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Heather Gauthier's
interview with
Richard Skewis

Introduction:

Me: This is Heather Gauthier. It's February 20th 1993. I'm interviewing my grandpa, Richard Skewis, in his home. The main topic of this interview is his, "Work at the Post Office".

Interview:

Me: When and where were you born?

Grandpa: I was born February 15th, 1926, at 615 North Second Street, in Ishpeming.

Me: What were your parents' names?

Grandpa: Lena and Herbert Skewis.

Me: What are the names of your brothers and sisters?

Grandpa: I had two sisters, Carol and Francis, and five brothers, Herbert, William, Henry, Wallace, and Robert.

Me: Were you married?

Grandpa: Twice. First time from July of 48 in Ishpeming, through and the second time was March the 8th, 1988.

Me: What were your spouse's names?

Grandpa: Betty, she passed away on February 12th 1990.

Me: What did your parents do for a living?

Grandpa: My dad was an underground miner and my mother was a house maker.

Me: Where did you go to school?

Grandpa: I went to, in Ishpeming at the High Street school, the Grammar Street school, The Ridge street school, and the Ishpeming High School. High Street school was torn down to build the C.C. Phelps school. The grammar school on the corner of 4th and North Street was converted to apartments and burned down. The Ridge street school was converted to apartments and still stands on the corner of Ridge and Lake streets. It is now known as the Ridge Street Apartments. Three of the four schools I attended as a youngster no longer exist only the Ishpeming High School is still a school.

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

Grandpa: Kids didn't have as much free time as they do today. We had jobs to do after school, such as seeing that the wood box was filled, the ashes were hauled, the garbage was dumped, the snow was shovelled, and the lawn was cut before dad got home from work.

Then the evenings were spent in the vegetable garden we had to help dad with planting, weeding, cultivating, picking potato buds, and harvesting in the fall. Dad grew many of the vegetables that, which were stored for winter, or preserved by my mom for winter use. In the fall we picked berries, fruit, to preserve for winter. Cut, split, and piled wood in the basement enough wood for all winter. All this was done by hand, no chain saws, or splitter in those days. The work was done after school on weekends, so it didn't leave much spare time.

Me: O.K. What special features stand out in your mind about the cities of Ishpeming or Negaunee from when you were younger?

Grandpa: Well the Grammar school, and the Gossard building both had tower clocks, neither one of which any longer exist. Ah. There was many small businesses not many large stores. Many of those had been torn down. There were no parking lots, at the time most people didn't have cars. Ah, where ever you went you walked most of the time.

Me: (laughs)

Grandpa: (laughs slightly)

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

Grandpa: We spent time fishing and hunting, and other sports. We used to make a ski hill in the winter and made our own skis out of barrel staves with a piece of an inner tube for straps.

Me: (laughs)

Grandpa: Kids that had extra spending money used to go to the Chocolate Shop a restaurant in Soda Fountain located where the Brown Derby is on the corner of Maine and Pearl streets. They had a Youth center over at Narotzky's Garage down at the Twin City Dodge for a while, but it didn't last for long. Not enough teenagers used it.

Me: Do you have any interesting stories to ~~tell~~ share about these early days in Ishpeming or Negaunee?

Grandpa: Ah. These were depression days and money was hard to come by. If you had a nickel for an ice cream cone or some candy once a week you were lucky. We would share a path for people for a nickel. Clothing and shoes were patched and handed down from the oldest to the youngest until they no longer fit, or were worn out. We would sell and deliver magazines to people's houses for Olson News for 1 or 2 cents per magazine. That's what we got paid for delivering, 1 or 2 cents after school. If you had a few pennies to spend for candy you would go to the neighborhood store and look in the candy corner

to see what you could get the most of for your money. If you got to see a Saturday afternoon matinee once in a while you were real lucky at that time the show cost ten cents, when school was out for the summer Dad would line us up and cut our hair right down to the scalp so he didn't have to cut hair to often during the hot summer months, but we weren't alone, most of the boys had their hair cut that way, when we were smaller, Bats used to be in front of the kitchen stove with the oven door open to to keep you warm. The bath tub was a laundry tub, we used to follow one another, using the same water and didn't have a bath tub at that time.

Me: How old were you when you found your first job and where did you work?

Grandpa: I quit high school half-way through the eleventh grade against my mom's and dad's wishes. And, that was when my dad told me I had one week to find a job or you go back to school. I think he was hoping I didn't find a job. At this time I was 16. My first job was as a clerk and delivery ^{drive} for K. Rosberg merchantile. The job paid \$30 a month for five days a week.

