

Ed Ylitalo's interview with
Elaine Franitti

Me: This is Ed Ylitalo interviewing Elaine Franitti about her job at the Metropolitan Insurance Company. The date is February 17, 1993. The location is Ishpeming, Michigan.

Me: When were you born?

Elaine: I was born in 1931.

Me: Where was that?

Elaine: In Calumet, Michigan.

Me: What were your parents' names?

Elaine: Alice and Leonard Franitti.

Me: O.K. What were the names of your brothers and sisters?

Elaine: I had two brothers, Gordon and James. I have one sister, Dorothy Ore, who is living. Three sisters of mine have passed away, they were Janet Franitti, Mary U'Ren and Helen Dovatilla.

Me: O.K. What did your parents do for a living?

Elaine: My dad was a blacksmith and my mother was a housewife.

Me: Where did you go to school?

Elaine: I started my schooling in Calumet for the first five grades and after that I ~~was~~ moved down to the Ishpeming area and attended school at Diorite, the grammar school and then the Ishpeming High School.

Me: O.K. What special memories do you have about growing up in this area?

Elaine: Well, I suppose going back to my growing up ~~days~~ years, what I remember most is when we lived

Elaine (continued): up in the Cleveland location and 2
we used to hike often in the evenings,
um, in the wintertime all the way
across town and up to the Al Quaal
Recreation area with our toboggans
and spend the evening tobogganing
and then hike back home, it was a
good few mile hike. And in the
summer months we could hike over
the bluff to go to Cedar Lake,
where we often took our lunch and
spent the whole day

Me: That would've been fun.

Elaine: Yeah, it was fun and I think that's where
I learned to swim.

Me: What special features stand out in your mind
about the cities of Ishpeming and Reganec when
you were young?

Elaine: Well, thinking back through these years, uh,
alot of the businesses that were here when I
was younger have left town or either
closed and many different ones are in their
places and alot of the homes that were pretty
well kept up years ago are not so nice anymore
because people are moving into the out-lying
areas away from the city.

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

Elaine: Life was a little slower paced back then we did lots of yard games, we played things like Red Rover, and Kick the can and hide and seek. I think some of those things might still be done today, but not as much as we did.

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

Elaine: (laughing) I'm sure that too has changed alot, but Auntie's Cafe was the restaurant right across from the Mather Inn and that's where the kids used to go often, um, the hang-out probably wasn't quite like it is today but that was the primary place.

Me: O.K. Do you have any interesting or humorous stories to tell about these early days in Ishpeming and Nequamee?

Elaine: About the only thing that comes to mind ~~now~~ right now is when we had just moved from Calumet to this area we lived in Greenwood location and we were out in, kind of the country and the people that owned the house we lived in had a barn and behind that barn was a huge maple tree and we used to play tag there. We got so good at that that we could swing from branch to branch without falling! (laughing)

Me: Really!

Elaine: Our parents didn't know that we did this 4 all the time. (laughing) But it was fun!

Me: I'm sure it was. How old were you when you found your first job?

Elaine: Other than a couple of things I did during school, uh, I worked for one of the Cohodas families, um, in their home and also filled in part time just to help out one Christmas time, when I was still a student, at the Gateley's Furniture Store. My, uh, I was 18 when I found my first job.

Me: Where was that?

Elaine: This was at the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

Me: O.K. What types of duties did you perform on that job?

Elaine: Well, the at time I started I would've done a lot of paperwork, uh, naturally insurance companies have a lot of paperwork, answer telephones, wait on customers, and help out our salespeople and things such as that, take dictation, a lot of typing.

Me: O.K. How many total years did you work?

Elaine: Well, I worked for 41 years, all of them in the same place, working ~~for~~ for the Metropolitan in Ishpeming (laughing).

Me: Um, when did you retire?

Elaine: I retired in 1990, after my 41st anniversary.

Me: O.K. How did you choose this career?

Elaine: When I was in the commercial course in high school, one of the requirements was that you go out and work for two days in an office to get some experience and to be judged a little bit before you graduated and I went to the Metropolitan office and worked those two days and while I was there the manager told me that they were anticipating an opening that summer and would I be interested? He said he would like me to put in my application and I did that and his word was true, there was an opening and I was called to come in for an interview and I got the job.

Me: O.K. Could you describe the main duties of this job in as much detail as possible?

Elaine: O.K. A simple answer, I guess, isn't possible ^{since} as you would know, working for that many years in one place, you're changing often. First all, because the job itself changed and lots of things that we did at one time, they transferred into some of our main offices and also we went to mechanized systems, eventually to the computer system. And also promotions, with each promotion we had a different ~~type~~ type

Elaine: of a duty and since a majority of my 6
(continued) time, actually 23 years I was in supervisory
position there so naturally you would then
probably change alot because now you're
doing more supervising, working more closely
with the manager and overseeing things, making
sure everything is done.

