

Terri O'Brien's Interview
with Les Kallioinen

This is Terri O'Brien interviewing Les Kallioinen
On Saturday the 13th of February.

Me: When and where were you born?

Uncle Les: I was born at Empire Mine near Palmer on
June 12, 1924.

Me: ~~What~~ What were your parents names?

Uncle Les: My parents names were John and Sagmar (Larson)
Kallioinen. ~~In~~ In those days a lot of babies were
born at home (attended by a doctor or a midwife).
Dr. Burke who resided in Palmer was the attending
physician. From there my mother and father moved
to Negaunee. We lived in town for a short time
before moving to Rolling Mill Location which was
about a mile south of Negaunee. It was near
the Rolling Mill Mine and the Mary Charlotte mine.
Most of the iron ore mines had small settlements
built close by so the miners wouldn't have to
walk very far to work.

Me: What are the names of any brothers and/or sisters?

Uncle Les: There were four boys and three girls in our
family. My brothers were Arthur (died as an infant),
Kenneth, and Stanley. My sister's names were Katherine,
Helen, and Marjorie.

∴ Were you married? If so, when and where?

Uncle Les: I met my wife (Ijra) after being discharged from
the army at the end of World War II. She was
one of Frank Jarvi's daughters. Her father and
mother had a dairy farm three miles south-east
of Negaunee. We were married on February 21, 1948
at the Immanuel Lutheran Church parsonage.

Me: What is your spouse's name?

Uncle Les: Her name is Ijra.

Me: What did your parents do for a living?

Uncle Les: My father worked most of his life in the iron ore mines. Starting at the original Empire Mine when he was 18 years old. My mother was mostly a homemaker although she ~~was~~ worked at the glove factory in Negaunee for some years. She was very good at sewing and made a lot of clothing for us children.

Me: Where did you go to school?

Uncle Les: I began school at the Rolling Mill School. There were two teachers there, Miss Reichel and Mrs. Henderson. There were six grades there counting kindergarten. From there I went to the Case Street School in Negaunee and then on to Negaunee High School.

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

Uncle Les: My memories of growing up in the Rolling Hill location area was swimming in the mine pits. We learned to swim at an early age as the pits had sharp drop offs instead of gradual beaches. In fact one time I was drowning and Eber Perucco a lad a little older than I, came to my rescue; so I owe my life to him. I didn't tell my mother a thing about this (when she asked me why are my eye so bloodshot) for fear that she wouldn't let me go swimming again with the rest of the boys. Another thing I did a lot of was brook trout fishing. Trout creek which ran through Bellevue location was my favorite stream and we enjoyed many a meal of fried brook trout. Another times I went trapping beaver with my Uncle Emil, and Grandfather John Larson to the Flat Rock area. We lived in a

tent they put up for two weeks. I was only 12 years old then and it was a great experience living out there in the woods. I remember the depression years and how little we had but somehow we did have fun also.

Me: What special memories do you have ~~of growing~~ in your mind about the city of Negaunee when you were young?

Uncle Les: Every summer a carnival would come to Negaunee by rail. They were rather large carnivals and people would look forward to seeing them come here.

Me: What kinds of things did you do with your friends for entertainment when you were a teenager? Did you have a hang*out?

Uncle Les: The kids from "our" location didn't hang around town much except to go to a movie on a Saturday or ice skating. We had our own ski hills, swimming holes, ball fields, and sleigh hills nearby. We were like one family, did a lot of things together.

Me: Do you remember anything humorous or interesting that happened in the early days of Ishpeming and Negaunee?

Uncle Les: We had the greatest snowstorm ever in 1938. Everyone was snowbound for many days. The blizzard blew day and night for three days. When it let up you couldn't tell where the roads were. As there weren't the snow removal equipment then that there is now, it took gangs of men with shovels to open the roads and etc. I had a dentist appointment at that time and the dentist said, "How in the world did you get here?" I said, "On skii's of course!" The only other patient he had that day was a man who

had been drinking in a saloon a few doors away, and had a bad toothache.

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

Uncle Les: I was about 15 years old when I got my first job as a gas station attendant at the Rolling

Mill gas station.
Me: What types of duties did you perform on your first job?

Uncle Les: Gas was 20¢ a gallon and we had to pump gas by hand. Fortunately there weren't as many customers then as now. Besides selling gas, there was candy, ice cream, tobacco, and etc. sold there.

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

Uncle Les: What stands most in my mind at my first job was hoping that the customer had smaller bills so I could give them change. As often there wasn't much money in the cash register.

Me: What other jobs did you have during your working career?

