

Andrea Scapel's

Interview with Nick Joseph

Introduction

me: My name is Andrea Scapel and I'm interviewing Nick Joseph at his home on February 19th, 1993 for a Red Dust Project.

me: When and where were you born?

Mr. Joseph: I was born in Marquette Hospital in 3/29/45.

me: What were your parents names?

Mr. Joseph: Lawrence Nick Joseph and Claira Joseph.

me: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. Joseph: I've got one brother Larry and I've got six sisters.

me: Can you name them?

Mr. Joseph: Yep. Ann is the oldest, then I came second, Larry, Rosie, Patty, Susie, Julie, Margaret.

me: OK, um, when and where were you married?

Mr. Joseph: We were married in Saint Johns in 1965, August 10th.

me: And what is your wife's name?

Mr. Joseph: Judith, Judy (laughs)

me: What did your parents do for a living?

Mr. Joseph: Well, ever since I remember we have always been in the grocery business. My mom and dad started a business in 1948 up on

His Mom: 49

Mr. Joseph: The history says 48, and a where you would

recognize it now as Lawrey's Pasty Shop, that was our first store and our first house, and that's where all but two of the kids were born I believe.

me: Where did you go to school?

Mr. Joseph: I went to Ishpeming High School, I went to Saint Johns School for grade school, and at Ishpeming High School and I graduated in 1966. I went to Northern Michigan University and received an Bachelor of Science degree in business in 1971.

me: What special memories do you have of growing up in Ishpeming?

Mr. Joseph: Well we had a lot of our memories revolved around the lake, we did a lot of family things together and my mother had two brothers and three sisters and between us we had lots of cousins our own age and all that and a lot of things we did we would go to camp in the summertime and just do a whole lot of different things you know whatever you do on a lake and stuff like that and basically a lot of things centered around camp and family type of things.

me: Do you have any children?

Mr. Joseph: I have three children, and my oldest daughter is Melissa, she's 23, she works for Holiday Travel in Marquette, she's just getting home now. I've got a son Nick, who's a junior at Michigan Tech University and I've got a son Brad who's a freshman, he's 19, he's at the University of Notre Dame.

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me: What special feat features stand out in your mind about the city of Ishpeming and when you were younger?

Mr. Joseph: The city itself is, if nothing else, has gotten smaller, population wise I think the census things will bare that out, the townships on the other hand have gotten much bigger, the city itself, when I was going to school and probably the biggest differences: when I went to school we had 900 to 1,000 kids in the high school and you know we were a big high school and then in 1975 I believe it was Westwood came and now Ishpeming is about 300 and some kids in the high school and Westwood is about 500 some kids I believe and whatever it is you know and that's probably the biggest difference, its changed the um, it changes alot of things that happened I mean you know where everybody from the townships used to come into Ishpeming and their kids ~~wx~~ were going to school and to either band or sporting activities and that, now each has there own type of thing that they kind of huddle around and that, and yet it shows you that the community itself really hasn't changed because we still depend on each other to make our livings no matter what were doing if were a policeman or a fireman or you know we own a business or if we work at the mine we still need each other, we go to church together and all those things like that, so as far as which changes, it really hasn't changed a whole lot.

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

Mr. Joseph: When we were teenagers, well I'll tell ya, once in a while we would go out to camp, we didn't have the luxury of ah like today where kids have their own cars and all that I mean if somebody had a car that was a big deal, most of the high school years were spent every Friday and Saturday night there was a dance at the high school and everybody walked in circles and you know asked people to dance and so on and so forth. After the dance everybody left um, 10:30, 11:00 o'clock and we would all go down to the Congress Lounge and ah you know pizza cards, when you bought a pizza you got a pizza card, if you had ten pizza cards you would get a dollar so you know whenever you walked in people ask you, you got a pizza card, I got nine I only need ~~one~~, you know how about giving me the last one I need and stuff like that so alot revolved around the high school activities more so, I mean you go out of town, we made ah, my senior year we made a trip to Sault St. Marie and we stayed overnight. Six of us guys went to watch Ishpeming play basketball, and then that same year we went up to Ironwood and watched the game. That was, that was unusual itself and we felt very, very happy and ah very big like we were big men around town now because we went all the way to the sault by ourselves, and ah as far as other things basically through high school myself I, you know I went into sports, football and track basically, I did not ah, I didn't do much after school other than go to work

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after practice and all that ah I worked just about every night and on Saturdays, we weren't open on Sundays then, so Sundays was off and course that was football days you know watching the Lions or the Packers and ah the Packers were on t.v. all the time so that's kind of the team you start following when you were in your, you know younger and mostly those were, those were mostly the things we did. We used to go up to Greenwood and ah we used to call um Greenwood Gorillas where we used to play football in the wintertime and you know Ishpeming against Negaunee or Ishpeming against Greenwood or whatever it was like that you know, we just had good times like that.

me: Where did most of the kids like to hang out?

