

Kimberly Szenina interview  
with  
Tony Certo

Me: This is Kimberly Szenina, the date of the interview is Dec. 10, 1989. I am interviewing Tony Certo the type of interview is an autobiography, and the location of the interview is in his house in Ishpeming, MI.

Me: Tony, when and where were you born?

Gramp: I was born in Boggs, on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1929.

Me: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Gramp: Yes, I have ~~3~~ <sup>my sisters were</sup> three sisters and one brother. My brother was Joseph and Grace, Antonette, and Rosemary.

Me: Were you the oldest out of all these children?

Gramp: No, I wasn't the oldest I was about the middle.

Me: What were your parents' names?

Gramp: My father's name was Antonio and my mother's name was Georgina.

Me: When they were older what did they do to make a living?

Gramp: My father worked in the mine and my mother was a housewife.



Me: Was it hard for your father when he worked in these mines?

Gramp: (Oh, hesitantly) Yes, it was a lot harder working in the mines then, because they didn't take the same precautions as they do now.

Me: By any chance are you married?

Gramp: Yes, I am married.

Me: and do you have any children?

Gramp: Yes, I have three children.

Me: What were their names?

Gramp: Carolyn, Jacqueline, and Tony.

Me: And, when you were younger what were schools like?

Gramp: Well, schools were a little different, they were a little stricter, because I went to St. Paul's and we had nuns and all of that. Otherwise they were just the same or that, except they were a little stricter then.

Me: Do you remember any nuns in particular that I don't know were strict to you.



> Gramp: (Questioningly) What was that again?

Me: Any nuns that were strict to you? that you remember

Gramp: (Hesitantly) Oh, No they were all pretty close the same except when I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade we had one there that used to come out and play basketball with us. & all & had a little fun with her.

Me: That's not what teachers do now a days.

Me: Um, what subjects did you take?

Gramp: Well, I didn't have any real subjects that I really went for. I just took the regular class that you ~~had~~ have now a days. Like the reading, Arithmetic, and math.

Me: Did you or have any or were one of the subjects your favorite?

Gramp: Well, I wasn't that kind of school, or that I never really had a favorite subject except we used to go to public schools to wood work, and I used to like to wood work.

Me: Did you take much schooling when you were young?

Gramp: (Confused) Ah, ~~what~~ do you mean ~~you mean~~ how much? I just took through the lower grades. & all that

Me: How far did you get to?



Gramp: I went through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade then in high school  
I went through the 10<sup>th</sup> grade

Me: How did you get to school?

Gramp: We had to walk, to school and all and that. I used to have to walk the railroad tracks. And roughly it was about any where from 7 to 10 miles and that, I had to walk.

Me: When you were younger did the buses start to come out, or did you have to walk your whole school year.

Gramp: Ah, we walked all in the lower grades and all that and later on they did have the bus come out when we got older and that, but when we get older they come and picked us up.

Me: So, were your class sizes ~~very~~ <sup>really</sup> large?

Gramp: Yes, we had pretty good size classes there, but there weren't as many like in a public school, because this was more like a private school, and it's catholic and all that, but they did have pretty good size classes.

Me: (Um,) (almost like humming) - So how were you supposed to act or behave? with these hunts?

Gramp: Well, your supposed to behave the best, (laughing) the best that you can. Your supposed to have your best behavior all of the time.



Me: Did you have any dress codes when you went to this school?

Gramp: No, we didn't have any dress codes at all.

Me: Did you happen to get into any trouble at one time and if you did what were your punishments?

Gramp: Well, if you ever got in trouble and that, there was a couple times I got in trouble or something like that I had to stay after school, and ~~at~~ that and either stay after school or write "I'll behave" about 50 to 100 times.

Me: Just like what we have to do now a days.

Me: Do you remember any humorous or interesting events in school?

Gramp: Well, let's see in school I can't remember anything right now. One events in school I never really had too many events or like that, but I was like a little better in the summer because I had a car. Was my events and that I came to school in the rule. None of the other kids had a car. I had a Model A car.

Me: When you got home from school did you have many chores or responsibilities to do?

Gramp: Yes, I had a lot of chores. I had to shovel snow in the winter time and I had to haul wood. And in the summer time we had a big garden so we



worked in the garden.

Me: Did you have any recreational activities that you did when you were younger?

