

**Sara Poirier's interview with Jack Thompson**  
**Interview date December 21,1997**

**Me: Hi I am Sara Poirier interviewing Jack Thompson about the Dead River**

**Me: When and where were you born?**

**Jack: When was I born? On March 27 1920 in Marquette**

**Me: What is your national ancestry?**

**Jack: Scotch I think it is.**

**Me: Did you immigrate to America?**

**Jack: No I was born here.**

**Me: Did your parents?**

**Jack: My parents come from Scotland and Canada. My mother from Canada and my dad from Scotland.**

**Me: What were your parent's occupations?**

**Jack: He was a stone mason. He laid up the Catholic Church in Marquette and the towers yah he did a lot of that work around Marquette.**

**Me; Where were you raised?**

**Jack: I was raised in Marquette.**

**Me; Were you close to your mother and father?**

**Jack: Oh yah till I went in the service and got married.**

**Me: When did you go in the service?**

**Jack:** Ah in 1942

**Me:** What kind of chores did you have when you were younger?

**Jack:** What kind of what?

**ME:** Chores

**Jack:** you mean in the service?

**ME:** No like around the house and stuff

**Jack;** Ho I had to spade the garden, cut wood, take care of the cows,  
Take care of the chickens ah I had to try to keep my own  
bedroom clean and everything ah. I had two brothers too  
lived with me.

**Me;** What were their names?

**Jack:** Max was the oldest boy and Austin was retired out of the coast  
Guards.

**ME:** What kinds of games did you like?

**Jack:** Games?

**Me;** Yah.

**Jack:** Ho Ooh I don't know. Spin the bottle, ah hide and go seek, kick  
kick the can, ah hopscotch, ah what do you call that rope that  
you put around ah skip rope or something like that there. Yah.

**Me:** What kind of clothes did you wear?

**Jack:** Oh I used to wear knicker bokeres and little high boots, I got 1  
shoe over there. I still got it form when I was a baby. Yah I had  
bottons on my shoes.

**Me:** Where did you go to school?

**Jack:** Oh around Marquette.

**Me:** What were your most vivid memories of school?

**Jack:** Oh I don't have many memories of school at all. I didn't like school at all. I would like to get outside and go fishing hunting. There was a lot of hunting and fishing them days I mean not like today there isn't

**Me:** Did you have lots of friends when you were in school?

**Jack:** Oh yah quit a few.yah

**Me:** Did you get your diploma or certificate in school?

**Jack:** No I graduated out of the eighth grade went right on to a job.

**Me;** What kind of job did you do?

**Jack:** I started to drive horses for spear and sons. Delivering coal and then we got the trucks in there and then I was a mechanic. Then from being a mechanic I went over on a steam train run the steam train for a while.

**Me;** Who were you heroes when you were a kid?

**Jack:** Who's what?

**Me;** Heroes

**Jack:** oh gee Roy Rogers or Tom Nicksand Hop along Cassyah there are all cowboys and I don't know.

**Me:** Did you have any sisters?

**Jack:** I had four sisters. I still go tone living. She lives in Lansing. She's coming up for New Year's with me.

**ME:** What are their names?

**Jack:** Oh there was Nita, Nola , Revlon they are all dead. And Peg my little sister she's 72 73 years old now.

**Me;** Did you enjoy working?

**Jack:** oh yah

**Me:** Why.

**Jack:** I used to take care of my family that way. I did the kind of work I liked to do and I guess that's about it. When I retired I was still setting steal.

**Me:** Where were you working when the Great Depression occurred?

**Jack:** When the Depression was oh god, you couldn't buy yourself a job I was still living at home,

**ME:** Describe how you survived during it.

**Jack:** We lived off of everybody else I guess. We took care of everybody else and everybody else took care of us. Ma used to bake bread and sell it, Dad used to go out and do different things I don't know I guess he laid up chimneys, laid up fire places.

**Me:** What has been the high light of your life?

**Jack:** oh gee I don't know. I have no idea.

**Me:** Were you in any wars?

**Jack:** Yah I was in the Second World War.

**Me:** Describe your life in the Cold War years.

**Jack:** The Cold War years?

**Me:** yah.

**Jack:** Oh that's when the United States was fighting with Russia you mean. I guess I was working then. I was putting up the mines around here. Setting steel at the mines. I also worked on the Mackinaw Bridge a little bit. AH the Houghton- Hancock Bridge, ah the Duluth Bridge, I don't know I set steel down at The Power Houses.