Mr. Joseph: Congress, and the dances like I said every Friday and Saturday night there was a dance and generally Negaunee also had a youth center, um and that was every Friday and Saturday night also so you were at either place or both you know to find out where everybody was.

me: Do you have any interesting or humorous stories to share about these early days?

Mr. Joseph: Humorous stories about that, not so much of the, of then you know, none that I can think of right now but ah, when you asked for this interview and we were going to do this story you know we went and started looking through old pictures and high school years and stuff like that, and you compare what you looked like the long sideburns, the long hair and stuff like that, the flower

generation or you know baby boomers or whatever you want to call us and we have changed quite a bit since then and I guess that's the humor itself what we thought you know that we were kings of the hill and were not, were going to change policy, were going to do this as years go along the humorous part is you become the establishment and you find out that all the things you were against are just things that really weren't much sense at that time when your looking back but they kind of molded you into what you are today you know.

me: How old were you when you found your first job?

Mr. Joseph: I was born, (laughs), all of us, like I said we we my parents started in business in, and from when we were probably, I'm going to say 7 or 8 years old, everything used to come bulk back then so we had, oranges and apples we used to put in 3 pound bags or 5 pound bags, we had ah, we used to sweep up the counters, we used to bag potatoes, that was probably the biggest job and the toughest job you know but, you know usually there was 4, 5 of us that were always old enough or young enough to do that and we would just all get together you know, there was never, you know, we never got along all of the time, well as far as that goes somebody had to be the boss and that but, so youngest job, you know, I was twelve when I got my social security card, you know, the first social security card in 1960, and ah but we start working when we were young, just doing simple little things, maybe it was a couple days of the

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week or an hour a day or something like that
but these are the things I remember.

me: Um, what stands out in your mind about the
first job?

Mr. Joseph: Probably the biggest thing that stands out
is ah I didn't think I had to do some of
those things, I thought I should've been able
to start with the glory jobs or the good jobs,
the clean jobs you know and stuff like that
because I was the owner's son so I shouldn't
have to do those other things you know.

me: Ok, how or why did you choose this career?

Mr. Joseph: In 1965 my father bought a store in Gwinn, my
mother and father bought a store in Gwinn,
and we had a manager go down there in 1967,
I believe that manager went ~~quick~~ to go back
to school and all that and my dad offered
me the Gwinn store at that particular time,
in fact it was 1965, the night I had get
married and all that but I just didn't
really know what I wanted to do on second
year of college and really not sure that I
wanted to be in the grocery business or did
I want to, you know what did I want to
do, and so I said no, I, you know, I really
didn't want it so he sold it in 69, and when I
got out of school and all during college, when we
got married especially you know I was working
40 hour week plus I was taking a full load at
school and stuff like that, and I just, I never had
another job outside of the store since and I
just I guess the thing that really made my
decision on it do I stay in the grocery store

or do I take this type of field, I just liked people and to me there was nothing worse and even today there is nothing worse than just sitting in an office doing bookwork or not seeing people and being able to talk to people and help people and have them you know sometimes they're crabby sometimes they're happy but it's just the way you are, you know it's just a human type of feeling going on.

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

Mr. Joseph: My job right now is that I'm president of Joseph's food Incorporated which is our corporate name in the state of Michigan, my duties as president we have a partnership, or it's a corporation but my brother's the vice-president-treasurer and my duties are to oversee the operation of the store, to take care of the advertising, to make sure that the office work runs accordingly and that we meet our, set our projections and our goals, budgets and mostly to see that our employees are trained or not trained but hired and manned on the hours that are needed. My brother on the other hand he takes care of most of the, making sure the shelves are stocked, the pricing is correct, he oversees the employee's, making sure that there are no problems of any sort, customer problems or anything like that. If there's a problem he's there to take care of it, and basically we've ~~oppo~~ operated really good, he does my job at times, I do his job at times and it's just an real good working relationship.

me: Does this job require any special training?