Me: What types of duties did you perform on your job?

Grandpa: Clerking, stocking ^{shelves} and delivering groceries to homes. At that time we used to deliver groceries to people's homes.

Me: What stands out most in your mind about your first job?

Grandpa: The thing that stands out the most with me, was when I was gonna quit he offered me a raise, \$16 a month.

Me: That's not very much!

Grandpa: (chuckles)

Me: How many total years did you work in your life time?

Grandpa: 43 years

Me: During your life time where you, where were you employed the longest?

Grandpa: At the U.S. Post Office.

Me: How or why did you chose this career?

Grandpa: Well, they had good job security, and a good pension, and the pay was good.

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

Grandpa: Well, when I first started I worked as a clerk carrier I worked the inside that consisted of sorting mail for the carrier routes and for shipping out on the train at that time. And when I got to be a regular carrier I was sorting and delivering mail house to house. The routes, most of the routes at that time are 10 to 15 miles so that's what you walked every day

Me: You had to walk!

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Grandpa: Yes, you had to walk we didn't have the vehicles in those days! And, you had to take care of all your important mail, keep track of everybody who moved out of your route, and where they moved and see that their mail was forwarded to them.

Me: What special equipment or clothing did this job require?

Grandpa: You had to have a uniform. And for summer and winter outdoors and other than that good boots and stuff, that's about it I guess.

Me: Did this job have any special rules or regulations to follow?

Grandpa: Oh, yes! You came in, you punched in at a certain time you left the Post Office in a certain time in the morning to make your deliveries. You had 2 hours in the Post Office and 6 hours on the route and you were supposed to be back when your 6 hours ~~on the~~ were up on the route. There were certain rules and regulations you had to follow that, being a government employee.

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

Grandpa: The first time was when I became a regular carrier, because as a sub you had no certain hours to work and they could call you any time they needed you, but

When you got to be a regular you had better pay and you had a regular schedule. And the second most important thing was when I retired!

Me: (chuckles)

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

Grandpa: Remembering all the changes of addresses of people who moved, and making sure their mail was forwarded, that and putting up with the weather.

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

Grandpa: Well, I started out as a clerk, sub-clerk, and then I got to be a regular carrier, and then the last three years before I retired I went inside at a custodian or fireman. The carrier job has changed a lot over the years, it's no longer anything like it used to be.

Me: Did any other family members work for the same company?

Grandpa: Ya. My son Charles worked there for a short time.

Me: Did your job put you in any dangerous situations? If so, please describe them.

Grandpa: Any dangerous situations?

Me: Uh-huh.

Grandpa: Ya. Traffic, weather hazard, dogs.

Me: (chuckles)

Grandpa: Well dogs bite mailmen you know so.

Grandpa + I: (chuckle)

Me: Please describe what your co-workers were like.

Grandpa: When I worked at the Post Office the co-workers were friendly, and fun loving, and helpful. We used to have a very good time in the morning we'd go in and kid with each other and joke back and forth. Nobody took anything serious and if anybody needed help somebody would always give them a hand. I'm sorry to say its no longer that way now.

Me: (chuckles)

Grandpa: (chuckles)

Me: Could you describe som interesting or humorous events that happened during your career?

Grandpa: Ya. One of the humorous events that happened during my career was when I went in as a custodian. And we had an old type wall mounted tank for the ladies bathroom for the flush toilet and it was leaking, and we had to change it, so I, being the custodian got the job to change it, and while I was working at it the Area

Maintenance Supervisor came in and when he came in, when the Post Master brought him over and introduced me, cause I had never met him before and he asked me what I was doing and I told him I was replacing the toilet. I said, "If I wasn't doing this you would have to." He said, no he said I wouldn't do it I'd contract it out. So I looked at him and I said to him How do you go about getting a job like you got and he said to me, he said, Well, After you've got enough years in he said maybe you can qualify for it. Well, the post Master and I both started to laugh, and he asked us what we were laughing about The Post Master told him he said, he's got 25 years how many have you got? He said 6!

Grandpa and I: (chuckle together)

Grandpa: that was pretty comical to me! (chuckles)

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

Grandpa: Not after I got with the Post Office, The job security was good, the pay was good, retirement was good, and I like dealing with people.

me: What were your biggest responsibilities on the job?

Grandpa: Well, you, like I say it was delivering the mail and seeing that it was properly delivered, see that the correct mail was forwarded to people who moved. safe guarding

the mail, delivring it properly - like you were supposed to - and of course when I got to be a custodian it was taking care of the building, the mantairance of the building, things like that.

