

Brandi Palomaki's
interview with
Lillian Hurley

This is Brandi Palomaki on February 18, 1993. I'm interviewing Lillian Hurley on her life occupations. We're interviewing in Lillian's apartment.

Me: O.K. Um, when were you born?

Lillian: December 11.

Me: And, where?

Lillian: In lower Michigan.

Me: What were your parents names?

Lillian: My mother's name was Ari.

Me: And you don't know your dad's?

Lil: NO.

Me: Um, what were the names, well you didn't have any brothers and sisters. When did you marry?

Lillian: 1935.

Me: To who?

Lillian: George Hurky in Marquette, Michigan.

Me: Did you go to school?

Lillian: Ahh, off and on. I was with my grandmother in camp and sometimes there wasn't any school nearby.

Me: What special memories do you have of growing up? Where you lived?

Lillian: I think in the camps sometimes with my grandma. And she cooked for 150 to 175 men.

Me: That's alot.

Lillian: Ahh, sometimes if the second cook was sick or something sheld let me wait on tables andd alth, we weren't allowed to talk and if they passed a dish for potatoes or something and there wasn't anymore I'd just have to shake my head that there wasn't any. And, alth, the men weren't allowed to talk, they had to eat as fast as they could and leave.

me: Yeah.

Lillian: Because there was somany people to eat. you know they had to eat and leave right away. And, ah.

me: Did anything ever happen when they couldn't talk to you?

Lillian: One time a man got very angry. He passed the potato dish and I shook my head that we didn't have any more potatoes and he threw the dish down toward me and went out of the camp. And slammed the door and there was a big lamp, gas lamp, hanging over the door and it fell down and broke.

Lillian cont.: The boss happened to be there in the camp that day so he went right out behind him and fired him.

me: About how old were you when you were serving?

Lillian: I think I was only about 7 or 8. I'd just do it if the second cook was sick or something, my grandma would let me.

me: Yeah

Lillian: Just to help her out sometimes, you know, she'd have everything ready for me and that, you know.

me: What about the Indian people?

Lillian: Oh, I think there was an Indian family and they had a little sick baby, and they'd been up for nights and nights with the baby and this Indian tribe believed that you had to sit up with the baby or anyone that died. They were so exhausted they asked the people around the community if they

would sit up with the baby, it was just less than a year old. It had died, I didn't know what it had died of and no one wanted to sit up with this baby. (4)

Me: Yeah.

Lillian: So I volunteered because I felt so bad for them, because they had been up for days and nights with this sick baby. So then I was working at a little summer resort between Newberry and the Soo, it was a little place called Eckerman, Michigan. When I volunteered to sit up with the baby, to let the parents get some sleep. Then my boss and another lady said they wouldn't let me go alone so they went with me. Because I was a

Me: Yeah

Lillian: Young girl, you know. So an

Me: About how old were you when you did that?

Lillian: I think that, I don't think I was quite sixteen.

me: That's pretty young! Um, how did they 5
wash the dishes for all those people?

Lillian: In the camps you mean?

me: Yeah

Lillian: They put them in a big, one side of the sink, it was a big wooden sink and they put the hot, hot water, and soapy water. Then they'd rinse and they'd ~~erase~~ put the plates, they were all tin plates and cups and all of the dishes were just tin stuff.

me: m-hm.

Lillian: And they'd drain the plates on some kind of a big rack on one side of the sink because it was a big wooden sink and forks, and knives and spoons and that they had to scald those and they put them scalding hot in a great big heavy bag. They'd pull the bag up and down to dry them.

me: Laugh/slight giggle.

Lillian: When they thought that they were dry enough, this was a big heavy some kind of a bag.

Me: Was it like a ...

Both: Cloth bag.

Lillian: And then they'd put it on the one side of the sink, you know, dump them back out and let them dry that way.

Me: Like what kinds of things did your grandmother have to make everyday?

Lillian: She had to bake bread and doughnuts and I guess you'd call them sugar long johns, twist them and roll them in sugar, and cookies and fried cakes now in grease, you know.

Me: Yeah

Lillian: Everyday she had to bake like that.

Me: Did she have to make pies?

Lillian: Yes, she made pies, apple pies mostly, I think in those days.

Me: Did you ever have time to just entertain yourself? Could you ever do anything for fun when you were little?

Lillian: well, in these camps where my grandma

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cooked and took care of me, there wasn't any children right,

Me: m-hm

Lillian: In those camps, some of the camps we lived in there were families, but in these big camps where they had the men. 150 men, you know, and I was just with my grandma there alone and sometimes they'd bring what they called flatcars and there was a railroad that came right in front of the cook camp and the men's camp. And they'd bring these cars in every night.