Uncle Les: From there I worked at a Shell gas station in Negaunee. After high school I went to Chicago (an uncle and aunt lived there) and worked for Simpson Electric Co. for a few months and then I was in the first 18 year old draft and served in the Army for 3 years. A couple of years in the South Pacific Theater, Salmon Islands, ~~Philippines~~ Philippines and then to Japan. After the war I worked in Muskegon, Weyerhaeuser Timber Co. (Longview Washington) came back here, worked one summer with the Northwestern Railroad and then hired into the mines. I began in the Cambria Jackson mine, then Mather "B", Tracy

mine, White Pine mine (copper), Humbolt, Pioneer, Empire, and Tilden mines. I ~~was~~ retired from the Empire mine (place were I was born) after 38 years.

Me: Why did you work for each of these places?

Didn't answer.

Me: Could you explain the working conditions of the mines that you worked in? Were they ever dangerous?

Uncle Les: The underground mines had their dangers and often the air wasn't very good, but the time went by fast as in contract mining we would try to get as much as possible so we could have a bigger pay check. Mining (underground) is a kind of work that gets into one's blood and a person wouldn't mind it so much. Now the pellet plants are a different ball game altogether, not at all like the underground work.

Me: Do you have any humorous or interesting stories that you would like to share about working in the mines?

Uncle Les: Of course there were humorous things that happened and I don't remember a lot of them off hand. But here's one: The Mining Captain was making his rounds to various controls, and at one place he came to a raise and instead of climbing up the ladder he hollered up to the miners working up there, "How many of you are up there?" A voice answered, "Three of us." The Captain replied, "Well, half of you come down!"

Me: Could you describe your duties while working in the mines (In as much detail as possible)?

Uncle Les: Duties in the mines were brakeman, motor-man, contract miner, ~~m~~ Motorman hauled ore out to the shaft. Contract miners did most of the underground jobs at one time or another. Mostly they put in the network of main drifts (haulage tunnels) sub-level drifts and raises stops and etc. Most of my work in the pellet plants was pellet plant operator (worked on the control panels). The control panel is the "nerve center" of the plant. From there various machinery ~~is~~ and well as tounages are controlled and the kiln and furnace temperatures in making a desirable iron ore pellet.

Me: Did your job in mining require any special training? If so, could you describe the training.

Uncle Les: Training for these various jobs was working with experienced workers (On the job training).

Me: What special equipment or clothing did your job require.

Uncle Les: Special equipment was safety glasses, shoes, ~~gloves~~ gloves, and etc.

Me: Did your job in mining have any special rules or regularations to follow?

Uncle Les: There were a lot of rules; most of them concerning safety. For instance in handling dynamite underground there was a list of over a hundred don'ts. Accidents happen to the most careful worker but alot of them can be prevented by common sense and by being observant.

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

Uncle Les: The duties have changed alot by more modern machinery that is automized; the work force has been greatly reduced because of this.

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

Uncle Les: The most rewarding part of my career is that I was able to provide for a family of six.

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

Uncle Les: The most difficult part was when there was mass layoffs with not much hope of the underground mines opening up again. Fortunately the mining industry here was revived by a new way of mining and many of us were rehired.

Me: What were your co-workers like?

Uncle Les: Most of my co-workers were people that were raised in this area and we had a lot in common. So it wasn't difficult to work with them.

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

Uncle Les: Family members that worked for the same company were my father, two brothers, several uncles, two sons, and many cousins.

Me: What were your biggest responsibilities on the job?

Uncle Les: The biggest responsibility on my job was the last job I was on Kiln Operator or Plant Operator where we had to keep a constant watch on the panel gauges so that the furnace and kiln heat (2,400°-2,450°) wouldn't go much higher and burn out the grate (furnace) or warp the kiln. If that would happen it would mean that part of the plant would be down for many months if not longer. I would hate to think what would happen to the operator who was responsible.

Me: Did you receive any special from your job or from your hobbies,

Uncle Les: I have recieved many safety awards connected with my mining career, but the one I ~~the~~ treasure the most is the one I received for having a top mink ~~pellet~~ pelt which I had in a collection of furs that were auctioned in North Bay, Canada. Out of 19,000 mink pelts that were sold, 300 made the top lot and one of mine was chosen. In ~~the~~ order to get into the top lot the pelt had to be perfect, no scars, ties, prime full fur and pelt preparation. I belong to the U.P. Trappers Association, Distrect 5.

Me: At any time did you feel like changing careers? Why or Why not?

~~No response~~ Didn't Answer

Me: Were you ever in the military? If so, please describe your experiences there.

Didn't Answer

Me: How many total years did you work in your life time? (When did you retire?)

Didn't Answer

Me: Were you a member of a union? If so, which one?