Mr. Joseph: Not really, you know because I was brought up in the job from day one and stuff like that so.

me: Right, o.k., what was the most challenging or difficult part of your job?

Mr. Joseph: The most difficult part ^{was} probably finding out that no matter how much you know you find out new little you know, and that you never know

enough to say I've get it made now I can sit back and just do nothing, you always have to be looking for something ~~to~~ new and better and different and challenging and hopefully if that day comes and that and I'm not challenged or I'm not this it's time to change professions or retire depending on my age and stuff like that.

me: How are the duties of your job changed over the years?

Mr. Josephs: Most of my duties changed quite a bit over the years from the stand point of, about when I first started it was more a learning process, like I said we were brought up in it but the process was making mistakes and making corrections. So we were always operating behind and we had to make a mistake before we found out what was the right way to do it. Now basically my job is to try to prevent making most of those mistakes, learning from past experiences because with the job Larry, my brother and I have know we are making decisions that are best for 70 people, yes, you know it's most important to us probably cause it's our business and stuff like that. But each of the partime people that work for us from fulltime people, yet there main job be it a high school kid just getting their first job or college kid trying to work their way through school or getting extra money. All the decisions we make affect them. If we make a big bad one or many bad ones, really there could be 70 plus people that would lose their incomes and that's probably where my job has changed the most, where down at when we were smaller and we were first starting in business it was kind of just keeping things going and stuff, and now it's really, the markets getting tighter, there's bigger and better equipt stores, there's more competition, there's gas stations selling pop, there's discount stores

that are rather than just selling furniture and clothing and stuff like that they're selling grocery items and even the grocery stores you will see alot of health and beauty aids and alot of things that you traditionally saw at discount stores or that you saw at drug stores and stuff like that so there's alot of cross merchandising now and I think that's really a neat thing.

me: Could you describe some interesting or humorous events that happened during your career?

Mr. Joseph: Interesting I would say is that you just never know what's going to happen in your store every day, I mean sometimes you could be really worried about something or thinking about something that's really troubling you and somebody will come up to you an employee or a customer and tell you a joke or say something they think is really funny and it just breaks, it just breaks that whole dead thought that you had, that the weight of the world is on your shoulder, and like I said the biggest thing that I think we enjoy the most is the fact they're just people, it's just a whole lot of fun to inter-relate with people and to know people and when they're happy, you're happy and when they're sad, you know you're sad type of thing and not that you're trying to be a, what is that a tutti good shoes or something like that, how do they say that?

Mrs. Joseph: Goody two shoes

Mr. Joseph: Goody two shoes or any but I mean it's, you really, you know, certain people, we all get in patterns and if they come in every Wednesday morning you look for them on Wednesday, when you don't see them you think gee you know, I didn't see so and so I wonder is she sick, are they on vacation, what is it, and you kind of develop that interest.

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and that you want to know what happened you know and stuff like that.

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

Mr. Joseph: Yes

me: And why?

Mr. Joseph: Just, you just sometimes you get into a point in your life when you just think that is there something that I would just assume be doing as doing this? Is there something with maybe less pressure? Is there something with mainly a more challenge and I think we all go through that, I was probably troubled with that more when I was in college than anything, you went to school with some of your friends and they knew they were going to be a doctor, or they knew they were going to be an engineer or whatever and your sitting there really not sure what do I want to do the rest of my life and I think we always question that even if you're, I think even if you're at the top of your profession whatever that is, I think you sometimes say is there something else I would enjoy doing more than what I'm doing here. I went through that probably three times in the 20 some years since I've been out of college and just never had the gumption, guts, whatever it took to make that decision because I always felt that when I really thought about it this is what I'd like to do and that's always kept me at that.

me: What were your biggest responsibilities on the job?

Mr. Joseph: Just making sure that we can keep our employees, I'm sorry, making sure that we make money and a profit at the store so that our employees and ourselves can share in that and we can hire more people, that we can keep the people we have employed so that their style of living or even

if its twenty or thirty dollars that a part-timer person is bringing home, they still learn to live on that you know and that might be a pair of jeans that might be gas money, that might be part of your car payment or insurance, just to make sure that people can make a fair and a good living for themselves.

me: Did you ever recieve any special awards from your employer? And were you recognized in any way for your job performance?
Mr. Joseph: Nope. I can honestly say none.

me: ok. During your days of employment and beyond what have been your favorite hobbies or leisure activities?

