

Tracy Rogers's  
interview with  
Melvin Rogers

I'm Tracy Rogers interviewing my grandpa Rogers at his house and it's February the fourteenth.

me: when and where were you born?

grandpa: Born in Ishpeming 19, September 20, 1930

me: What are your parents names?

grandpa: Melvin and Hilda

me: What are the names of your brothers?

grandpa: Clayton and Robert

me: When did you get married to grandma?

grandpa: I got married in 1950, April Fools Day, April 1<sup>st</sup>.

me: What is grandma's name?

grandpa: Natalie

me: What did your parents do for a living?

grandpa: My dad was an electrician in the mine all his life.

me: Where did you go school?

grandpa: Negaunee

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

grandpa: Well I lived in Cornish town, There were Swedes

Italians, wh Finns, cousins, jacks and all different nationality kids and we all had fun we played base ball and hide-and-seek at night and ski riding, we made little ice rinks in our backyards and there was always something to do in them times. (clears throat)

Me: What special features stand out about living in Cornishtown and

grandpa: say that again

Me: What special features stand out about living in Cornishtown?

grandpa: I don't know they were so friendly people and you got along good with everybody there were no fights or nothing <sup>you know</sup> and everybody helped each other like in the fall cut wood you would buzz up the neighbors wood and then they come over and buzz yours up. We all worked together.

me: How has it changed like Negaunee and that how did it

grandpa: <sup>(interrupts)</sup> well, the location I was born and raised and it's all mined under all the houses are moved out or torn down, it's all fenced off, caving grounds.

Me: What kinds of things did you do when you were younger like

grandpa: <sup>like</sup> when we played games and that?

me: ya, like did youse

grandpa: well we never had no tv's them days, we would

get radio once in a while at night but we usually played baseball. We had enough kids around there to play baseball or football and then we had ski hills in our yards and (pause) we kept busy. We hated to see winter go.

Me: ya (pause) where did youse hang out most of the times?

Grandpa: ~~huh?~~ huh?

Me: where did youse hang out? like

Grandpa: Well there was monuments in Cornishtown where they first discovered iron ore. We always hang out there. There must be 25-30 kids there sometimes.

Me: What did you mostly do there just talk or?

Grandpa: We we played, light a little bonfire, sit around it, tell stories and

Me: Is there any interesting stories like that you want to tell me about when you lived around there? (pause) any funny stories or?

Grandpa: No, I can't think of um right now. (pause) hmmm

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

Grandpa: 10 years old

Me: Where did you

Grandpa: (interrupts) I spotted pins at the bowling

alley in Negaunee. You had to spot them. We had to set the pins up by hand and uh they had six alleys. You get paid two cents a game. You would work all day for a night for about 50, 60-60 cents and then you get paid every Saturday you get about \$4.50 to \$5.00. (laughs)  
me: wow!

Grandpa: then when some guys threw the ball down there fast, you would have to run to the side. You would get hit in the leg or arms with pins and

me: ya (pause) what was like how was it like working like did you do anything else, just set up the pins or did you?

Grandpa: I set up the pins, picked the ball up and put it on the track. It would run back to the player. Then we would set the pins up and they would throw another one and try to get a spare or. It was work. It was hard work. You would be ringing wet sweat when you got through.

Me: What what um like how many years did you work altogether?

Grandpa: Well I started working when I was 10 years old. That would be 1940 to 1980. I retired from the mine.

Me: What was it like working at Connelixus Bakery?

Grandpa: Well I scraped pans. That was a monotonous greasy old pans and then the hard crust on them and if you didn't scrub them right they would give you heck and I was there for a few months and then I went Mather Inn they have a kitchen there. I went there scrubbing pots and pans. That wasn't too bad. Then you got a free meal there and the cook made potatoes so white I thought she was filling my plate up it was ice cream so I saved it for last and it was potatas. Then I was bell boy there, run the elevator for few months fill in for a guy that was sick and I made more money on tips there than I got regular pay. I got 25¢ an hour and 7

think I made 50¢ an hour on tips.

Me: Wuh

grandpa: It was lots of ups and downs on that elevator you know.

me: (laughs) ya um where else did you work when you were younger?

grandpa: My neigh neighbor had a farm there. I would work there in the summer \* weeding gardens then cut hay for the winter and then later on when I was about twelve I went Covington up to my grandma and grandpas. I would drive truck full and hayloaders behind it and then my two uncles would be on top spreading it. Then I would drive you to the barn. Then I would \*run to the back and start up the motor. Clunker car and hooked the rope on there and then I would pull that hay up in the barn. I did that quite a few years in a row. I would stay up there all summer.