Didn't Answer

Me: Do you have any interesting moments that occured as a member of a union? If so, please describe them.

Didn't Answer

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Me: Overall, what are your fondest memories of your working days and your careers?

Didn't Answer

Me: What do you do in each of the organizations that you are in?

Didn't Answer

Me: Are there any rules or regulations that you have to follow in any of the organizations?

Didn't Answer

Me: If you had to do it all over again, would you choose the same career and hobbies? ~~Why~~ Why or why not?

Uncle Les: If I had to choose a career all over again, I would like to be a wild life biologist. It would be something I'm very interested in. It would be really something to go to a job each day and do something that you really like.

~~Me~~ Uncle Les: Aren't you suppose to ask where I was born and all that stuff?

Me: Well, we can do all of that over again or we can just use ~~what~~ what is on the paper.

Uncle Les: Oh

Me: O.K.

Me: Are there any other special memories you have of growing up in this area?

Uncle Les: I remember, ah, we had a swimming hole down in ah, Warner ~~Creek~~ Creek; On my Grampa Larson's farm. And, ah, the girls used to come down from the neighboring farm down to the swimming hole, and one of these girls later on in life

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was a famous model in New York.

Me: Wow!

Uncle Les: So ah, I thought that that was kind of interesting.

Me: I suppose it would be. Um, Do you remember any humorous or interesting things that happened in the early days of Ishpeming or Negaunee?

Uncle Les: Anything interesting?

Me: Anything humorous or interesting about it, ^{Anything special} About Ishpeming or Negaunee.

Dad: Turn it off and let him think.

Me: Ok.

No Answer

Uncle Les: One of our neighbor boys, was about at that time 15 or 16 years old. Ah, he dove off a cliff, now this was a mine cliff.

Me: ~~It was a~~ what?

Uncle Les: It was a shear cliff down. It was 55 feet down to the water.

Me: Wow

Uncle Les: Ya, we measured it with a rope.

Me: (laughing) A rope!

Uncle Les: We, ah, dropped the rope down to the water, and then we measured the rope; and that's how we got it. He did that twice! Each one of us had to give him a penny for doing it.

Me: (laugh)

Uncle Les: There were about five or six of us that watched him.

Me: ~~It was a~~ That is pretty amazing!

Uncle Les: Ya.

Dad: Shut it off.

Me: O.K.

Me: Were mines ever dangerous to work in?

Uncle Les: Most mines were, ah, more or less dangerous. But ah, ~~more~~ it's surprising that there was such few accidents, but ah, there were alot of close calls. Almost any miner that worked in a mine for any length of time, ah, they could tell you, ah, a couple of close calls they had.

Me: What was it like working underground?

Uncle Les: Underground? Ah, it was something that got into your blood. When you worked underground in the mine it, ah, was something that some of us really didn't mind it. And the time went by really fast because, ah, we were; alot of us were on contract work and the more you did ah...

Me: The more you got paid.

Uncle Les: Ya. The more you got paid.

Me: Um, how did the duties of your job change over the years.

Uncle Les: The underground mines, they were altogether different type of mining then the open pit mine which they had today. They uh,...

Me: The technology and stuff like that.

Dad: Mumbling to Uncle Les.

Uncle Les: The underground we did, ah, it was; usually you started off as a breakman on the motors. Ah, then motorman, hauling out the ore from the shafts.

~~Me: Oh~~

~~Uncle Les: And that's how you learn mining at the mine.~~

Dad: Mumbling to Uncle Les.

Uncle Les: And then from there after learning some of the booties, ah, from the different

jobs. Then you usually advanced to contract mining, ~~with~~, ah, ~~the~~ ~~was~~ some experienced miners.

Me: Oh.

Uncle Les: And that's how you learn mining of the mine, just by working with these older men that have been mining for some years, ~~the~~ these experienced men.

Me: Oh, O.K. Over all what are your fondest memories of your ~~fondest~~ working days and your careers.

Uncle Les: My fondest days?

Me: Ya, fondest memories, I'll turn it off and let you think.

Uncle Les: I think that the fondest thing is ah, working with the guys. ~~We~~ We made some pretty good friendships and ah, which I would have otherwise haven't made.

Me: Um, that is something. O.K. During your days of employment and beyond what have been your favorite hobbies or activities.

Uncle Les: Favorite hobbies?

Me: Ya

Uncle Les: Um, I like hunting, fishing, and trapping. Bowling, Horseshoe, and golf.

Me: What do you do in trapping and V.F.W.

Uncle Les: what do you mean?

Me: What exactly do you do for trapping? Do you go out in the woods and trap.

Uncle Les: Of course, ya.

Me: (laughing) Of course.