Me: mh-hm

Lillian: This big thing, it was a jammer or something like that, that they lifted logs onto the flat cars with,

Me: mh-hm

Lillian: and they'd make some kind of a swing with it, sometimes some of the men would, cause my grandma I always had to stay right in front of the camp

Me: Yeah

Lillian: because there was so many men around and everything so I had to stay right where she could see me. And they'd make this swing for me and they used to give me pennies to ~~sing~~ for them. I don't imagine it was very good but maybe
(both laughed)

it just ~~cause~~ cause they felt sorry because I was alone or something.

Me: What kind of songs did you sing do you have any

Lillian: I have NO idea what I song. (Both laugh)

Me: Did you ever go anyplace like did you do anything?

Lillian: Like when I was little? ^{me: Yeah} Most of the time, until, she cooked for a ~~couple~~ ^{certain amount} of months then, it seemed to me it was mostly in the summertime or something. I don't know if they closed this place down, it's hard for me to remember that far back, but then we'd go and then they'd have camps, other camps, you know, where families lived in and there'd be a lot of children and stuff around in those camps. And there'd be empty houses, sometimes, and I could, when the houses were empty, I could, if there wasn't families around there,

Me: Yeah

Lillian: I'd go in and make a playhouse out of, move all my stuff and scrub them and clean them. And then a family would come with

three or four children or something and they'd⁹ throw out all my stuff and they'd move in cause the place was clean and empty and that.

me: Yeah

Lillian: I used to feel bad about that, that they'd throw out my stuff and they'd move in that one. I didn't know any different, I guess.

me: (Laugh) Yeah

Lillian: So I had to enjoy it I guess.

me: Yeah, what were the camps like, like what were the houses like?

Lillian: Where the families lived in?

me: Yeah, well where the men lived, too?

Lillian: They were just wooden camps and they had black roofing paper, I'd guess you'd call it, tar paper. And it had, after I got older, I didn't notice it when I was little, but after I got older, that smell of that tar paper because there wasn't any wall paper it was just plain wood inside of those camps and it

had a strong terr ysmall and it would get in your clothing and after I got older I didn't like that smell but when I was younger it didn't make any difference.

Me: (laugh) Yeah, um, how old were you when you got your first job?

Lillian: I think I was between 13 and 14. The first time I worked for the bosses in the camps, for their wives, they always had children and I'd watch them and help with children a little bit.

Me: Yeah.

Lillian: Then I got a job in a little store the other side of Manistique, Michigan and I worked there for three years. The lady had arthritis, I'd work all day and then when the store closed at 9:00 at night I'd give her baking a massaging treatments for 2 hours after the store closed. I did this one whole summer and you had to pump the gas in a big tank, I think you'd pump up 50, by hand.

you had to pump this gas. You had to pump 20 gallons at a time in this big glass tank.

Me: See. Did the store ~~ever~~ have to be cleaned any certain way?

Lillian: Yes! She was very strict about the store. The inspectors used to come and they wouldn't even bother to inspect the store. They said it was the cleanest that was this side of the "straights," I guess, because there ^{never} was ~~any~~ any a dust around, allowed or anything. I'd have to move the cans everyday and dust the shelves and everything.

Me: (small laugh) How much did you get paid?

Lillian: 3 dollars a week.

Me: (laugh) That's not alot. (Lillian laughs) Did anything ever happen at the store, like any stories or anything?

Lillian: Yes, a young couple ~~came~~ came through there and they had just gotten married one time, and my boss did oil drilling on the side and he was away on a job. They had to have grease

in the back of their car I guess it was,
ah, . . .

Background

voice : Transmission fluid.

Lillian : Transmission fluid.

me : Yeah

Lillian : I didn't know how to do it, the [boss]
always did it and they said they
couldn't go on, they had to have it
in the car. So, I finally, it was a
little, looked like a little barrel
about ten gallons or 15 gallons

me : Uh-huh

Lillian : Of this grease that was in it, and
it had a little hose on it. So the
man was trying to help me and
the lady was standing there. And
I got the hose on in this little
hole that you're supposed to
put this transmission grease
in, and the hose flew off and
the grease flew all over the
man and all over the lady.

(Both laugh)

I guess they were quite a mess. They stayed, they had to go to Manistique and stay with my boss's sister and they were laughing and talking about what happened trying to get the transmission oil, grease in their car. (Both chuckle). And that was quite funny.

Me: Yeah. Why did you go to work?

Lillian: Cause I didn't have any money and I had to.

me: What kinds of things did you do?

Lillian: I did housework.

me: Where was your 2nd job, after you worked in the store?