Me: Did you ever recieve and special awards from your employer, and were you recognized in any way for your job performance?

Grandpa: Ya. I got safe driving pins, every year for 30 years, that's driving all year without an accident so that was a pretty good accomplishment there, and I got a Copel Pin for over 2,000 hours of sick leave saved that I didn't use, And of course I got a retirement certificate for 30 years of service to the ^{u.s.} government.

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

Grandpa: Travelling through-out the United States and Canada, coin collecting, hunting and fishing, of course snowmobiling, and camp life out at the camp, hunting and fishing, we had a very good crew down in Northland we used to hunt deer down there, and the same crew hunted together for thirty years, the same 4 guys. And as far as snowmobiling went the big thing with snowmobiling was the trip up to Canada.

we made up there we went up to Meosenee which is on James Bay, which is the southern tip of Hudson Bay. There's no roads or anything going in there so you had to go by snowmobile or plane. (12)

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

Grandpa: Well, at one time I belonged to the American Legion, but I dropped out of that, I was with the Boy Scouts of America for 12 years we ran the Sea Explorers ship 3-10. I was with the Peninsula Pathfinders Snowmobile club. I'm a present member of the Elks Lodge 447 in Ishpeming, The National Rifle Association, and Ducks Unlimited.

Me: What special moments stand out about this aspect of your life?

Grandpa: The people I worked with and when we had the Sea Scouts ship it was working with the boys, these were teenagers, and for the 12 years we had the ship we had over 200 boys who joined, and we taught them the things about scouting, nautical things such like that there, as far as the Peninsula Pathfinders goes like I say it was the trips that we made, we made numerous trips snowmobile trips but the one trip that impressed me the most was when we went

ut to Moosenee an 981 mile trip from here. Of course we didn't travel all that way on snowmobile but, the biggest part of it we did. And as far as the Elk Lodge I enjoy going over there, I go and I give them a hand with their projects when ever I can. I enjoy working with the people.

Me: What was it like belonging to the Sea Scouts?

Grandpa: Well we took, we used to have practice sessions once or twice a week at Marquette, that is where the boat was kept. And one week every summer we'd take a short trip, (correct) a long trip. We took numerous short trips up to L'Anse, Munising, up to Baraga, ~~up~~ up to Houghton, and once every summer we'd take a long trip either to Mackinac Island or to Isle Royal. We'd alternate them one year we'd go to Mackinac Island, the next year we'd go to Isle Royal and those were a week long trip or, week or 10 days and we made about five trips down to Isle Royal and about five trips to Mackinac Island, the boys seemed to enjoy those a lot so, but they had to work their way to get there.

Me: Over all what are your fondest memories of your working days and your career?

Grandpa: Ah, I think the fondest memories were probably the people I worked with and that I've always enjoyed the people I've

worked with, I've gotten along with them and they have gotten along with me. Memories, there is probably a lot of, I can't think of any special one right now. Like I say probably one of the better ones would be the day I retired after I had my time in and retired from the Post Office.

Me: Were you a member of a Union?

Grandpa: Ya. I belonged to the United Steelworkers Union when I worked at The Cliff Power and Light + when I worked at the Post Office I belonged to the National Association of Letter Carriers which I still belong to.

Me: Please describe any interesting moments that occurred as a member of a union?

Grandpa: Well, I think that one of the biggest ones that I ~~remember~~ remember was when we got to write to negotiate a contract, for our pay, leave, and benefits and stuff like that because up until that time any time that the letter carriers wanted a raise they had to, they took an act in Congress to do it, it had to go through Congress, the Congressmen decided what you were going to get and knowing the way Congress operates why you

probably know that that would take from (15)
a year to a year and a half for you to
get a pay raise so you were always a
couple years behind on your pay raises.
If you got them at all.

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

Grandpa: No. Oh! chose the same career yes def-
initely.

Ma: What other jobs did you have when you
were younger?

