

Geoff Kruger  
Interview with Mae Johnson

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me: This is Geoff Kruger the date is December 28, 1988. I am interviewing Mrs. Johnson. This is an autobiographical interview. I am interviewing her at her house in Ishpeming.

me: When were you born?

Mae: May 26, 1899 (Rocking in her rocking chair)

me: Where were you born?

Mae: Where ~~was~~ I born? Cheboygan, Michigan

me: What were the names of your parents?

Mae: My mother was Jenny Bigger and my dad Walter Tucker, Jenny Bigger was her maiden name

me: How long have you lived in Marquette County?

Mae: Well, since I was six months old

me: How many kids were in your family?

Mae: My family

me: Yeah

Mae: two boys and four girls

me: Were you the oldest, I was

Mae: ~~What~~ uh

me: what responsibilities did you have when you were young

Mae: Oh, golly lots, uh at what age do you mean

me: Just like what you did and had to do

Mae: at home, well, housework, chores we had cows and I had to deliver milk before I went to school

me: What was school like when you were <sup>first</sup> young?

Mae: Oh, oh so different from what it's like now it's hard to explain, I went to the High street school which is the Phelps school now, but kindergarten, there was a problem at school

I don't know whether it was a fire or what because that was many years ago, <sup>I went to a Church on the corner</sup> the baptist church was on one corner and there was another church across the street. It was baptist at one time that was sidy corner from the Phelps school. That's where I went to kindergarten, started at least, but then of course we finished at Phelps

~~But~~ Could you describe what school was like?

me: Did you have any favorite teachers?

Mae: Oh, I had lots of them, Mrs. Carl was our kindergarten teacher and she was also Sunday school teacher at our church. So I thought she was great, my children had her for kindergarten also.

mae: There was also, Bossfeld, Robinson, she taught Sunday school also at our church, those were my favorites

me: What responsibilities did you take on during the Great Depression?

mae: Oh, oh well I went out in my day all babies were born at home and I went out for home deliveries and things like that. I did that very young though, long before the depression. I did those things and if any neighborhood person was sick they used to call my aunt. I was raised by a great aunt. They used to call her and then after she died they called me and that went on through the depression. It started long before it too.

Did her parents pass away?

payments

me: What other kinds of work did you do during the depression?

mae: I did housework I worked Auntie's restaurant I, well that's about it I guess.

me: What did you think of think of the new president during the depression F.D.R.?

Mae: Well, to be honest I didn't think much one way or the other you know he was the president and we were taught to respect whoever was in charge, so I as far as any personal opinion I really don't have any, He was our president and that was it.

me: What kinds of meals did you have during the depression

follow  
up. Prices  
Suffering?

Mae: Meals? well I tell you hamburger went a long way ← (laughing) we had that and vegetables and we did have a garden at that time.

me: What did you think of Hitler and the Nazis?

Mae: Well I didn't think to much. I had a son and two son-and-laws they weren't son-and-laws at that time but they were right after they came back.

me: What bunch of service did they serve in?

Mae: One of them was a navigator he was a lieutenant and my other son-in-law was a corporal and so was my son, They were in the Air force.

me: Did they tell you <sup>about</sup> any of their attacks?

Mae: My son-in-law one time was telling me that on mothers day he was telling me they were flying over bombing places. He felt so bad because there was mothers there and they hadn't done anything.

Mae: He really felt bad when he thought of his own mother and thought about what they were doing

me: Can you recall any other incidents?  
 Mae: What was your reaction to the dropping of the atomic bomb?

Mae: no

me: Did your son-in-law talk about it at all?

Mae: They didn't talk to much about it, my son & I did say - felt so bad for those people he said mother if you could see the wounded we blew back from the country like we did you wouldn't feel so bad for them and when you would see what they did to them. He had a lot of reaction to it. It bothered him

me: Was there a national hero that you thought of as a hero?

Mae: no, not really

me: Did your son-in-law or son have any?

Mae: Like I say - they didn't talk to much about it

me: When did you first join the Presbyterian Church?

Mae: when I was thirteen years old

me: Who was the minister at the time you went there?

Mae: Mr. Allen was a minister there for many years when I was little, that was the first one I really remember. He was there close to twenty years.

me: Did you teach Sunday school?

Mae: Yes.

me: What grades did you teach?

Mae: Uh, the Juniors.

me: The Junior High?

Mae: At that time Mrs. Geysler, well I was teaching before she came then I taught downstairs with the younger ones. And then I taught in the Junior department. I taught up there too before she came with Mrs. Hanson, Walter Hanson's mother.

me: ~~was there more or less~~ people coming to church back then than there is now.

Mae: Well it varied from time to time. At times there would be a lot but there ~~was~~ more coming then than there is now. There has been so many deaths and transfers so many things but people have good reasons.

me: Do you have a favorite hobby?

mae: Oh, I knit and crochet those are my favorite hobbies

me: How did you get started knitting?

mae: When I was a little girl, I was in second grade I knit my own stockings. We wore home-knit stockings. There were no snowpants or slacks I tell you in that day. I had to knit my own. My aunt taught me and when I'd get to the heel I couldn't do that so she did that for me. If I made mistakes I had to rip them. I was so young I had a teddy bear and dolls of course first pair of socks I knit I knit for my teddy bear. I cried bitter tears because when I made mistakes I had to rip them and do them over again (laughing).

me: Is there any important discovery of technology that you lived through that you think is the most important?

mae: Well, back then what I think is when we got electric lights, I thought that was great.

me: When did you first get them?

mae: Oh, I was maybe, 10 years old, I ts about that time I think.

