

Amber Sodergren interview
with Jim Sodergren.

me: This is Amber Sodergren interviewing
my grandpa Jim Sodergren on his past

me: When were you born?

him: May 10, 1925 in Ishpeming

me: What are the names of your brothers
& sisters?

him: My parents names were; my father's
name was Seth Sodergren, & My mothers
Madian name was Ellen Farn.

me: Were you married?

him: yes I was married in November 27,
1946. In Ishpeming

me: What was her name?

grandpa: My wife's name was Williamina

2

me: What are the names of your brothers & sisters?

grandpa: I have one brother called Ford Sodergren and two sisters one was called Thelma and Olive.

me: What did your parents do for a living?

grandpa: My father was a painter and he was a contractor & employed two or three people but he was an independent contractor.

me: Where did you go to school?

grandpa: I went to ~~the~~ school at Ishpeming High School or I should say to the Ishpeming school system.

me: Did you go to college?

grandpa: Yes I went to college, I went to Northern for 1 year.

me: That's all it took for you to graduate.

grandpa: no I didn't graduate. I was a ~~good~~ drop out

me: What special memories do you have of when you went to college?

grandpa: When I went to college I guess I had some fond memories of college but I got married we started to have children so I really couldn't afford to go to college and support a family.

me: Do you have any memories in this area?

grandpa: Well growing up in this area was much different then it is today, there were alot of mines working at the time and part of my child hood was growing up during the Depression and that was between 1930 & 1938 when jobs were scarce & alot of ~~the~~ family's had to go without food and fuel. I was fortunite that my father generally had a job & we always had food on the table such as it was.

me: What special features stand out in your mind about the city Ishpeming?

grandpa: Well the city's of Ishpeming and Negaunee were active there were alot of small stores we didn't have the super market's in those days & there semed to be a store for each specialty for example there was a meat market were all they sold was meat... →

(Con.)

There were fruit stores were they specilized in only selling fruit there was a general mercintile store were we had 2 or 3 of those in Ishpeming + they sold everything from groceries to material for making clothus + used to Deliver groceries with a teamster and it was generally done with a hourse + slay in the winter time and a hourse + carrige in the summer time. And there was alot of matenence work Because of the Depression men would seek employment with the City and the County + we did have in those days what we called a WPA Program were some of the men would get a job building roads.

me: what did you do for entertainment as a kid.

gnamp: Are entertainment was entertainment that we would make up ourselves in the summer we would swim of course we would go to cooper lake + little lake in Ishpeming, we played can, can all you needed was accouple of →

(Con.)

pick handles + a ball + a couple of can's. our parents didn't have any money to really buy baseball gloves + bat. We had to for the most part entertain ourselves.

me: Where did you like to hang out in town when you were a teenager?

grandpa: Well the hangout in Ishpeming when I was a kid was called cream land + they served milk shakes + hamburgers + malted milks. It was located right next to the Peninsula Bank on Main Street. We did not have a youth center, that I can remember there were dances held on occasion up stairs of were the old Dodge garage is now + there were dances in the high school gymnasium.

7
me: Do you have any humorous events about the early days in Ishpeming?

grandpa: Well let me see I guess one humorous event happened to me I when I was 14 years old I was a sophomore in high school I purchased my first car, And I payed \$5.50 for that car and it was a model

T. And we used to buzz the gut. & Drive around the block particularly in front of the Cream land because that's generally were everybody was standing out on the sidewalk, But on this particular occasion I was warned by Mr. Johnson who was a cop in Ishpeming at the time that I was not to keep circling the block like that it was a Friday night & there were people shopping they were busy But I thought we'll try one more time around the block →

(con.)

