

DAVE Joseph
interviewing
Mrs. Clara Joseph

Me - I'm David Joseph interviewing my grandmother, Mrs. Clara Joseph, on January 1, 1988 about her life in the grocery business. Let's start off by when and where were you born?

Gram - January 4, just the date, or?

Me - Yeah.

Gram - January 4, 1926 in Ishpeming.

Me - Ah, what was your childhood like?

Gram - Uneventful - I went to school.

Me - Where were you in your family?

Gram - (remembering) Lets see, fifth.

Me - Ah, what did your parents do for a living?

Gram - My father worked in the mines and my mother was a homemaker.

Me - Where did you grow up?

Gram - Ishpeming.

Me -^{ah} What schools did you attend?

Gram - St. Johns parochial schools until the eighth grade and then Ishpeming High School.

Me - Did you grow up in the grocery business as a child?

Gram - No

Me - When did you decide to start your own business?

Gram - Well, when my husband couldn't sell, ah, beef cattle anymore, we decided to ~~run~~ open a grocery business.

Gram - Up, we were up on the highway.

Dave (me) - Ah, did your parents inspire you to do it?

Gram - No.

Me - Who do you think inspired you the most then?

Gram - Well my husband decided he wanted to open a grocery store.

Me - Where was your first business at?

Gram - (Remembering) Oh ah, the highway, 41, U.S. 41. We had a converted garage we made into a store.

Me - What was it called?

Gram - Joseph's Market.

Me - How did you work your way up then?

Gram - Well, when the mines closed up there, we ah, decided to move downtown where there would be more business.

Me - Did your husband have a lot to do with this?

Gram - Oh, yes.

Me - (Interrupting) How?

Gram - All to do with it.

Me - How did a bigger business affect your daily life?

Gram - (Remembering) Well we both worked, and, I helped him get along in the business.

Me - How long have you been in the grocery business?

Gram - 39 years. (correcting) 38 years.

Me - How many stores have you owned in that time?

Gram - (sighing) Let's see now, (counting) 1, 2, 3, 4, 6. We opened one in
Gwinn and then one in Gladstone.

Me - Has it gotten better or worse as you've gotten older?

Gram - Better.

Me - A lot better?

Gram - Well, yeah, I would say so.

Me - Was there ever a major change in your business?

Gram - Well what would you mean by that, major change?

Me - Like -

Gram - Oh, well we went from service to self service. You know, people
waited on themselves and we didn't have to do anything for them.

Me - Did you have ah, any major financial problems?

Gram - Yes we did (laughing). Um, I don't know how to explain that though.
How would I explain that.

Me - Were you -

Gram - We never had a lot of money. We always had to borrow money to
open a grocery store.

Me - Were you ever really in debt?

Gram - Always in debt.

Me - How did you feel when you had to move on to another store?

Me - Was it hard?

Gram - It wasn't hard to move from on the highway. I enjoyed coming back into the city of Ishpeming to open our first store in Ishpeming.

Me - Have you ever gotten tired with the business?

Gram - No, I can't say that I did. I ah, I enjoyed being with the people.

Me - If you were young again, would you go into the grocery business?

Gram - I think so. Um, I enjoyed it, we both enjoyed it.

Me - You wouldn't pick a different career?

Gram - No.

Me - Would you rather have a store outside of Ishpeming instead of here?

Gram - No. Well, know we have one just on the outskirts but I enjoy it. - That store as much. I miss the one across the street, of course.

Me - Could you give me any advice for people who are going into the grocery business?

Gram - It's a hard business to go into ^{right} now, there's too much competition in it now. When we started we didn't have all that big stores or competition.

Me - What changes were there moving from the old store to Big Dollar, now?

Gram - I think it's ah, meeting the people and, you know, it's different because there we were more family orientated than we are.

Me - Now you're more business?

Gram - And we have a bigger business right now.

Me - Ah, what, would you still have liked to have the old store right now? Would you have liked to have both?

Gram - I would have liked to have had both, but I, economic reasons we moved up there, and I enjoy it up there.

Me - Do you work more now that you own a bigger store? Or is it about the same amount of time?

Gram - Well when we were across the street I only worked a few hours a day, but up there now I work about you know, 6 hours a day.

Me - Do you have any future plans now for like a bigger or different store?

Gram - No, Not right now. Not right now we don't.

Me - What was it like to manage a store while raising a family?

Gram - (laughing) Very difficult. Oh, we had to work late at night when we first started the store to get everything ready for the next day.

Me - How did it affect your children then?