Lillian: After I worked in the store?

me: Yeah

Lillian: I was working in a camp again for a short period. I was cooking in the camp this time.

me: mh-hm

Lillian: And I was around seventeen. But I

was gonna be finished and a man came along one day ~~and~~^{one} and said that his wife was looking for somebody to come and work for them,

me: mh-hm

Lillian: Helping with the children and the housework. And it was in Marquette, Michigan. I was around 17 years old ~~so~~ I came to Marquette and worked for them for 3 years.

me: Ok. Did you work anyplace else, after?

Lillian: Yes. I worked for 2 other families after them. Then I got married.

me: Did you stay in Marquette, or did you ... ?

Lillian: Yes, I've been in Marquette till I was 17.

me: Do you have any stories to tell about your other jobs working in Marquette? Did anything happen? Did you have to, ... ?

Lillian: Oh, we had big dinner parties, and of course they had big dinner

parties at different times. It was always funny things, sometimes, that would happen. One time we had a big dinner party and a man took a couple of the little bread and butter knives and put them in his vest pocket.

me: Mh-hm.

Hillian: And I ~~took~~^{saw} them and I said you got those outta there. Because I'm not gonna pay for those knives if you take them home or something. He looked at me so surprised and my boss was right behind him. And he said you don't have to worry about that you won't have to pay for them and. I said you got them outta there cause I was told I would have to. So that was kinda funny but he took the knives out any way.

me: Yeah. Where did you work the longest?

Hillian: I think doing housework, my last job

until I got married.

Me: Where did you meet your husband?

Lillian: In Marquette, Michigan.

Me: Well like when? How did you meet him?

Lillian: Oh, (Laughs) That was kinda funny. I had a friend that we used to go to the show together and she used to go out with him once in a while I guess. She was in high school, and of course I seemed older than she did because she was in high school and I wasn't going to school, although there wasn't much difference in our ages, but so I met him through her.

Me: What kinds of things did you do with your husband while you were going out?

Lillian: Oh we used to go to dances and shows. There was a ballroom here called the Brookton Ballroom and we used to go there about once a week to dance and

went to shows. Then after we got married we never went anyplace.

(Both laugh)

me: Did you have to wear special clothes for work?

Lillian: Yes. At 2 of the places I had to wear a white uniform and a little maid's apron. But I never had to wear the little caps that they were supposed to wear.

me: Did you want to wear them?

Lillian: No. I never wanted to wear them so they didn't make me wear em. that was very nice. They were very nice about it.

me: That's nice. Were there any special rules you had to follow?

Lillian: Yes. I had one afternoon a week off and I had, two, three evenings, but I had to be in, unless it was a weekend. If they were going out, most of them had children and, if they were going out then I could

go out. I had to be in by midnight.

Me: Mh hm. Um, was your job difficult?

Lillian: At times I think it was fairly hard.

Me: Was the housework the most difficult part of the job?

Lillian: Yes. I think the dinner parties was the hardest because we'd have to, sometimes there'd be 8 people, as many as, hardly ever less than 8 people. and there was no dish washers.

Me: Yeah

Lillian: So you'd have the big dinner parties and then you'd have to stay up until all those dishes were done, sometimes it'd be 2:00 in the morning before you got finished. And you had to be at quarter to 7:00 the next morning.

me: Did you have to do, Did you have courses?

Lillian: Yes, in the big dinner party

there was always courses, so there's lots of dishes.

me: Yeah. Did you ever have any dangerous situations at work?

Lillian: none

me: What was the most rewarding part of work for you?

Lillian: Oh, when the people was satisfied with what I did and praised me for it.

me: um, could you have switched careers if you had wanted to?

Lillian: No I couldn't because I didn't have the education. I didn't get, I didn't graduate from the 8th grade and I never finished 1 full year of school. I was moved around so much, so it was much better, if I'd had my choice I'd stay in school and graduate from ^{high} school and have a good education. Get a good job. I never got more than \$25 a month.

me: Yeah

Lillian: That was top wages then.

25 dollars a month.

Me: Do you have any special hobbies or leisure activities now?

Lillian: Well, not right now, I broke my wrist, I did like to knit. knit mittens mostly. But, I don't have many hobbies now.

Me: If you had to do it all over again would you choose the same thing?

Lillian: NO, definitely not. (Laughs)

Me: What would you have done different?

Lillian: I'd get a good education so I could get a good paying job. The better the education the better the job.

Me: Yeah. How old are you now?

Lillian: 82.

Me: 82. In closing would you like to add anything, any stories or anything?

Lillian: Ah, just stay in school and get a good education, that's my advice.

Me: Yeah

Me: O.k. Thank you.

Lillian: You're welcome.