Mr. Joseph: I don't really have many hobbies from the standpoint of really working with wood or collecting stamps or things like that. I enjoy reading, I enjoy all high school sports, I like high school activities as a whole, I like, I also liked, I also felt that I got a good shake from this community, this area, and this business and I also felt that I always owed something back for that and not in form of money or stuff like that but I believe very firmly that people do owe there community something cause we get something out of it. I've been very interested in sitting on, be they business committees, be they raising money for a high school team to go downstate, be they for little leagues, be they for church groups, and those types of things and just, I always felt that I owed something for that and my job allows me to do some of those things, maybe sometimes I do to much, most times I think we don't do enough, but I just feel that we owe our community something back, and again the community, my community is not this block, or this city, or this immediate area

The community of me is I mean you go to Republic - Michigamee, Champion, you go to you know Nequaine, towards Marquette and stuff like that, I mean my business depends on that, on that market, Gwin and stuff like that and that's where I feel if I can help anything in my area, I always felt that it was my responsibility and my duty to do that, and that has been the trait that my father and my mother have instilled in us kids and we believe firmly in that. I think that's something that, if nothing else comes out of the Joseph trait since we've been in business I think that's probably something I think is very important.

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

Mr. Joseph: Yes

me: And can you please describe them?

Mr. Joseph: I've been ah, well as far as basketball goes I've been in charge of the, I think I served three or four years as treasurer of the Ishpeming City League, basketball league. I've been Chamber of Commerce president, I've been Chamber of Commerce diplomat president for a couple of years, I've been retail president. I've been the city, I've been a city commissioner for three years, two of those years as its ^mayor. I'm serving on the County Board of Commissioners, I just got elected and took office as of June, or I'm sorry as of January 5th I believe it was, was the first meeting. I've served on Northland Grocers, which is a whole sale grocer company, and I was it's president. I served on Catholic Social Services now. I am president of Saint Rocco Saint Anthony Society. I'm sitting on our church board. I hope I'm not forgetting anything. I'm very active in Little League. This is most of the stuff, we tried putting

this together you know cause sometimes, I'm sitting on the Miner's First National Bank Board. I sat on the Michigan Food Dealers Association which is a food dealer's group down in, it's out of Lansing, it's a block from the White House, not the White House, from the state capitol and I served on that for about three years. I'm sitting on the Ishpeming Economic Development Authority now, and I guess that would probably be most of that, I've got the church.

Mrs. Joseph: You were a religion teacher.

Mr. Joseph: I've taught CCD for seven years which is our religious education for St. John's in Ishpeming here. I taught pre-marriage classes, I got that one, I think we got them all.

me: What special moments stand out in the aspect of your life?

Mr. Joseph: Well, probably from a special moment. There's been lots of them, some of them happy some of them sad. I would say probably some of the happiest ones are when I got married, when I had each my kids, when I see them accomplish what they have done in their lives so far, that makes me happy. I think when we were able to put together a, we were able to put together for my grandparents a 6th ad in the Mining Journal with their kids pictures, their grandchildren, their great-grandchildren and if somebody was expected at that time we left just a little picture with a question mark in it. That was a great moment. Some of the sad moments which we kind of take would be my father died less than a year after we incorporated in business, and probably when my grandparents left cause they were, like I said we had a lot of

family things together and those were probably two of the saddest things. From a business standpoint or a community standpoint probably the, probably one of the main highlights was when I was featured in Michigan Food News, a Lansing paper, depicting, it kind of picks the person in that industry that's recognized and that and they're still doing it now but I was one of the first ones picked that they did a life history type of thing on you and interviewed you and send somebody up from Lansing to interview you. So from a personal growth ~~you~~ in the industry that's probably one of the main things and the other thing would probably be from a club standpoint when the Sons of Italy, a couple of years ago honored me for being their business person of the year, and they had people from all over, they had you know, it was just something special that sticks out a little bit more.

me: overall what are your fondest memories of your working days in your career?

Mr. Joseph: Probably the people I've worked with. I mean is just unbelievable the amount of people I've been in touch with. Sometimes somebody comes back after you haven't seen them for 20 years and all of a sudden you kind of look at each other and say, "gee, remember when this happened when we were working", and just the stupid things that happened that you talk about when you were working side by side someone and stuff, like that, and it's just the growth that you see some employees making themselves and when they come to you, they get their first job, they seem so timid, so scared, so nervous, so everything and as they go along and you see them

building up confidence, where they would, ~~at~~ you had all you could do to get them to say hello to a customer or thank you or something like that. All of a sudden now they're calling them by their first names or if somebody asks them something now they're very confident, it's over here, it's over there or yes we carry this or whatever happens. I would say those are probably the fondest memories because I grew up the same way. When I'm in my store, I'm very confident, I'm very sure of myself. Not that I know all of the answers or know all the right answers, but I feel confident in what I'm doing. If I don't know the answer I feel that I can go to some of my employees and get that answer and stuff like that. I think that's probably the fondest memory I have of working is the people that I've worked with.

me: Do you plan on expanding your business in the future?