Me: Did this job require any special training?

Elaine: Well, most of the training was done on the job.
You were assigned to work with somebody on
each job and you would have a certain number
of weeks of training and then you would work
at that job for a certain number of months
and then you would move on to another one
until you learned everything in the office.
But, for some things we were sent away for training
and I ended up in places like Chicago, Milwaukee,
Lansing, Dayton, Ohio, uh, Battle Creek, all of
which were trips for various training purposes.
We learned our computer system, for example,
in Dayton, Ohio and the first machine that we
used, I learned the training for that in Battle
Creek, so some things were done away from here.

Me: How long did you stay on those trips?

Elaine: Well, the longest I ever had to stay away was
one full week and that was in Chicago, where
our training lasted five whole days. And I
think some of those others, for example the

7

Glaine: computer training, we were gone for just about
(continued) a week and sometimes it would be 2 or 3
days.

Me: O.K. Um, did you have to dress up or anything
when you went to work?

Glaine: Um, our dress code, particularly in the earlier
years was a little bit fussier, ~~and~~ we had to
wear dresses and they didn't allow any slacks
of any kind to be worn but in later years,
especially as the mode of dress changed throughout
the areas, then they allowed dress slacks or
pant suits.

Me: Did you have any special rules or regulations
to follow on the job?

Glaine: Not necessarily, the only thing I can say is that
we counted on punctual so that we could get
our work started on time but other than that
we were pretty well governed by our job and
everybody knew what their hours were and what
time they had to put in.

Me: O.K. What was the most rewarding part of
your career?

Glaine: Ah, I guess as I look back through the years,
the thing that would stand out the most with
me would be that I worked with a lot of fine
people and ended up with some lasting friend-
ships, even some of the managers that I

Elaine: worked with in the '50's, I still hear from. 8
(continued)

Me: Really!

Elaine: Yeah, so that's kind of nice, you know that you did have a good relationship with them.

Me: What was the most challenging or difficult part of your career?

Elaine: Well, ah, many years ago, I would say in the early seventies, we had alot of clerks working there, I would say 13, some part-time and some full-time and at that time I was supervisor and to keep on top of everything with so many clerical employees was pretty challenging, the other thing is, as you get older, they always worry that you're not going to adjust to any changes and we made lots of major changes, so I tried to remember that and keep on top of everything. and adjust as the changes came.

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

Elaine: I think I mentioned a little bit about the changes through promotions and so on when you start out in a position such as this, naturally you're doing alot of things ~~needed~~ like waiting on customers, answering the telephone, typing and handling alot of paperwork, well, alot of that never

Elaine: changed and added to that, you, I think especially when we went to the computer work, so much was done on the computer, that, and then you're in a position where you're training everybody and you have to be continually training and helping the manager and working with the salespeople and trying to keep everybody happy.

Me: Did any other family members or anybody you knew work for the same company?

Elaine: No family members but, um, through the years I had a few different people who were friends of mine ~~and~~ who worked there and as a matter of fact, when I started to work ~~there~~ for the company, the girl that was first assigned to train me was a girl I had know very well in school so it made it real easy for me to start out.

Me: Yeah. Could you describe what your co-workers were like?

Elaine: I would say that basically I worked with some pretty nice people and in that 41 years as far as the clerks are concerned, I could probably count on one hand the number that I would've had any problems with and I think that the saying is probably true for all the salesmen, cause we had alot of salesmen

Elaine: and saleswomen in the last several years, 10
(continued) too. And I think basically I got along very
well with most of them.

Me: That was nice.

Elaine: Yes, it was.

Me: Could you describe some interesting or humorous
event that happened during your career?

Elaine: Well, through the time that I worked there,
especially after I got to be ^{the} supervisor, any
time anything would go wrong with the type-
writers or adding machines, they'd holler for
help and many is the time that I took the
machines apart to fix them, and often I got
them fixed so we wouldn't have to call a
repairman in. But, one time my boss told me
that one of the men was having a problem with
his lock on his desk, one of our salespeople,
and I said, "Well, don't worry about it, I
have graphite at home, I'll bring it in and take
a look at it." So, the next morning, I brought
my little tube of graphite in and got down on
my knees by his desk and gave it one little
squirt in the lock and though, well maybe
that isn't enough, so I pressed the tube a
little harder and wow it burst, I had
graphite from my hair all the way down my
clothes, I had a real light pants suit on

Elaine: (laughing) and I was covered from head 11
(continued) to toe, it just burst all over me. And my boss
was standing there and he just stood with his
mouth hanging open, not knowing what to say.
I was a sight, I just shook off what I could
shake off and got out the equipment and
vacuumed and scrubbed everything up and
then I went home to change clothes and we
started all over again.