Gram- Well, I think it ~~is~~ Kind of helped things because they learned to get along with people and they learned the business for about a month. They each one worked in the store.

Me- Did they all work?

Gram- Some capacity - they all worked.

Me- So it was more like a family business.

Gram- Yes.

Me- Ah, could I see any pictures? Would you have any older pictures?

Gram- Yeah. If you'll wait I'll go upstairs and get an album.

Me- O.K.

Me- What size family did you come from?

Gram- Well ah, two brothers and two sisters.

Me- Ah, what year did you start the business on U.S. 41?

Gram- 1941. August 1941.

Me- What year did you move downtown from that store?

Gram- Ah, we stayed there 6 years and moved downtown in '55.
~~1955~~ 1955.

Me - did you have any slogans during this time?

Gram - We trim the bone, not the customer.

Me - Where'd that come from? Just out of nowhere?

Gram - Just out of, I don't know where!

Me - Sounded good?

Gram - Just sounded good and -

Me - Did you think of shutting down the store after your husband died? Did that ever come up?

Gram - No not really. Because I had two sons that were in the business.

Me - So they helped manage it?

Gram - And they helped me manage it.

Me - Did your stores always get bigger as you progressed?

Gram - Yes. Always bigger.

me - a lot bigger?

Gram - Well, not the first three but the fourth one did.

Me - What were your feelings about closing Joseph's and moving to Big Dollar?

Gram - Very sad, kind of. I was always so used to having a store here and working every day.

Me - (interrupting) So you -

Gram - Now I have to get in a car and go up there.

Me - Yeah. How was your relationship with your employees?
Was it good?

Gram - Very good.

Me - Were there any times of like, fighting or anything?

Gram - Not really. I can't ever remember any. I can't ever remember fighting or anything.

Me - Were they always good then?

Gram - We always had good employees.

Me - Who have been your longest employees?

Gram - Barbara Strongman. She came as a part-time employee in our first store and stayed for 36 years.

Me - That's a long time. Anyone else that really sticks out?

Gram - Well, we still have Jeff Jarvi who started about, ~~who~~ started when we formed the store at King Koin Laundromat. So it has to be, 6, 20, 30 years.

Me - What changes did you make changing to self service like from cutting beef cattle and stuff? Page 8

Gram - You mean, from his job?

Me - Yeah.

Gram - Well, we knew that he couldn't do that anymore so we ^{decided to open} ~~opened~~ a store there, it was built as a garage and we decided we had to make a living so we decided to open a grocery store. I wasn't too happy with it,

Me - So you would've rather stuck with it, cutting the cattle?

Gram - I'd rather have not had a store, but once we ~~had it~~ ^{started} I enjoyed it.

Me - Do you think you'd rather go back and not have one, or?

Gram - No, I don't think so.

me - Still liked to go into the grocery business?

Gram - Yes. He's earned his good living. We had a lot of hard times but,

Me - Ah, what's it like now to base the store on a computer?

ordering and the stuff ~~is~~ based on a bigger computer for

Gram - A lot easier now than it was, we used to order by you know, have to send in an order every week, now it goes in a computer.

Me - Has your life been affected at all by losing ah,
all of these stores?

Gram - No, because we always went in to another. I
enjoyed working in each one.

Me - Ah, can I see your photo album, again?

Gram - This is Grandpa. That's my -

Me - (interrupting) that's Grandpa? Ah, what's this? Is that
a delivery truck or?

Gram - Yeah. - No. He used to go to get cattle with that.

Me - Where did he butcher it, just in the garage?

Gram - Yeah.

Me - Now this is your, first store?

Gram - First store, This one we always had to wait on people.
Everything was behind us, the counter, we had to
give to every body. Here we had to wrap our meats.
We used to, we used to cut at night to fill the
case, so we wouldn't have to do it in the
morning.

Me - Cheaper than they are today?

Gram - Much cheaper, than they are today, And he would
go in and work and then when it was dinner time
I'd go out to work so he could come in to eat.

Me - Is that Grandpa now?

Gram - Yeah.

Me - Who's that?

Gram - He came soon after we opened.

Me - Now that's the one on the corner?

Gram - Yes. That's King Koin Laundromat now.

Me - Ah, that's you?

Gram - That's me. In '55.

Me - Ah, where's this at?

Gram - This is ah, the second store, King Koin ah, King Koin Laundromat.

Me - This is all, King Koin Laundromat?

Gram - Uh, hah. I was glad to move downtown.

Me - Would you rather have stayed downtown than moved out there?

