doors. I remember one trip in particular
 where my brother and I were bedded
 down in the car and my mom, dad, aunt, uncle
 were around a fire on the side of the
 road and all of a sudden dirt started
 coming down the bank while they were
 sitting there and everybody immediately
 thought "BEAR" and my mother and aunt
 jumped up and got in the car with my
 brother and I and wouldn't get out
 for the rest of the ~~trip~~ night and
 needless to say we didn't get much
 sleep but we had fun and the next
 day we got loads of good
 fish and anybody knows there's nothing
 that's better eating than Brook Trout.

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

Granny: When I found my first job, I was 15 yrs. old and I worked at Bartelli's store which is now Antalla's grocery or Elaine's now maybe. I think site changed names. It was a little neighborhood grocery store and I was the sales person there and they served beer and wine there and you had to be very careful that you didn't sell any to any minors and quite often kids you knew who now you were working alone would come in and want you to sell it to them but I needed that job so I did the right thing and didn't sell it to them. I worked there for about 2 yrs. I started there when my father was on strike from the mines and what I made (it wasn't very much) ~~it~~ went home to help out with our own grocery bill.

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

Granny: I don't no. I just really enjoyed it - kids that you knew used to come in and we had a big candy counter and we sold a lot of pop + ice cream and people in those days bought at their groceries from little neighborhood grocery stores and so it was kind of a busy place and you really felt important for the first time in your life working somewhere like that.

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

Granny: I guess it would be hard to put it in total years. I worked a couple years then and then when I graduated from high school I had gone for about a day and a half work at the Hewitt & Society Co. through the school system. We had some thing like career days and I had taken the commercial course and this was part of our senior year and I was chosen to go to Hewitt's and I worked there for 1 1/2 days and Mr. Hewitt liked what I did gave me a box of chocolates and told me when I graduated to come back and I'd have a job. So I started there when I graduated in June of '52 and then I quit when I got married in March of '54 because my husband still 6 months left to put in at Michigan Tech and we decided we were going to live together on the school campus for those 6 months and then we left these parts for quite a few yrs. and when we came back here in 1965 we lived in Ishpeming again and for a couple yrs. I took a part-time job working at Dubinsky's retail women & childrens apparel store for maybe 6 months or so and then the following Christmas I worked at the J.C. Penny's catalog dept. for the season and that's about all the work I did until my later I did get into full time baby sitting but I never did get back to working for a company.

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

Granny: I would say at the Hewitt Grocery ⑩

CO: Almost 2 yrs.

ME: In as much detail as possible, please describe the main duties of this job.

Granny: The main duties that I had I was an assistant bookkeeper to John Macdonald who was the main bookkeeper at that time and I was also part-time secretary for Mr. E. B. Fisk who was the manager of the grocery Co. I spent most of my days doing book keeping, posting, (we had a great big huge posting machine there), and filing, taking dictation, typing letters, and then at the end when you thought you were going to go home at 5:00 that usually didn't work out because then you had to start typing orders for the trucks that were leaving in the morning with their loads of groceries to the different retail stores. Hewitt's was a wholesale grocery they sold groceries to all the little grocery stores in the U.P. We had a salesman that lived and worked in the Copper Country and he used to call in his orders and then we had 3 other salesmen who worked down through the lower part of the U.P. some worked locally and they'd bring in their orders and you'd have to type out and price all these orders and the men in the warehouse would have copies of the orders and they would load the trucks that were set to leave early in the morning. All of our groceries or most of them came in by rail. There were railroad tracks behind the building. It was my duty to fill out the damage claimed because quite often you'd have damaged goods.