Me: Did you do anything else when any other kind of work on?

grandpa: Let's see. I worked D&C Ford Garage

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I ah polished cars, washed cars,  
greased cars. I did that for a  
year. And then I went ~~under~~ <sup>on the</sup> railroad  
gang for a track from  
Marquette to the Greenwood Mine.  
That was hard work.

Me: Did you have to do any training  
for that or did you just?

Grandpa: No, No you didn't even have to  
go through kindergarten to get  
that job.

Me: Did you have to wear any special  
equipment like?

Grandpa: Not them days did you have to  
what did I do ~~after~~ <sup>when I left</sup> the railroad? oh  
then I went Lutey's Greenhouse,  
Plant flowers and delivered  
flowers and it was a hot job  
there under that glass you  
know. The windows were all glass.  
In the summer it would be like  
an oven working in there but then  
we would scrape chloride all  
over the glass. In the summer it  
kinda shaded it then. But it

was interesting you could watch the  
flowers for ~~x~~ different seasons. You had to  
make sure you planted them ahead of  
time so they would come out for Easter  
or Memorial Day. My boss had ulcers  
bad too cause they weren't grown  
right you know.

me: laugh

grandpa: (continues) Then we would have to  
go out in the bush and cut Christmas  
trees & branches because they make  
different centerpieces for the people  
and

me: ya

grandpa: Decoration Day Memorial Day that  
was our busiest time. We had earn  
bask yearn baskets learn baskets. You  
had to put the moss along side  
of them, put dirt in um, put  
beautiful flowers. It was a  
busy time of the year.

me: How much did you make for  
that?

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grandpa: huh

Me: How much did you make when you did that?

grandpa: I got 25 dollars a week. If I stayed home a day I still got 25 dollars. It wasn't much though. When then I left there I went in the mine, I used to get 98¢ an hour. Two weeks I would take home about \$60 to \$70. I thought oh boy am I rich now. (laugh)

Me: Wah! When did you work at um when were you a chauffeur for that mo hotel?

grandpa: Oh ya! I was at the <sup>Breiting</sup> ~~Breiding~~ Hotel. I was chauffeur there. I'd wash windows and that. They were kind of crabby people. The owners  
They were old you know.

Me: ya! What kind of did they have any fancy cars that you drove around

in when you were chauffeur or just a regular car?

grandpa: Oh, they had a 41' Buick. Oh that was a classy car them days <sup>boy</sup> I dropped that the boss of at the bank. He'd put his money in the bank. He would tell me to come back in an hour and get me. I would go out <sup>N</sup> North Lake Forks, turn around and I would wide open back to Ishpeming. Go 100mph. (laughs) The boss would have a fit if he knew that. He was telling me one day, gee that car runs good. I blew all of the carbon out of it.

Me: (laughs) were you ever in the military?

grandpa: I was in there two weeks. I got in an argument with my dad. I told him I'm going in the army. I was only fourteen years old. He said "You won't get in there." I said "I will forge my birth certificate." So I did. I was sworn in and everything and and uh and ready to ship up to San Antonio, Texas in Bay. I got caught. I was too young

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and there was about 100 other guys there with me that were too young. (chuckling) That recruiter that recruited ~~as~~<sup>me</sup>. He knew I was too young but he wanted to get his quota for the month. That's why he tried to push me through. Some guys went through. I had a cousin that was in the navy. He went in at fifteen and he come out and he still wasn't old enough to join. He was in Second World War.

Me: Did you have to did you quit school when you were younger to work?

Grandpa: Ya, I went through the eighth grade. I just didn't like school. I would rather work. I wanted to get a job and a car. I had the car fever them days you know. I'm sorry I didn't graduate though because that would have helped me in life. I could have went higher up in <sup>for</sup> CCI if I went through school.

Me: what kind of work did you do

there?

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grandpa: At the mine?

Me: At CCI ya

grandpa: I start out underground, skipped ten. Then I would be loading up the skips you know to haul ore to the service. I was on that job a few years and then I went to inside mining. Ya I'd stand around filling in the shaft miners and we'd rope a rock drift a tunnel from Negaunee to Ishpeming. I was in two-three of them. That was a many year project. Ya and there was a lot of guys <sup>got</sup> hurt ~~and~~ blasted. It was dangerous work but it was fun down there. Everybody was happy down there. We would fool around and joked around and

Me: Did they have any special ~~set~~ rules that you had

to go by or?