Grandp: Well, when you were younger and all that the most recreational activities in the winter was skating and stuff like that. And we used to have a sled or slide in the front of our house and that and I used to do quite a bit of skiing and all that and I used to go to St. Paul's basketball games.

Me: What kind of skiing did you do?

Grandp: I used to do most of my skiing was ski jumping. I used to do a lot of jumping. I never did get the guts to ride Suicide though. I rode a lot of smaller hills in Jshpening and Loganssee.

Me: Did you ever get into any church activities? Did you do much of that?

Grandp: No, I never got into any church activities and all that, just the only time the church thing is when we built the new one on the highway I helped out a little bit and some of the staining that was done, otherwise I really didn't do anything.

Me: Did you ever attend any special community events, such as any holiday parties or celebrations?

Grandp: Well the only events that I really had was, let's put it as a on my 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary my two daughters gave us a surprise 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



And at the present they gave us they flew my son home from Phoenix, Az. For the surprise party. It was a real beautiful party that they gave us.

Me: Sounds like you had a lot of fun.

Gramp: And another special memory was when my son was born. Because like for an Italian name to keep carrying on is that it was big thing for my father and all that to have the Italian name kept carrying on.

Me: Now when you were a I don't know maybe 15, or 16. did you have a job?

Gramp: Ah yes when I was in school I was a I can't exactly remember the age. and, but I was younger and all that. I had a job at Vista Theater. I used to collect tickets. I was an usher at the Vista Theater.

Me: After you ~~worked there~~ <sup>worked there</sup> did you go to college.

Gramp: No. I didn't go to college and that because I didn't finish school.

Me: What was your job after working at the theater?

Gramp: After I got out of school, ~~because~~ I didn't finish school that. I (and) had to get out in order to help ends meet at home and that. I got a job with the roofing & siding company. Until I reached 18.



Me: What was this job like?

Gramp: Well just like the regular construction. We used to go around, the guy used to go around and put bids for putting on ~~roofs~~ siding for a house & putting roofing on the house and that. And that is what we used to do.

Me: What was your job after this?

Gramp: After this when I turned 18 and all that, that's when I got the job with the CCI.

Me: What kind of mining did you happen to do?

Gramp: When I went to CCI in the mining I went to the Athens Mine, and that. And at the Athens Mine I was ~~and~~ <sup>doing</sup> underground mining.

Me: Could you describe what the underground mining was like?

Gramp: Well, the underground was just at the, they used to go do all of the mining underground, they used to go in and into the drifts, blast the dirt, and bring it out the shaft on railroad cars. Which at that time I was a motor man. I used to bring the dirt out the shaft and when you got it out the shaft, it used to be raised to surface. By skips. And after that they used to ship it to Escanaba to go on to the boats.



Me: for how long did you do this?

Gramp: Well, I worked underground, I worked underground for 11 years. And all that, I worked at 3 different properties underground.

Me: Did you work ~~at~~ at any other mines?

Gramp: Yes, that was the 3 ~~different~~ different properties like underground that I worked at. I worked at the Mather A mine, and I worked in the Bunker Hill mine, and I worked at the Mather B mine. Those are the 3 underground mines I worked at.

Me: At what age do you remember when you worked at those three properties?

Gramp: (Pausing) Oh when I was first at the Athon's mine and that I was 18 yrs. old and then from then on I worked underground until I was about 28 or 30 and I was still underground at that time.

Me: Were you married at this time to keep a family life while you were working here?

Gramp: I worked in the mine for 1 year and after that then I was married. I got married one year after I started working in the mines.

Me: Was it pretty hard keeping a family life and also working in these mines underground?

Gramp: Yes, it was really hard to make ends meet and that, but that was the best place to work.



around here, because that was the best paying job's and all that. But the only time they made it real hard for picks to meet, was during those years I was underground I was layed off for 4 years.

Me: That must have been a really tough time.

Me: Do have any memories working at this mine?

Gramp: Well, I have one memory from when I worked in the ~~the~~ Athun's mine. When I was at the Athun's mine, it was about the April month that I got buried. I was sitting on a dirt pile with my boss and right after he left, I mean the dirt pile just gave in and I was buried up to my chest in dirt.

Me: You really were buried up to your chest.

Me: Did you have to go to the hospital after this, or have anything broken?