Granny: The walls on the building must be a couple of
 (Cont) feet deep. It was a stone building and so it never
 got very hot in the summer and never got very cold
 in the winter because the different temperatures
 would not penetrate the stone on the building.
 It was a huge old building and sometimes a very scary
 building. I believe it had 3 floors counting the basement.
 And if you had to go in search of one of the fellows
 out in the warehouse who was filling an order
 sometimes it was a pretty spooky place to walk around in.
 We had a big candy room because we sold candy to the
 stores and sold all the canned goods, flour, sugar and
 everything but fresh items. We stocked all the foods
 for all the retail stores in the U.P. I
 remember one time it was my fault my sure
 but the boss was very nice about and the salesman
 was very nice about it too but I remember typing
 short Bills orders. He was our Copper Country
 Salesman Bill Smith and I remember typing and
 all these orders and he didn't have very good
 penmanship when these writty orders
 came in and he had all these orders on
 his slips for cases of hominy and I thought
 now that's strange, hominy is a southern item
 and I couldn't figure out why people in the U.P. were
 stocking hominy well it turned out that all of his customers
 had mis-orders that day because what they really
 wanted was honey and I couldn't read Bill's writing
 right. And I remember another time when Mr. Corneliuson
 had called from the bakery and ordered several cases
 of corn starch for his bakery and someone made
 a mistake and just put starch on the order and what
 the fellows in the warehouse sent over there was
 Argo starch which was starch for cloths and this
 all got put into his bakery goods for that day none
 of his people caught it and when Mr. Corneliuson found
 out about it he was a very irate person. But I enjoy
 my work there. Most of the people were very nice & friendly to
 work with and most of them were very good to me and
 I guess I have no complaints and I would've probably stayed on

Granny: had I not got married and left Ish. at that time. (Cont.) I will say, at that time you didn't get paid very good we worked there 44 hours a week and Saturday mornings for many months and got a \$1 an hour and boy (chuckles) you talk about slave labor. We worked for our money. I don't think the kids nowadays would bother to go out and get your paper for a \$1/hour.

ME: Did this job require any special training?

Granny: Well, I had taken the commercial course in Ish. High School which was my training. I took shorthand, typing, and learned how to use their posting machine Mr. McDonald showed me how to use it and I utilized all these skills. And I learned filing in the commercial course also so ~~in~~ I was working in the field I was trained for in the High School. They had a very good book keeping and commercial course.

ME: Sounds nice.

Granny: It was.

ME: What special equipment or clothing did this job require?

Granny: There was no special equipment, I mean you had your own typewriter. They had their own posting & adding machines which they used all the time. There were no computers in those days. Right now I guess I would of learned that just like everything else but now the thought scares me. I'm just as glad we didn't have them. As clothing goes, we didn't wear slacks. Girls just didn't. You wore skirts & blouses or sweater and nylons and dress shoes and you went to work looking like you were dressed for work you didn't look like you were dressed for relaxation.

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

Granny: Just that you get your work done, and you were expected to be on time and never late. You weren't expected to be a clock watcher and when it came to 5:00 it was just another hour on the clock. If you had work to finish, you just sat there and kept typing or bookkeeping or whatever you were doing at the time until you've finished. Otherwise there were no specific rules.

ME: That must have been nice.

Granny: Well, Like I say, if you weren't a clock watcher it was nice. At least you felt like you were giving someone an honest day's work for an honest dollar and you felt like you certainly earned your pay. And as ~~long~~ long as you did your work, the employees were very nice. MR. Fisk was a very nice employer.

ME: What was the most rewarding part of your career

Granny: I guess the most rewarding part was pay day. As little as it was, it was pay day. At the time I started with them that summer and the next, CCI had a great big long strike, one of the longest on record and most of my pay went home to help my folk with their bills and I kept out maybe \$2 a week and the rest went home to help towards current expenses and groceries because everybody had it tough then.

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

Granny: I was challenging learning to run that great big posting machine that they had but once I did learn, I felt like I had really accomplished something and I enjoyed it. It was set up in front of a big picture window and I could see outside as well as get my posting done.

ME: Did your duties change over the years?

Granny: No, not really. In the spring of the year when it got towards income tax time and time to inventory all the goods in the warehouse then of course we all pitched in and we also hired extra help. A woman who used to live in Negavuse came in and helped us out and other wise no, they didn't change.