**Me:** Were you Blacklisted?

**Jack:** NO No No never. I was a stuart on most of the jobs. So I was with the Union.

**Me:** Do you have any children?

**Jack:** I got two children. One boy is 51 years old, and my daughter is 48 or 49. She is getting close to 50 years old.

**Me:** what are their names?

**Jack:** Ah Jackie works at the mine over here the CCI mine and Pamela she is married to Jerry Stang down in Marquette. They got some sort of a business there.

**Me:** What are you active in today?

**Jack:** oh I'm active in masonry. Ah 40 and 8, maybe the Legion, I 'm not overly active in anything I'm 77 years old.

**Me:** What was the Dead River Basin like when you first saw it?

**Jack:** She was full full of logs, I tell ya it was nothing but logs. You could walk across almost any place there was logs.

**Me:** Do you remember the dam being built?

**Jack:** No no No (laughingly) The dam was built in 1918 1919 something like that. So that 's along time that's before I was born even. But I knew some of the fellas who worked on it. That's where I got these pictures from.

**ME:** Has the action on the river increases or decreased?

**Jack:** The action on the river oh it increased many many times. People have been on there with snowmobiles, and chain saws and cutting down all the old trees and everything. In the Winter time usually the waters would be way down now and we would go up with the chainsaws and snowmobiles and cut down all the trees that were standing in the river cause they never cut any of the trees when they flooded it out so it was just like the woods around here you know there was all these trees were out there in the river. So that's what we cut down. So in the spring they all floated up you know and that plugged up the river. Oh lots and lots of trees.

**Me:** Do you like living on the Dead River?

**Jack:** Yah I been here 36 years. Yah I love it here.

**Me;** What was the most exciting thing that ever happened to you?

**Jack:** wow I almost fell through the Mackinaw Bridge with a crane. A mobile crane. ah we were up there with nothing tied together we were backing down we'd run over a 4by 4and it kicked out some of the grating underneath us and the grating came up and we would start going down so that was the most exciting thing for me for a long time.

**Me:** Was it hard working on the bridge?

**Jack:** No it was a good job but you gotta take it easy.

**Me:** Did you get paid?

**Jack:** Oh yes yah. We made good money.

**Me:** Did you ever have a wife?

**Jack:** Oh yes.

**Me:** What was her name?

**Jack:** Florence.

**Me:** When did you meet her?

**Jack:** Oh I meet her in 1938. We were out at the tourist park swimming in the river when I met her.

**Me:** Did you ever move?

**Jack:** Oh yah we moved to New York. Moved to the Copper Country. Yah I moved all over.

**Me:** Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

**Jack:** When Pearl Harbor was attacked I was living on March street In Marquette my wife and I we were married there. We got married in 1940. So we were living on Arch Street that's when Pearl Harbor was attacked and it was 7:00 in the morning that I heard the news and ah Oh about 9:00 in the morning I heard the news. Yah

**Me:** How did it affect your political outlook?

**Jack:** Well I didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was I mean ha ha I had to figure it out on the map where the Hawaiian Island were I had to look it up but it didn't affect me I mean just that I was working pretty steady for the Western Union then I think I was a telegraph man. I was working on the telegraph crews.

**Me:** What lessons have you learn that would be helpful to the current generations of racials in America?

**Jack:** I don't know.

**ME:** Who were your parents and grandparents?

**Jack:** My parents, my mother and dad had been go since 1956 and I never knew my grandparents. I never knew them they were one was a shoe maker in Munsing and

**Me:** What were your parent's names?

**Jack:** John and Sophie.

**Me:** Do you remember your first car?

**Jack:** First car was a 1930 Chevrolet

**Me:** When did you get it?

**Jack:** I would say in 1938.

**Me:** What was it like?

**Jack:** It was a pile of junk!

**Me:** Why?

**Jack:** It was pretty well worn out. (laughingly) It was pretty well wore out! We used to walk all the time wherever you had to go you walked you know. You never went on any trips, you couldn't afford a car. We couldn't

**Me:** When did you get your first TV?

**Jack:** 19 let me see. I was living in Mackinaw or St. Ignas. We got our first TV from up at the Soo that was an RCA and that was in 53 or 54.