And as I passed, the cream land
& right in front of Mr. Johnson
we used to call him 9-toes
Johnson the windshield in the
middle T fell right out & smashed
in a thousand pieces & made all
kind of noise & needless to
say we didn't take the time
to stop & pick up the glass
we scurried out of town
as fast as we could I think
I had 2 or 3 of my buddies in
the car at the time fortunately
Mr. Johnson must of felt it
was a humorous occasion because
I never heard anymore from him
on the matter it's one of the
things I remember being kinda
exciting at the time but still
humorous

9
me: How old were you when you found your first job & where did you work

granpa: Well my first job of course was delivering the reflecter, I had several paper routes. And I think I started to deliver papers when I was 10 years old. I used to make 60¢ a week delivering the reflecter twice it published on Wednesdays & Saturdays, Then I worked for a short period of time in for Mr. Elson who ran the Pop Shop in Barnum location. And but I think my first full employment was with E.S. Ionear Company in Fort Dodge Iowa when I became 18 years old & that was we were doing diomond drill in the corn fields in Iowa. & I was really a diomond drill helper to begin with I later came an operaton, I spent maybe 27 years in that profession

10
me: Do you have any memories that stand out in your mind about that job?

Grandpa: Well my first job in Iowa was my first experience in being away from home I was lonesome & fortunately the job only lasted 3 months we finished the job and were able to return home. I remember having to work in the summer time in the corn field ~~out~~ when it was unbearable especially at mid-day we were working in corn that was 12 feet high & it was very humid & hot so in order to accomplish anything we would go out to work early in the morning at 4:00 & work until 8:00 & then we'd work in the evening from 4:00 in the afternoon till 8:00. That's about what I remember about my first job. At that time I was earning 60¢ an hour my first job.

11
me: were you ever in the military?

grandpa: yes I was in the U.S. navy I was
Drafted in August of 1943, And
I spent almost 3 years in World
War II.

me: Do you have any stories about World
War II to tell us?

grandpa: Well I was a underwater sound
operator & my job was to determine
the depth of the submarine when we
contacted a German sub & also
to determine what direction the sub was
going in. & then I did the firing from
the recorder that I operated, we
would fire what we called hedge
hogs & deep charges on submarines.
I also can relate that our sister
ship on April 14, 1945 was sunk
by a German sub. we picked up 65
Survivors from our sister ship which
was called the USS Davis.

(Con.)

A destroyer escort. Later on in the afternoon we regained contact w/ the submarine & we forced the submarine to surface, after which we sunk it & we picked up 34 german survivors. Interesting to note that 3 years ago we convened in Janesville Wisconsin & had a reunion were by 11 of those german sailors that we rescued attended along w/ their wives. We had perhaps 20 of the survivors from the davis that attended & from our ship perhaps 25. & we convened of dedication day & we together marched in the memorial day parade in Janesville, on dedication day it was ~~very~~ very memorable event & kinda tear jerking in a way but all of us at the time had a job to do & there didn't seem to be any animosity at that meeting w/ between the german sailors & the American sailors.

me: How many total years did you work in ~~the~~ your life-time?

Grandpa: Counting my days when I was a paper boy I worked 58 years + I have no intention of retiring. I like to work.

me: What was the one you were impressed the most?

Grandpa: Well I've been employed the ~~longest~~ longest at the court house where I've been an elected official I got into the political arena in 1968, as a county commissioner + I served there for 6 years after which I was appointed county treasurer. I've been ~~re~~ reelected to that office since that time. I just now have been elected for another 4 years.

me: Why did you choose that career?