Gram - Definitely. I have never lived out of town. And then we came to West Ishpeming to live in the first place and we built, we built our house out there. That's where we built our store.

Me - Is it better business now than it was here?

Gram - Well, it's different to me.
Me - Yeah.

Gram - Being up there.

Me - Is this all still the-

Gram - (interrupting) This is self-serve too, yeah.

Me - Self serve too.

Gram - This is when we first went into self service - we came down here. We closed up there because the mines closed up ~~there~~ and we didn't think we could make it up there so we moved. We always had the dream of bigger stores. That's Joe LaFreniere. He was a sales person who does a lot. He used to help us when we got big sales.

Me - That's the third store?

Gram - That's the third store - Old Rosberg's store.

Me - Where's that?

Gram - Right next door.

Me - Is it?

Gram - Yeah. We tore it down, after we moved in to
the fourth store.

Gram - And this is the 3rd - That's - I've
always worked in every store.

Me - you never really quit working or anything?

Gram - No. One year when we had a new manager, but then
I came in every now and then - Filling. I used
to work register.

Me - What about like when you were pregnant?

Gram - I always worked. Except the day I

Me - Now this one is across the street?

Gram - Yes, across the street.

Me - So you've had this for a long time then.

Gram - Yep. Until we moved up to Big Dollar.
They enlarged this.

Me - yeah.

Gram - We enlarged it.

Me - The whole place?

Gram - yeah.

Me - So that's what, 22 years for this?

Gram - I think it's 26 years.

Me - 26 ~~years~~?

Gram - Cause we've been up there 2, three years?
We moved to Big Dollar 3 years ago.

Me - Now this is the store across the street still?

Gram - Yes, This is our opening day, This was the most modern store at the time.

Me - So everyone shopped here?

Gram - Huh?

Me - Everyone shopped here?

Gram - Well, I wouldn't say everyone shopped here.
We had a big store.

Me - And that's, Jeff Jarvis?

Gram - And this is the night before we opened, Yes, that's Jeff. We never used to ~~have~~ ^{cut} meat ~~at night~~ ^{but} electric saw when we first first cut meat.
We used to cut at night.

Me - That's the opening day across the street?

Gram - Wh huh.

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Gram - This is when we went into self-service.

Me - Was it?

Gram - We were part service over here now.

Me - Who's that?

Gram - Joe Garceau,

Me - Is that Joe?

Gram - Joe Garceau has been with us since we were in Rosberg's store. And then we had Tony Olson as Manager of the store. This is when we just had it come in uncut.

Me - So you had to cut it?

Gram - It doesn't come in quarters anymore. It's broken down and then cut into fractions.

Me - So you had to cut it back then and send it up?

Gram - Yes, we did.

Me - Did you have any certain way to send it up like?
Just by hand?

Gram - What do you mean by send it up?

Me - Like just, carry it up?

Gram - Carry it up from where? No, this is -
this is in the cooler.

Me - From downstairs, Oh.

Gram - And then we just, move it out on a track and they
cut, split it and store it.

Me - That's Tony?

Gram - That's Tony Olson. And then our new venture
was the King Koin Laundromat.

Me - So this was when you went into ~~this~~ the laundry
business.

Gram - Yes. We sold it in a year or two. Just too much.

Me - Seems like they still have that sign up. Have
one like it.

Gram - King Koin?

Me - Yeah.

Gram - Yeah. Same sign. Then we had a store in Gladstone
and a store in Gwinn. We had to run back and
forth to Gwinn.

Me - Now this is when you were putting the extension on.

Gram - The addition, yes.

Me - the addition onto it, Joseph's?

Gram - Then we had a fire soon after. After we put on the addition we had a fire so -

Me - Did you rebuild?

Gram - We just had to remodel again. It had mostly smoke damage.

Me - Was that a tough time?

Gram - It was a tough time you know, we had just opened up and we had a fire - I think it was a month or two later after we opened up, I think we had to take those things to the dump.

Me - Uh, huh. So this is still Joseph's? Yeah, ~~you~~ you can see cause that's the damage.

Gram - Damage. There was a lot of smoke damage.

Me + Gram - (Both Mumbling)

Me - Who's that?

Gram - Jimmy Judici. He's been here for

Me - Did he work?

Gram - Jimmy Judici worked for us, yes.

Me - A long time?

Gram - 15 years. He worked for us. I don't have
any ~~regrets~~ ^{regrets}. But I've always
enjoyed working and I like the people. I
don't think I'd ever quit because of
being with the people.

Me - OK, that's about it.