Gramp: Well, I didn't have anything broken, but I was taken out by ambulance into up to the hospital and all that and I spent one week in the hospital and everything, but I was real fortunate on there. I had a real bad bruise on my back, but I had nothing, nothing really was broken.

Me: Boy, thank goodness!

Me! (Pausing) Do remember any special memories after this mine?



Gramp: No, just that I can remember one mine when I was a motor man underground and I don't know how I can explain it on being a motor man what we got underground is and that I had my breakie coming and that and he had his hand inside of the sling that holds the trolley up to the pole and the pole came off and got caught and pulled him ~~to~~ right off the motor. And pulled him off to the side. And I was so scared to go back and look, but we were fortunate on that one too, he never got hurt at all.

Me: Boy, what some lucky accidents.

Me: (Pausing) Let's see, Did you work with any other types of mining at different mines?

Gramp: Then after the 11 years of underground and the 4 years layed off, when they started with the open pits. And all that, this was at the Empire Mine. And then when the Empire Mine got started up and that I started at the Empire Mine, roughly it would be about 1963.

Me: Did you have a second job while working here?



Me: at any other mines?

Eramp: No when I worked at a mine that was similar, that was I was in the Empire, I went in the lab as a tester. When I first started at the Empire.

Me: Oh, what did the tester really do for this?

Eramp: Well, a tester was just where you got your samples in and you test your dirt brought in your dirt and everything. And then you had to run samples and tests to see what kind of grade or your what your getting and all of that. In order for a find out what kind of tailings ~~you~~ you were throwing away and ~~with~~ what kind of grade of pellets that you would have been making.

Me: Oh, so about what was your I don't know, last mine that you worked at?

Eramp: Well, after the Empire Mine, I was at Empire so long, and that, then I went up to the Bas as an ~~an~~ analyst there. And I worked as an analyst. Then from a tester I went to an analyst and I was an analyst there for about 3 years at the Empire and then, after that I was transferred to the ~~X~~ Tilden Mine.

Me: Did you do the same things at other mines that you did at the Tilden?

Eramp: Yes, when I transferred from the Empire to the Tilden



I stayed as an analyst. And I worked there all the time as an analyst at the Tilden.

Me: Did you happen to do anymore underground mining?

Gramp: No, all of the underground mines closed and that I was glad of that because I didn't care to go back underground.

Me: Then you don't have to have anymore accidents like when you were buried.

Me: Did you enjoy working at the Tilden Mine?

Gramp: Yes, that was I enjoyed it very much there. The lab was a new mine at the time when I first went there and I started right off with the mine. When they first started we worked right together and got the place operating real good.

Me: I'll bet you'll have a lot of memories getting that mine ~~place~~ together too.

Me: How long do you ~~are~~ how long are you working at the Tilden mine or ~~are you retired~~ did you?

Gramp: I worked at the mine when I transferred over there in 1963 and I worked there until 1989.

Me: Do you work at another mine now or are you retired?



Gramp: No, I have retired.

Me: And how long have you been retired?

Gramp: I've been retired since May 1, 1989.

Me: Are you enjoying your retirement?

Gramp: Yes, I am. I am enjoying it very well.

Me: I bet you are still busy.

Me: So do you have (pause) do have, what ~~base~~ has made area real special to you?

Gramp: Well the ~~the~~ only thing that makes it real special around here is a to keep things going around here is you have the mines and all that. ~~But~~ your mine well paid from the mines, higher pay and all that, otherwise I think if it wasn't for the mines around here and all that I don't think there would be much between I shipeming and logonee.

Me: What do you think was the most memorable event in your life?

Gramp: (Sighing) Oh, that would go back, oh, I would say the most memorable would be, it is hard to think of something say when I had my first child. That was real ~~memorable~~ memorable because I was <sup>youngest</sup> real young. I thought that was real memorable.

Me: What event do you think had the most <sup>greatest</sup> impact on your life?

Gramp: No, for something like for more of an impact on my life I really can't think of anything that was real important.

Me: What do you think has been one of the most rewarding parts of your career?



Group: Oh, — one of the most rewarding parts ~~of your~~  
~~career~~ I'd say one of the most rewarding  
when you had been for 2 years and something  
like that and had been called back to work it  
sure is rewarding to be called back to work

Me: I bet.

Me: Well, thank you very much for your time I really enjoyed  
this, thank you.