Grandpa: Well I really didn't choose it I was appointed to be county treasurer because my colleagues on the county board thought I was very conservative + was concerned about finances + spending + I guess they felt that I perhaps was the tightest kind in the county so they thought I'd be a good person to serve as county treasurer.

me: What are your main duties of the job?

grandpa: main duties of the county treasurer are of course is to administer & collect delinquent taxes that are returned. Also all monies come into the county treasurer's office including the including the road comision money & mental health monies, social service monies, the treasurer really is the custodian of the county funds. & ~~generally~~ generally there's about 43 million dollars that come in and go out of the county treasurer's office each year & that can very alittle bit but that's alot of money & we have to account for every penny that comes in & ~~it~~ goes out, & investing thoes funds is perhaps the most, my main duty is to insure that these funds are invested in a secure investment. Do that there is no laws & we are expected to maximize our earnings & interest on all of thoes moneys. But in this day & age we know of many banks that go bankrupt Do it is a ~~concern~~ concern & a ~~responsibility~~ responsibility that I don't take littly.

me: what kind of schooling did you take to become in this business?

Grandpa: Well running a county treasurer job is much like running your own budget at home theres more zeros after each number so that your dealing with alot more money. But I really had no special training other then my 6 year experience in training as a county commissioner. There of course I was exposed to the budget ~~process~~ process of the money's needed to run the county.

me: What special equipment or clothing is needed for this job.

Grandpa: A suit & tie is required at times not always but casual wear is also exceptable on certain days.

me: What special rules & regulations do you have to follow?

Grandpa: Special rules & regulations that govern the county treasurers in Michigan are the laws of the state of Michigan & our books are added once ~~each~~ each year that's a requirement so we have to satisfy & recognize the special rules & regulations that others required & also we must know the property tax law & be able to respond to people w/ connection w/ their taxes.

me: What is your most rewarding part of your career?

Grandpa: I think the most rewarding part of my career is to be reelected, It's a ~~lot~~ boost of confidence when people elect you to the offices. In recent times I haven't had any opposition which I like to think people feel that I'm doing a credible job & they would rather see me there than someone else, However are elected officials & our elected process is not designed to do that, elected officials ~~should~~ should have opposition. However I have not have any for the ~~last~~ last 12 years.

me: What is the most challenging part of your job

Grandpa: Most challenging aspect is dealing w/ erect tax payers, Nobody likes to pay taxes, & I think that's a challenge to explain to them ~~why~~ why they're paying taxes & why their paying those amounts & to explain the laws to them & Secondly I think that protecting the funds & investing the money is probably the next ~~at~~ challenging aspect of my job.

17
me: Do you get alot of people that complain about the taxes?

grandpa: Well yes every day people don't like to pay taxes I try to explain to them the tax laws & why there paying taxes, property taxes are designed to pay for local services. Schools of course recieve the biggest part of the property tax which uselly runs about 70% of the total property tax bill. Townships & the county & cities also depend on the property tax to provide the services that they responsible for.

me: has your job changed at all during the last couple of years.

grandpa: yes my job has changed not in the last couple years but perhaps in 6 or 7 years were about we have employemented the computer age, were we can retrieve info. much faster then we were able to before. The job ~~load~~ load seems to be increasing however w/ computerizing our accounts & our systems we'd been able to keep up w/ the responsibility with out hiring new people. as a matter of fact when I first got to be treasurer I had 5 account clerks & now we're down to 4.

(con.)

So computerization has been a big change in running our office

me: Did any of your other family members work for the same company?

granpa: I guess my grandfather Jim Farm was an elected official not at the county level but he did serve as a township supervisor in Tilden Township in 1922 & 1923. He was a democrat one of the ~~few~~ few democrats in the county at that time & I've been associated & believe in a democratic party as he did then.

me: Did your job put you in any dangerous ~~situations~~ situations?

granpa: No the job at the county of course doesn't have any dangerous aspects. I think I was probably more exposed to danger when I worked underground at the Tracy Mine I worked there ~~as~~ as a diamond driller for 18 years but this interview seems to be centered on your most recent job ~~which~~ which is serving as Marquette County Treasurer.