Uncle Les: Well, the thing that got me started is when I was young, ah, money was pretty scarous because it was still in the depression

days.

Me: Ya.

Uncle Les: And ah, I must have been 12 years old or so and I was trapping muskrats to make a living or a some money. I was the first kid on our location to have a brand new bike and, that's because I got it from trapping. So I was kind of important then.

Me: A hotshot!

Uncle Les: (laughing) Ya, a hotshot.

Me: Um, what do you do in the V.F.W.?

Uncle Les: The V.F.W.?

Me: Ya, what do you do there?

Uncle Les: Um...

Me: Are you just a member?

Uncle Les: Ya, I'm just, I'm just a member of the V.F.W, Ya. In order to be eligible for the V.F.W. you had to be a veterian of a war.

Me: Oh.

Uncle Les: Of the United States.

Me: Oh, O.K.

Uncle Les: A dollar then was worth ah, five, six, maybe ten dollars now.

Dad: Mumbling to Uncle Les.

Uncle Les: There is a Industrial difference. Like ah, if I say I got ten dollars for a mink then or, it would be almost like getting seventy or eighty dollars for one now. So it's hard to...

Me: Does it seem like alot more or a little more.

Uncle Les: Uh.

Me: Did it seem like alot more money, in money?

Uncle Les: I ah think it was more, in some years it was more.

Me: Uh.

Uncle Les: You did alot more with that...

Me: You could do alot more with ten dollars.

Dad: Mumbling to Uncle Les.

Me: If you had to do it all over agian, would you chose the same career and hobbies?

Uncle Les: Ah, ya, No the career but the hobbies; I would be interested in.

Me: Why wouldn't you choose the same career?

Uncle Les: Ah, the career, for the career I could think of better things to do, like a wildlife biologist or some thing, a job I would enjoy doing. If you wake up in the morning and you go, you go with a different attitude, then when you work in the pellet plants or something.

Me: Well ya I spose.

Uncle Les: (laughs)

Dad: Dad mumbles something to us.

Uncle Les: Today- I'm afraid your wrong.

Me: Um, do you; let me see, What do I want to say? I don't know.

Uncle Les: I remember one time when I was trapping for bounty. They had a bounty on cyote, but not on fox. I had a fox in my trap so when I got there I released it and it ran, I thought it would really run fast.

Me: I would take off.

Uncle Les: It would take off fast but, it just ran about 20, 25 feet and stopped and it kept starring back at me as if it was saying thanks, thanks alot.

Me: Laugh

Uncle Les: Another time I was after a certain cyote. And ah, it had one foot that was missing but it was healed over. And I was after him for about three months. I had to make a special set to get him, and when I finally did get him, like most cyotes they kind of couare and scringe, when you come up to them, but this one. He was a spunky one. And ah, he was there looking at me and ah, I think that that was the only time that I felt ah, compassion for an animal.

Me: Oh.

Uncle Les: I had, I had almost wanted to release him, but I couldn't. Because of the bounty! (laughs)

Me: How did you know it was the same animal?

Uncle Les: Because it was an animal that had one paw missing.

Me: Oh, you could tell by the foot prints.

Uncle Les: Ya,

Me: Um, Where are your kids living now?

Uncle Les: Our children are ah, John our oldest son is living in Kodiak, Alaska. And ah Sandra, she lives in Powers. She works in a Nursing home there. And...

Me: Your grandchildren, do you have any.

Uncle Les: They have a 2 boys. And ah, (asking Auntie Ijira) who's the next one? Audrey, (laughing) she lives in Florida, Cocoa Beach Florida. And, Jimmy he lives just across the road from us. They have 2 girls; 2 ~~granddaughters~~ granddaughters. Allen our other son lives down in Milwaukee. They have two boys. And then there's ah, Larry. He lives down in Florida. He has one child.

Mumbles something else.

Me: Is there anything special you do with your wife on her birthday?

Uncle Les: Now every year now for the past 20 years or so, we go to a small brook, near here. And ah, we snowshoe in, and ah, I make birthday coffee for her.

Me: Her favorite, is that?

Uncle Les: I have a coffee can, with a wire attached to it and you stick it into a fire.

Me: (Laughs)

Uncle Les: And, we usually have some hoistess cakes, ~~with it~~ like twinkies or chocolate cupcakes ~~with it~~, or something like that.

Me: Uh.

Uncle Les: I'll tell you ~~what~~ ^{one thing}, you have never tasted better coffee.

Me: Best way to make it.

Uncle Les: So this year, we had three cups a piece. We would have had more but the pot wouldn't hold it.

Me: A.O.K. (laugh), Well thank you.

Uncle Les: Your welcome

Me: By-By.