Grandpa: Well, the first job I had was
with Rosberg Merchandise. I worked
there from November '42 to February
'43. After I left that I went to work
for the William John ^{Lynn} Freight Lines from
February '43 to April '43 and we worked
out on the Chicago North Western Freight
Depot located at the corner of First and
Bank Streets. The building is no longer
there. That job was \$3 a day, payday
was every night we worked about 48
hours a week. Then I worked for Simons
Brothers as a deliveries driver delivering
confections, paper goods, tobaccos, beer &
wine from April '43 until July '44.
And that, one of the jobs I had when I
worked for them was selling beer off

of a truck on a Route that started in Palmer and ran through Princeton, Twinning, Little Lake, Lanthrop and McFarland. Then I would return to Marquette ~~on~~ ~~to~~ ~~un~~ load the empty beer cases I had on the truck and return to Ishpeming with a full load of beer cases. We worked 40 to 50 hours per week for \$1.50 an hour. Ah. I entered the service the 2nd of July 1944. After I returned from service I went back to work for Simens again. And, I worked there from December '46 until January '47 ~~to~~ worked 40 to 50 hours a week for \$1.60 an hour. Then I went to work for Cohodas ~~for~~ from January '47 til February '51 as a delivery driver delivering fruits and vegetable and beer. I worked 40 to 60 hours a week for \$1.70 an hour there. Then I had the opportunity to go to work for the Cliff Power and Light. Which was later sold to the U.P. Power Company. I worked there from February '51 until October '56 as an oiler and fireman at the Ishpeming ~~station~~ Stream Generating Plant and Diesel Plant. The reason I left there was because it was ready to be closed because of the bigger plant they had built in Marquette. That's when I first started

working for the Post Office at October 1956, as a substitute clerk carrier and I was made a regular carrier April '57, I held that job for 26 years and I transferred inside as a fireman until June '84 when I retired with 30 years of service. (17)

M: Were you ever in the military?

Grandpa: Ya. I went in the military in July of '44. And I was sworn in at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. I went from there to Fort Riley, Kansas where I was assigned to the 29th horse cavalry. I got tired of feeding two horses and grooming them before I had my breakfast myself so I transferred to the Mechanized Cavalry at Fort Whittside in Kansas which was in the same complex as Fort Riley was. Then I was transferred again to Fort Knox Kentucky for armored tank training. After training we shipped to Fort Meade, Maryland and then to Fort Dix, New Jersey for shipment to Europe. We boarded the S. S. Aquitania it was a British ship that held 7,000 troops, half of them slept on the open deck every other night, in other words one night you'd sleep below deck the next night above. And we recieved a change of shipping orders and we disembarked from the ship returned

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to Fort Dix and back to Fort Meade Maryland, where they had us turn in all of our winter gear for summer gear, and we were shipped to Fort Ord California, for shipment to the South Pacific. At Fort Ord we boarded Amphibious Personnel Carrier and joined up with the 41st Infantry Division at Leyte, in the Philippine Islands. We had stops at several islands in the Philippines before the war ended and when the war ended I was assigned to occupation duty in Japan. We rode out a typhoon off Okinawa Island aboard that ship, on the way to Japan and that was the typhoon that blew everything off Okinawa Island, so they turned all our supplies around, and sent them into Okinawa Island because they didn't have anything there. When we got to Japan we had rations, C-rations and K-rations that we ate until they got fresh supplies for us! (chuckles). O.K. we landed at Hero Honshu Island, that is about 100 miles from Hiroshima where the first Atomic bomb was dropped. We had the opportunity to visit Hiroshima on a truck visit while we were stationed there it was hard to believe the damage that 1 bomb could do, the total destruction just from 1 bomb. While we were in Hero we disarmed the Naval Barracks there and destroyed a Radio Station they had up on the mountain and 6" naval guns on top of the mountain. I returned to the U.S. for discharge at Camp McCoy Wisconsin.

I re-enlisted and was assigned to ^{and} 2nd Armored (19)
Division At Camp Hood, Texas, after serving a
year or a little better than a year there I was
discharged In November of 1946.

Me: Were you in any of the wars that we had?

Grandpa: The second world war! (chuckles)

Me: Do you ~~remember~~ remember anything from those
wars?

Grandpa: Well, like I say the big thing with
me with the war was the trip we made
to Hiroshima, where we could see the
damage that that bomb had done that
ended the war.

Me: O.k. In closing do you have anything else
you would like to add?

Grandpa: Ya, well, of all the places I've
worked the only one in business today is
Simon's wholesale that's the 3rd generation
business and the Post Office, and of the 4
schools I attended only the Ishpeming High
School is still a school. Even though I never
finished High School I took several correspondent
schools and I recieved a diploma in Taxidermy.
I got a diploma I Automotive + Diesel Mechanics
And a diploma in Lock Smithing. One of the
things that suprizes me is how many Businesses
and buildings no longer exist in Ishpeming,
that were there at the time, through my
lifetime of growing up. I think my life
has been pretty rich and fullfilling. My
neath has been good and I've had a

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wonderful family and Great friends. With
the exception of one or two things I don't
think I would change my life that much
if I had it all to live over again.

M.L.: O.K. Thank you very much!