Mr. Joseph: Yes, this summer we are going to be expanding. It's not going to be so much a expansion of actual square footage. There will be some gain in square footage but it's going to be more a paint up, fix up, decor type of change, with some new cases, the store will change immensely as far as when you walk in there will be alot of changes that you will notice and stuff like that. But it's not going to be an actual, where your building another 10,000 square feet or 5,000 square feet or any thing like that, so physically size is not, it is going to be a little bit bigger but the physical size is really, just to do some of the other things we want to do inside, it's not really selling it.

me: If you had to do it all over again would you chose the

same career?

Mr. Joseph: yes, I think that I would realize that the career I have is really a unique situation, I mean we all have to eat, we all have to shop on a, be it a daily, weekly or monthly whatever your shopping trend is. But it just brings you into relationships with so many different people, its not just, its, and yet I think, I think when you look at I think sometimes you think that, I think I could have been just happy to a certain degree, I could accomplish alot of these things I'm talking about, the relationships with the customers, employees and vendors and all that as much if I would've been in an department store or whatever you know whatever type of business it happens to be, but I think one of the key things is I think that the fondest memory I think that can possibly happen is that happened in this area. yes there's is other pockets in the country that are small and have that hometown feeling and people share things and all that, but I don't know where they are. I know, the one I know is here and I'm very comfortable, I think we've got everything we need up here. We got, we've got all the, we've got all the treasures we really need and stuff like that and the treasures are the people and I think if there's a sad part to this whole thing it seems that in today's time it seems like we have to export our youth someplace else so that they can get jobs and they don't have the ability to make a living. When I came out of high school in '66 we could have went and worked in the mine, I'd had 26 years in right now and kids in our generation you know we would've lived a very good life like

that. Kids coming out of high school now you know, they keep telling them you got to go on to a vocational school or two year, four year degree program of some sort or higher education of some sort and it just seems so much more pressure today then when I was a kid then and I think that's the sad part of this generation.

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

Mr. Joseph: I think that one I, probably, probably one of the biggest things I think that I am thankful for is that my mother and father gave the eight kids an opportunity to live a good life, taught us good values, made sure that we had the basic simple things that are necessary. We were never pampered to the point where we became spoiled, we were never given ~~with~~ everything we wanted, you know we were like any other kid, if we didn't take care of something we weren't going to get something else and stuff like that and I think the closeness that was developed and between the brothers and the sisters and stuff like that, I thinked was something that shaped us all to a large degree. I think that the things that we went through as far as our extended family, our cousins and aunts and uncles and stuff like that. I mean that made that thing just a little tighter because they kind of shared the same views and not that we all have the same views today and all that I mean we all have our differences and that but I mean by bringing this up we've learned to get along, we learned that we have to share, you learn that you have to get along and in a small more cohesive group and as you got out into high school and into college and out in your job and all that I think all those things that you learned

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and those family settings and that set the trend for us to where we are today. Not all of us can attain all the goals that we want to. I've got some goals that I would like to still personally achieve. There are some business goals you know that the Joseph's would like to accomplish, and maybe we will never attain them all or accomplish them all but at least were shooting for something you know and there's a plan down there someplace and the plan changes, it can change in the day, it can change in a month, you know or whatever period of time but I thank God to a certain degree for the family it's given me and for my personal family, my wife has allowed me to do lots of things, take the pressure off, hold my meals because I'm at ball games or meetings or tending different functions or involved in things that sometimes maybe I would have been better off to stay out of. My kids had to put up with a lot of things like that also but I think those are things you just go through and let me say I'm just proud of the family I have and I'm proud of my brothers and sisters and my kids. I hope that they you know, when they get to be my age which I'm not that old but that they will be able to look back and say the same thing about me maybe you know and their mother or their cousins or whatever the case happens to be, that's about all I think I have.

me: o.k., I just want to say thank you for letting me interview you.

Mr. Joseph: Thank you very much for coming. I appreciate the honor.

me: Thanks