Mae: I thought that was great because I had to clean the lamps and wash the chimneys and put fresh oil in them and I was just a little kid. So I tell you when we got lights one straight cord came down with just a light bulb on it, that was the first and we thought that was great, now when the lights go out I have lamps and I light them and I wonder how we ever worked by lamplight like we did.

me: when did you first become interested in being a nurse?

Mae: Well as a young girl I always was interested ~~in~~ in sick people and I wanted to become a nurse but I didn't have the opportunity and (Do you want to know about when I quit school?)

me: time good

Mae: Well a lot of people now you have to be a high school graduate to become a practical nurse. But at time you didn't and I became a practical nurse in 1952. And then I was afraid to take state boards because not graduating I didn't think I'd make it. But I did and I had a good mark and I told my girlfriend I don't know how I got a good in this and I didn't in school.



mae: He said well your like this and it was true I just loved it. Then I worked until I was almost seventy. I worked at the hospital after I started. At that time you were supposed to retire at 62 years old. I was there until January and I was seventy then. So I worked that long. At 75 years old I went back for part-time but they asked me to come and I went but I didn't enjoy it. I worked so many years and I was doing things I wanted to do and every time they call me to go to work something would come up that I wanted to do so I didn't stay there too long.

me: Was there any really interesting injuries that you saw?

mae: Oh yes we saw a lot of things but I worked more in O.P. first I worked on all floors you know but after I just worked in O.P. after they built the O.S. department they didn't have an O.P. department before. They just had rooms on the other floors with the other patients. But then after they opened the O.P. department I just worked in there.

me: who did you work as an aide for?

Mae: In the hospital it was the nurse in charge who ever it was. There were different nurses and I worked for several and they are all very good friends to me now. They're younger than me you know and they're all so good to me they're just great. There is one in particular that calls me very often to see if I want to go out to lunch or take me for rides. But not only one does that but there is several. They come and visit me they're very good to me. One in particular was here the other days she always remembers me at Christmas and I go to her house for New Years. There were so many I couldn't name them all that I worked with and are good to me. Most of my good friends are gone now that I'm very fortunate I have so many young friends. I still like to go places I go to play bingo two nights a week and as you know I keep active in church and oh I belong to the Rebecca Lodge

Mae: I've been a member of the Rebecca Lodge for 67 years and I'm still active in it. I hold in office so and I love pids as you know, and do you want to know about how meet family?

me: I see

Mae: Well I had 5 children and 13 grandchildren and I have 14 great grandchildren. I have thirteen living and the oldest died. He was 21 when he died, and as I say everybody is so good to me and I have no regrets about anything. I think I have good health for my age and I'm able to live in my home, and of course my homes now are so different than the ones back then. We didn't have the conveniences that we have now is quite different. I have been a widow for 19 years, but family and friends like I said are good to me. I enjoy my church, I always have. I still like to dance if I get the chance. My husband was a good dancer. We went to every dance the Cold Believers had dances every two weeks

Mae:

We went all the time, & he had belonged to the odd fellows and I at the Rebeccas we went to all these dances so I was honored there a short time ago well a month ago. The woman that wrote remarked about when she was a little girl she remembers me and Jim dancing. So I've had a good life a very good life we were poor very poor and school I walked from the end of that street to High school, I came home from school for lunch and I didn't think anything of that, storm or no storm we didn't have storm days like you do now you went so when you were young on Saturday night you had a dime and we just weren't little kids but with a nickel you could go to the show and then with the other nickel we went to kids Condy Kitchen they used to call it or Ice Cream Parlor they called them both or either and we had a nickel to buy a dish of ice cream after so you know we were poor and clothes we had when I was a kid we had my play clothes and my school clothes and and a Sunday dress.

Good to let her explain on her own

mae: and we didn't wear our Sunday dress  
to school ever that was for best  
only we usually got a new dress  
for Christmas and one for childrens day.  
In those days they had childrens day  
program you know the first Sunday  
in June always. My dad died when  
I was 6 months old in the Spanish

Now →

American war he never come back so  
my mom had to find a job. My  
grandmother was taking care of me in  
order for my mom to work and my  
grandpa got so sick that she  
couldn't do it anymore. So her sister  
my great Aunt took me and she raised me.  
My mother re-married and went to the south  
to live and took me. My Aunt and Uncle  
were so lonesome they came down on a train  
to live with me and that was before  
my sister was born and they asked me  
to come back until the baby was born  
and my mother let me go and well  
I never came back again. I lived with my  
Aunt my Uncle died ~~and~~ when I was  
very young I was about four I think  
when he died and my Aunt had cows  
13 cows and the neighborhood boys used to  
help her milk them.

Mae: She delivered milk and made butter, so that and cream she gave the skim milk away because now look what you pay for skim milk (laughing) Then she had a apple orchard and she made apple jelly she worked so hard and did so much but she raised me. I had a very good raising she was strict in many ways, I was eighteen when I was allowed to stay out after 10 o'clock. Now its not like that.

Then of course when my children grew up there was the depression it was hard going but we made it, My husband was out of work but he worked in the mines first and then he went to Michigan gas. He left the mines and the only place you could get a job was the Barnes - Hecker it just before the disaster and I didn't want him to work there so we went to Flint, we lived there for three years and moved back and he worked for Michigan gas but he went back to the mine until he had to retire because of poor health. He was sixty-one then