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

Granny: No, not really except my husband in his last year in college did work for a couple months out in the warehouse for summer employment once he had finished his employment that was connected with his career.

ME: Did your job put you in any dangerous situations?

Granny: NO it didn't. I spose if you weren't careful you could have a box or something fall on you out in the warehouse but for the most part no although I do remember when my husband and I were going together and we were going to the snowball dance up at Tech and we had left Ish. early in the morning and I did put me in a dangerous situation but it really upset me because one of our truck drivers who was a very good friend of ours had slipped off the road. This was in the beginning of February and there were groceries all in the ditch and I was very concerned about him and there were groceries all over. Fortunately, he was hurt badly and they got the truck and hauled it back in and got it repaired. Like anything else with vehicles in the winter up here it can be a dangerous situation.

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

Granny: Most of my co-workers were very nice. John MacDonald was very helpful. He did all he could to familiarize me with all of the equipment and with his system of keeping books and if I had any questions, he was very very helpful. Mr. Fisk, our manager was also a very helpful person and you never felt like you had to be afraid of your employers. They always were willing to answer any questions you had and the fellows who work in the warehouse were a friendly fun-loving bunch of guys and when they came in to the office with their orders for you to type up after they had filled the trucks would always crack a few jokes and we just had a general feeling of good will.

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

Granny: One that come to mind was we were aloud of course to buy any goods that were damaged like sacks of flour or sugar that had gotten torn. Occasionaly if you wanted a 50 lb. bag of sugar or flour (and now this can be told now that the company is closed) if one of the fellows would look around and discover there were no more damaged ones they'd very cautiously put a case knife in their back pocket and cut the bag and put a piece of tape on it and then those of us in the office could buy it. I no it wasn't the legal thing to do but we all kind of chuckled and the guys would do this for those of us who were work in in the office.

ME: At any time, did you feel like changing careers?

Granny: No, for the most part, I was pretty satisfied.

ME: What were your biggest responsibilities on the job?

Granny: I guess I already mentioned them. My biggest responsibilities were getting the filing done, getting all the accounts posted, and making sure that all the damage claims got sent in to the railroad on time because the rail road was VERY fussy about their damage claimers and they had to be sent in within 30 days of the happening of the damage.

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

Granny: NO, I don't recall that any of us ever did it was just a general feeling of good will. You were always told when they appreciate something you did or if you worked overtime. My first year there, I wanted to take a week off and I wasn't entitled to a weeks vacation and I was willing to take it off without pay but I was afraid to ask but when I did, Mr. Fisk was very nice about it and said no problem so take your work and come work with us through

Granny: HE was a very nice person. He and his wife used to live in one of the (cont.) 3rd floor apartments in the Malheur Inn which at the time was a CCI Building.

ME: Wish I could have a boss like that.

Granny: I guess anybody would be happy with a boss like that.

ME: During your days of employment and beyond, what have been your favorite hobbies and leisure activities?

Granny: Well, I guess I've gone through several over the years. I guess you wouldn't call it a hobby or leisure activity but I really enjoyed my children. I spent a lot of time with them and I really enjoyed them and really enjoyed them. I had 2 daughters and we spent a lot of quality family time with them. As the girls grew up, we got into camping which we all enjoyed we traveled around and saw quite a bit of the country with our little 12 foot camper and then we got into snowmobiling as that became popular and we enjoyed that. I got into ceramics quite extensively and I still occasionally dabble in a few ceramics and I also have enjoyed doing craft work along the way.

ME: Do you have any special stories about them?

Granny: I can think of lots of stories when we were camping. One in particular that always comes to mind is when we headed out of Ish. towards Yellowstone Natl Park. We got as far as a little place in ILLINOIS on our first trip and it was about 10:00 and it was already dark and so well Jack was setting up the trailer the girls and I were making supper because we had kept going and munched along the way and so we did this and we had things nicely going and all of a sudden all the light went out in the camp ground. We couldn't figure out what had happened. Pretty soon, a fellow from the neighboring trailer came over and said "Oh, Oh, I know what you did." We ran the front bar on the trailer where the wheel went only we had a pipe there instead and he was turning handle and it was going down and he didn't have the wheel on it because we were trying to stabilize for the night and he ran the pipe right through all the electrical cords. The fellow from the other trailer came over and said, "We've all done that at one point or another and he helped us splice all the wires back together again and before long, we had lights and everybody was happy."