Grandpa: Oh ya! They were they had safety rules down there. They had motors that hauled ore cars out. Lot of guys would jump on them you know and ride out cause you got to walk a couple miles in there. This way here they got a free ride out and if the boss catch you you get 3 day lay-off. I was lucky I never did get a lay-off when I was in there. Then I went let's see I got laid off there then I went Ely Minnesota worked I ~~end~~ got end up in rock drift there driving drift I was up there 6 months. Then I called got called back CCI. Started at the Ohio Mine driving a young a a ton trucks and I was there about 2 months and

then Humbolt Mine was opening up and so I got transferred there. Then I knew I had a steady job again so I was their crusher helper and then crusher operator and then I signed up for maintenance I got on there as a helper. I was on there for about a year and I got up to 14 points. That was the highest you could go then. Then later we were down to 16 points, I was on maintenance there. I was on maintenance for about 12 years I think. Then I went they asked me to go to Tilden so I went Tilden it was there about 4 months. They asked me to go for man. So I took it. Made good money but it was like jumping out of the frypan into the fire. You were catching heck from everybody.

Me: what was the most difficult part of working in the mines, and that?

Grandpa: I didn't like working in the shaft. I was scared in there. It was dangerous place and noisy and gassy. Ya, I didn't like that shaft at all.

Me: How did did the duties that you had to do change over the years like were they all just mostly the same thing or?

Grandpa: what's that?

Me: Like how like did you mostly do the same thing or how did it change as you went on?

Grandpa: In the mining you did the same damn thing everyday. Everything was same underground when I got laid-off I could

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hardly write my name cause  
I never had a pencil in my hand  
for ten years. It took a while. I had  
to damn near start learning it  
all over. Ya, there was a lot of guys  
go to work and they ~~sit~~ work in  
the same area for 40 years.

me: ya, umm where you put in any  
dangerous situations?

grandpa: Oh ya the the roof come in and  
your trapped in there. I've been  
trapped a lot of times. Maybe for  
a couple hours. I ain't worried.  
There was an airpipe in there.  
If I ran out of air I just turn  
the air on you know. It didn't  
bother me them days but if it  
ever come down now when I'm  
older. I would go crazy in there.  
But I was young and foolish you  
know.

me: Did lots of people get hurt in

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when that happened or?

Grandpa: ya, I seen guys get their legs cut off and a guys blasted to bits ~~when~~ the ore car jumped off and guys were eating along side of the railroad track and killed a there I think it was. Two guys got killed there. Ya, it's a dangerous place.

Me: ya, what were <sup>the</sup> like the other people like you worked with?

Grandpa: Oh ya, you would get some crabby guys to work with but most of the time they you got good guys. You get a good guy, time goes by fast and you talk and shoot the bull you know. When you get them crabby guys they try to pat the crabby guys together you know.

Me: Could you describe some

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interesting or humorous events  
that happened while working in  
the mine and that?

grandpa: No, when they scraped that was  
kinda hard work. The mills would  
plug up. You would have to blast  
<sup>dozen</sup> ~~100~~ times a day. And then you  
couldn't see the pile in there.  
You would have to guess  
with the scraper and then you  
would get some days where it  
runs like sugar out of there. You  
could sit behind the cover and just  
keep scraping you know. It's nice. It was  
a lot of fun when you had days  
like that but

me: Did you ever think about  
changing careers?

grandpa: No, not liked it. I liked working  
for CCI. But when I was on  
maintenance you would be in

like a negro when you got through. You got some dirty places. I always wonder what it would be like to go to work with a white shirt and a neck tie and a suit on. That would be nice instead of getting so damn dirty. You eat so much dust and dirt and smoke and gas and. It wasn't very healthy down there.

Me: What did you like do in your spare time when you weren't working and that?

Grandpa: I like camp, camping and when the grandchildren got bigger take them swimming and fishing. I used to go haul ~~the~~ around cars in my spare time. Make snow plows, welding, making bumpers and. I was always doing something.

me. Where you involved in any clubs?

grandpa: No

me: Where you just in the Amvets?

grandpa: Well, I'm in there through grandma there.

me: Were you a member of a union?

grandpa: ya, 49 #50 ya you would never want to work in a mine without a union. They protect you you know. If you get in trouble or lay-off and you didn't deserve it. You would go to the union. They would fight and get ya 3 days pay that you lost.

me: What were some of the

fondest memories about working around Ishpeming and Negaunee

grandpa: I can't think of any now. (pause)

You never had a dull moment working in the mine. There was always someone pulling a little prank on you you know.

me: what do you like doing now that you are retired?

grandpa: (laughs) camping in the summer not much in the winter, nope

me: Go cruising and

grandpa: Just ride around and visit my old partners and go hockey game once in a while.

me: yepo you have anything else you want to add that you did?

grandpa: ya, you see I worked in the rock drift that is driving the tunnel and uh this one guy got inter viewed for CCI and they asked him did you ever work ~~for~~ in Rock. He said no but I cut pulp in Gwian.

me: laugh

grandpa: I had alot of stories but I can't remember them now.

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me: OK I guess thats , thats it  
Thanks