**Me:** How many channels did it have?

**Jack:** I think 18. I think it had 18 channels.

**Me:** What was your favorite TV show?

**Jack:** oh out of Traverse City gee wiss I can't think of the name of it. There was Bob Hope there was Bing Crosbie and there was Eddie Canter and AL Jolson oh gee there was a lot of programs anything was a good show for us then. Good shows it usually



looked like it was snowing all the time any how. Couldn't see very good.

**Me:** Did you ever go to the movies with your friends when you were younger?

**Jack:** Ah the last time I was to a movie was 1954 with my wife when I got up in the middle of the show and walked out. I didn't like it.

**Me:** Do you remember what movie you saw?

**Jack:** yah I remember what it was too much bare stuff you know. Woman weren't covered up good enough for me. So I walked out.

**Me:** Did you see the first man to walk on the moon on TV?

**Jack:** Oh yah. I sure did I couldn't believe that anyone would be up there on the moon. Ha Ha Ha ha ha ha

**ME:** Do you see any great opportunities that you missed?

**Jack:** Oh yah I guess there are a lot of opportunities that I missed. Could have helped myself but I didn't. I could have gone on larger cranes down back east bigger cranes but I was satisfied up here setting iron and running the big shovels.

**Me:** Did your life turn out the way you thought it would?

**Jack:** My wife?

**Me:** Your life.

**Jack:** I guess she was happy most of her life yah most she was pretty happy. She likes life yah. She was a nice lady.

**Me:** How are you different from your parents?

**Jack:** Well my parents had to worry about making money I didn't.

**Money was an afterthought to me we had it and we spent it as though it was out of style.**

**Me: If you had to live your life over again, what would you do different?**

**Jack: I guess I would live it just about the way I did. It was really good. I wouldn't do a thing different.**

**Me: What do you think the happiest time in your life was?**

**Jack: What was the happiest time in my life?**

**Me: Yeah.**

**Jack: I just guess when the kids were born. I guess that was the happiest time in my life. When the boy was born he was a really nice boy. The girl was a good girl. So I would say married life and when we had children.**

**Me: What was the worst time in your life?**

**Jack: The worst time in my life was when I was in the C.c.'s. In 1937, 1936 or 37.**

**Me: When you were younger did you vision your self as you are now?**

**Jack: Do I what?**

**Me: Vision yourself as you are now.**

**Jack: No I never thought about myself. I don't even think about tomorrow. No**

**Me: What are turning points you see in your life?**

**Jack: What vision do I see in my life?**

**Me: What turning points do you see in your life?**

**Jack: the turning points have all turned. Laughingly they all turned**

now yeah.

**Me:** What was the hardest thing you ever had to do?

**Jack:** Bury my wife. Yeah I had a hard time leaving her.

**Me:** When you were younger what kind of discipline did you get?

**Jack:** Ho ho ho I used to get the rod. We used to have an old woman that lived across the street she had a piece of an umbrella a handle of an umbrella that she would slap us with that thing. Uh she used to beat the daylights out of us.

**Me:** Did you have a job?

**Jack:** g. uh she used to beat the daylights out of us.

**Me:** Did you have a job?

**Jack:** Yeah I used to pedal milk when I was 12 years old. I used to get a quart of milk a day for pedaling. I got up at three o'clock in the morning and pedaling until 6:30. Then I could go to school. And I'd get a quart of milk a day for pedaling milk. That was on an old 29modal A ford. I used to pedal milk for Joe Roll Hill Crest Dairy Products.

**Me:** Did you have a girlfriend when you were younger?

**Jack:** No I didn't umum

**Me:** How come?

**Jack:** I didn't have time for girlfriends heck I was swimming all the time. Swimming, hunting, or fishing. I didn't have no money. Not them days.

**Me:** Did you become prosperous during the Regan years?

**Jack:** oh yeah.

**Me: Why?**

**Jack: I guess I worked for everything I got. Yeah my kids got everything they want.**

**Me: When did you get your first radio?**

**Jack: Radio? Oh come on that was back in 1931 or 32. It was a Majestic. That was my mother and dad's radio. But I got my first radio in my life in 1940. It was a little one. Small small one.**

**Me: What did you listen to on it?**

**Jack: There used to be uh Amus and Andy, and WLS radio hour, and oh I don't know there was lots of oh there was only about 2 or 3 stations in the whole country you know and you'd only listen to 2 or 3 we tried to get Canada sometimes. They had good music up in Canada. Fiddle players, they were good.**

**Me: When Kennedy was shot what were you doing at the time?**

**Jack: At the time I was working at the mine right over there I was setting the ball and drum at the first phase at the Empire Mine. I just stated over there.**