19
Mo: please describe what your ~~colleagues~~ coworkers were like.

Gramp: I have a very good staff. These ladies have been w/ me since I became treasurer in 1974. Unlike alot of offices were they have turn over, my people have elect to stay in a treasurers office, it of ~~course~~ course makes my job easier. I do not have to ~~worry~~ worry about training new people & we have a very close knit staff that know their jobs & I think are very responsive to the public. I also must work as an elected official with the other various county officials including the county clerk, register deeds, county board of comissioners. My experience in working w/ all these people over the years I have nothing ~~to~~ but praise to say about all of them.

Mo: Do you have any humorous efforts that you can remember during your job?

Gramp: Well I try to add humor every day I'm in the office collecting taxes. It can be trying & stressful at times & I think humor is needed ~~in~~ in the working environment. & I try to provide that kind of an atmosphere.

me: Did you ever feel ~~to~~ like changing careers.

grampa: I have done many different jobs in my life - time. Carpentry, painting, diamond drill, underground mines, electrical optical & I really didn't change jobs because of my own not liking the job its just that ~~it~~ ~~seems~~ like I was appointed to serve these positions rather than quit. I never quit any job I liked doing what ever I was doing.

me: what are your biggest responsibilities?

him: responding to the public & insure that I'm the best custodian for the job

me: Did you receive any special awards? when you were workin in the office

grampa: Well of course I received a special award when I resigned from the county board of commissioners & became treasurer. I'm well paid for the job that I do, county board has recognized my ability to do the job & they have awarded me accordingly in my salary

me: During your days of employment what have been your favorite hobbies & activities?

grampa: Well one of my hobbies has always been music & politics I always got a great satisfaction out of capturing an audience from the stage & I also got alot of satisfaction from winning an election. But I think music is probably been one of my favorite hobbies & I was a member of alegro for several years & prior to that I ~~sang~~ sang w/ a group known as the choraleas. Both these groups were ~~started~~ directed by Jack Bouse & his wife ~~Pat~~ Janet.

me: have you been involved in any clubs?

grampa: Well I'm a member of the lodge called the Uasa lodge, it's a lodge designed to enhance & recognize my Swedish heritage, we are few in numbers but we ~~are~~ still meet monthly, I also belong to the Wauwinet golf club & of course the democratic party, Marquette democratic party

me: what are your fondest memories of your working days + your career.

grandp: Well there are many + I guess I would have to give that some thought before answering. I think overall being elected every 4 years is rememberable + exciting perhaps that is the fondest memory I have of a job.

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

grandp: No I wouldn't make any changes I'm very happy the way my life has unfolded + has provided me w/ work for almost every day since I was 10 years old. I'm very happy the way it's turned out for me, my life has turned out very good.

me: ~~In closing do you have anything else you would like to add.~~

me: were you a member of a union?

23 -

grampa: yes I was a member of the United Steam workers union. I served as its president when I was at the Tracy mine working under ground & I learned alot about people & I think it gave me a base from which I could serve people in the public sector which I've been doing at the county court house since 1968

me: Do you have any interesting moments that occurred at the Union.

grampa: I think negotiating a contract from the membership which amounts to some 300 people at the Tracy Mine was a time as my 10 year as a union president also as a union president we listened to all the concerns that the employees have & we try to resolve them & work them out

(Con.)

to the best of our ability I will say that during my 10 years I ~~was~~ was able to do that & I did not have to arbitrate on grievances. But there were some very interesting happening at the mine in my 10 year as a president some serious accidents, safety was one thing we spent alot of time on.

MO: Did you ever have any major accident.

Grampa: Yes I had an accident while I worked underground & it required some knee surgery the drill machine I was operating toppled over and crushed my leg we had some fatalities at the Tracy Mine generally they were fall of ground or blasting accidents I was fortunate in the accident that I had it was rather minor. I'm happy w/ all the careers I've been in & enjoyed each & every one of them

me: anything else you want to add,

Grandpa: Well let me see I think I've read most of ~~the~~ ~~the~~ Red Dusters that have been published I have copies of them all & I have enjoyed reading all of them I think it's a great project I'm looking forward to the next addition.

thanks