Me: At any time did you feel like changing careers?

Elaine: Yes, I did, a few times, as a matter of fact
early in my career because of a personality
problem with an individual, I thought it might
be best to change but ~~we~~ were able to work
things out and got along fine, with the help
of my manager at the time and I decided to
stay. And a couple of times I thought about
changing, just for the sake of getting into
some other type of work for awhile but giving
it serious thought, decided it was to my ad-
vantage to stay where I was and I think I
made the right decision.

Me: What were your biggest responsibilities on the job?

Elaine: I suppose I would say working to help the
manager, first of all, especially in later years. To
keep the operation moving smoothly and successfully
would be one of the biggest.

Me: Yeah. Did you receive any special awards 12 from your employer?

Elaine: As a matter of fact, I'll answer that in two ways, we did have, one thing we did have is a suggestion award program, that is if you made a suggestion and it was something the company ~~you~~ adopted they gave you a service award and I did win one of those and I helped two girls write up suggestions that they were awarded something for. I never did get anything big, some of the girls did. If you ever made a suggestion that saved the company a lot of money, they paided you an award on the "percentage" of their savings and sometimes that could be sizeable. Other than that, every year we were, ah, had ~~an~~ a performance ~~appraisal~~ appraisal completed by our manager and to me it was always important that I maintain a good rating there and I always felt satisfied that my rating, my appraisal every year was at least excellent or often outstanding and to me that was the award.

Me: How about, did you get any awards for working there so long or anything?

Elaine: Yes, as a matter of fact, we had to, all of us had to attend a meeting in Lansing, um, in January in each year all the salespeople and

Elaine: myself and my manager and the year, (continued) the January after I completed my 40th anniversary they surprised me by presenting with a plaque in front of everybody honoring me for my 40 years, I was totally shocked by that but it was a pretty exciting event.

Me: I bet! During your days of employment and when you were retired, um, did, um, you have any hobbies or leisure activities?

Elaine: Yes, uh, first of all I will say that I am a candymaker of course I do most of that in the last few months of the year before the holidays because for years I have made varieties and filled boxes with assortments to give as gifts and that I enjoy. And other than that I do alot of knitting and crocheting and now that I am retired, I do alot of reading.

Me: O.K. Do you have any special stories about those hobbies?

Elaine: I guess I'll tell you just one incident that has to do with the candymaking, the first time that I brought an assortment of my candies into the office, one of the ~~fellows~~ fellows there came up to me and he just had to over and over ask, "Are you sure you made all these because if you did I'm going to become your manager and were

Elaine: going to start up a business, we're going to ¹⁴
(continued) buy the Gossard building (laughing) and ^{will begin.} so, I think
he had some big plans but they just didn't
materialize.

Me: Have you ever been involved in any clubs or
organizations? Or anything like that?

Elaine: Ah, nothing like that, but I have worked,
um, with the youth at our church in putting
on a Christmas dinner for ~~the~~ everybody in
the congregation every year and also have
done work at our church camp in the
summer months primarily.

Me: Do any special memories stand out about
doing these things?

Elaine: Well, I guess not anything really special, ah, they
all had their own rewards, I guess, but
many of the dinners we've put on, because
the young people always try to have some kind
of a special program and some of them have
been really excellent and I've thoroughly enjoyed
working with them, so it's ~~been~~ been fun. But I've
enjoyed also the campwork because you get to
spend a lot of time with others and the work
doesn't seem like work.

Me: Yeah. What were the fondest memories of your
working days and your career?

Elaine: I think I would have to say that the 15
lasting friendships I have formed would ~~be~~
probably be one of the main memories. Because
through all of these years I have worked with
alot of people and still hear from alot of
them.

Me: Yeah. If you had to do it all over again
would you chose the same career?

Elaine: (laughing) I probably would, it seems as if
you could think through the years that you
would like to do something different or why
did you start here but I think I probably
would, I never did intend to go to college and
took the commercial course to either become a
secretary or work in an office and I have
to say that primarily I enjoyed what I did,
so I suppose I would do the same thing over
again.

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

Elaine: At this time I guess what I could say, is that
that 41 years passed by pretty quickly, ~~that~~
it doesn't seem like 41 years and, ah, now that
I am retired and receiving my pension and
enjoying some leisure and time to do things
that I couldn't do throughout those ~~41~~ ^{working} years
I just feel that I have been very fortunate

Elaine: and that I have alot to be thankful for. 16
(continued)

Me: Yeah. Thank you.

Elaine: You're welcome, Ed.