**Me: Who told you he got shot?**

**Jack: The superintendent came up and told me.**

**Me: How did you feel?**

**Jack: I couldn't believe it. I said are you sure. He said yeah he got shot. I said that is too bad you know. I didn't think too muck of Johnson coming in there. He was vice president you know.**

**Me: Where you raised in a religious family?**

**Jack: Raised what?**

**Me: In a religious family.**

**Jack: Yeah I guess I was. I still go to church. I was to church this morning.**

**Me: Where do you go to church?**

**Jack: Presperterian Church. Yeah early service.**

**Me: Did your parents help you with you schooling?**

**Jack: Did the what?**

**Me: Your parents.**

**Jack: Oh sure. Sure they had to help me in it. Sure.**

**Me: How did they help you?**

**Jack: I guess they bought me clothes and they bought me books. They bought whatever we needed you know. We used to buy all of our stuff in school we ah it wasn't free to go to school, we were taxed to pay the teachers. But everthing else we had to buy the books, the paper, the pens, the pencils, ah we had to buy everything.**

**Me: When you worked on the Mackinaw bridge, how many people go hurt?**

**Jack: 5 there was only 5. Oh hurt I don't know how many got hurt but 5 got killed.**

**Me: Did you get hurt?**

**Jack: No, uh uh**

**Me: Was it scary?**

**Jack: no**

**Me: What kind of equipment did you use?**

**Jack: I guess I run them all. I guess I ran everyone of the cranes. I mean I was the spare operator. I was on all the different cranes. I ended up with the Ojiboway with a Mohawk to Chicago. I went down for fits simanl conal to change the Dets Planes River down there change some tiling and change a couple bridges take out some crooks out of the Dets Planes River so the boats could up and down a little bit easier. Then I come back went for setting steal for the American.**

**Me: What kind of safety equipment did you have?**

**Jack: Oh we didn't have safety equipment sometimes we had a rope around our belly where we tied ourselves up off the steal. Otherwise we had to be safe. The safety was ourselves. We had to watch everything we did. We didn't have nets or anything underneath us so if you fall you went in the water.**

**Me: Who was your boss?**

**Jack: Oh I had lots of bosses. gee wizz every time I turned around I had bosses. Or I was the boss.**

**Me: Did that change your life in any way?**

**Jack: no no no**

**Me: How long did it take to be built?**

**Jack: Oh just under 4 years something like that.**

**Me: Did anybody get sick while working on it?**

**Jack: oh I suppose a lot of them got sick. I got a few fingers off and stuff like that. Maybe some got squeezed by cable. Some got rock stuck into them. A big rock would come down the cable and hit them but I mean I guess they got sick then they got really hurt.**

They got over it.

Me: Did you want to work on it?

Jack: oh yeah.

ME: Why?

Jack: Money was good.

Me: How much did you get paid?

Jack: 1 dollar 95 cents an hour 1 dollar 95 I don't know we ended up.  
4.50 5.00 dollars an hour something at that there.

Me: What are your plans for the future?

Jack: My future is just about done. I might go to Florida for the  
rest of the winter I don't know just yet.

Me: What is your favorite food?

Jack: I eat anything. Rabbit, Porcupine, spaghetti I guess. I like  
Spaghetti. I like scalp potatoes and ham, I like hamburger,  
meat loaf, I like bake potatoes, I like sour cream on it. Oh  
boy that sounds good.

Me: Do you play any sport?

Jack: no not any more.

Me: Did you?

Jack: Oh yeah I played baseball, football, sure.

Me: How long have you been retired?

Jack: oh gee since about 1980 I guess.

Me: How long has your wife been gone?

**Jack:** She has been gone a little over 8 years. No 7 years.

**Me:** How do you think the Dead River Basin got its name?

**Jack:** It was an that was an Indian name. That came from the Indians oh probably that old Chief Cabogogan down there in Marquette might have named it I don't know. He used to float logs down here. The reason it was dead it ran so slow there was never enough water to heat it only in the spring you know that's the reason it got its dead. Dead River. See way down in Marquette they used to have the shingle mills and the sawmills and everything way down by Shnidars and that down by the railroad depot railroad tracks out there. There used to be saw mills over in there before there this trains got lined up.

**Me:** They used the Basin for logging were you involved in that or do you remember it?

**Jack:** no I don't remember it and I was never involved in it.