Granny: And another time we were camping over in Missouri (Cont.) and in those days fellow campers were very friendly. They weren't as cautious about their neighbors as they are now, Not as dangerous as they are now I mean. We had some neighboring campers that we sat around a fire with and all of a sudden at about 9:00 a fellow said I'm sorry but I told my son I took him + I out fishing in the morning so you and my wife can gab he said but we've got to get up early so we wished him luck and sat there and gabbed with his wife for a while and pretty soon we went in. At about 7:00 the next morning we were just getting around to breakfast and there was a knock on the door and the guy comes with about 6 beautiful little brook trout and says "I hope you like some little brook trout for breakfast, we have plenty to spare", and there's not too many people who do that nowadays. In fact, I haven't ~~to~~ tasted brook trout in so long, I don't remember what they taste like. But we had many interesting adventures with our camper. Our first night out with it we were ~~to~~ parked just inside New Mexico, we were on our way to California and our daughters were in the upper bunk and all of a sudden we had a hail storm with big huge hail. Well, pretty soon the girls were right down in the lower bunk with us and that's where they stayed the rest of the night because that hail sounded like it was going to come right through the trailer. One more incident on that same trip was when we first got to California it was about 8:15 a.m. and we got on the freeway and we had never driven on a freeway before ~~with~~ a trailer and everyone was going to work and pretty soon someone behind us began tooting their horn and Jack told me to look out side and see if I see a radar cop or something. I can't figure out what's wrong. See what you can see. Well, I stuck my head out the window and I didn't see anything and this fellow kept tooting and we were getting ~~worried~~ very nervous. Pretty soon, the fellow had a chance to pass us and as he did, he turned around and pointed at our license plate. We were from Michigan and so was he. So we had spent about 15 nerve-racking minutes wondering what was going on on the freeway with us and well it turn out that it was a fellow Michigander.

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

Granny: There were a group of us woman who were in a club. I was a member of the Negavnee federated women's club and when Jack was in the service, I was a member of the officer's wives club and we met once a month. And at that time that was a very frightening experience because it was during the Euban crisis it was time when everybody was talking about fall-out shelters and at these meetings, they'd stress to us to have our husbands build a shelter and how to store water and all the things you need. More than anything it was a very nerve-racking experience.

ME: I can imagine.

ME: Overall what are the most fondest memories of your career?

Granny: I guess I just enjoyed doing that type of work and I was glad to have a job because many people didn't have or couldn't get jobs at that time because like I said there was a big mining strike and so a lot of families were out getting jobs and so a lot of us young people were able to get jobs and I was so glad to get one that I didn't find much fault with it. I was very happy to have the job.

ME: Were you a member of a union?

Granny: NO

ME: If you had to do it all over again would you choose the same career?

Granny: NO, in this day in age I don't think I did. But of course hindsight is always 20/20 you can look back and say you do things differently but in reality you don't. The only way you'd do things differently is if you knew now what you know at this age but if you were going to repeat you would no, so maybe you could. It's hard to say but if I had a choice, I would've furthered my education and probably do something that involves with

Granny: young children or handicapped children. I've done ⁽¹⁸⁾ an awful lot of volunteer work in the schools over the years and that sort of thing and I think it's very rewarding.

ME: In closing, do you have anything else that you'd like to add?

Granny: NO, except I've read and appreciated the Red Dust Magazine over the years and I think it's a very worthwhile adventure and a very good experience for all the young people that are involved in and taking part in publishing this magazine.

ME: Thanks, Gram.

Granny: Your welcome ~~to~~ Chad, any time.