

Jodi Heliste's Interview With Helen Solka

Introduction: Hi, This is Jodi Heliste, I'm interviewing Helen Solka who is a ex-student at National Mine. This interview is taking place at her house. The date today is Dec. 8, 1990.

Me: When and where were you born?

Mrs. Solka: I was born in National Mine, Dec 5, 1915

Me: O.k. um How many brothers and sisters did you have.

Mrs. Solka: I had four brothers and three sisters. My brothers were Floyd, Art, Albert, Meryl. My sisters Dorothy and I had two half sisters Ruth and Libian

Me: Oh

Mrs. Solka: And I was the next to the youngest of the family and Albert was the youngest. Ruth was the oldest

Me: When and who did you marry?

Mrs. Solka: I married Harold Solka long term, time friend. We went through high school together and were married in National Mine at my folk's house in June the 15, 1940. And we celebrated our 50th Wedding Anniversary this year.

Me: Oh. When was it?

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Mrs. Solka: It was in June. Well the date was June 15, but we had our little party in July the 6, when all the kids could be home. We had a little get together and a dinner at the Northwoods, mostly family.

Me: Oh, um, How many children do you have? What are their names

Mrs. Solka: I, we have 5 children, Bruce is the oldest then Richard, uh, and Christine, Tom, and Lois.

Me: Do they get along together?

Mrs. Solka: They all get along real well. uh, They're close family.

Me: When and where were your parents born?

Mrs. Solka: My mother was born up in Humbolt, Michigan. And she was, gosh, she was born in about 18, um 65 I think. And my dad was born over in the Isle of Man. Oh and I can't remember his, the date of his birth. I could find it, I mean if I know that I have it here somewhere. He was he died like in 1960 and he was ah 78 at that time. So, if figure from that time.

Me: What's the Isle of Man?

Mrs. Solka: It's an island off the coast of the British Isles of England. It's one of the

Mrs. Solka: islands it really was under the
(continued) English Rule, But he was born there
and he worked in the mines there and
came over to this country when he was
about 16 years old

Me: mm. What years did you attend National
Mine?

Mrs. Solka: Well I started school in 1920 and I
graduated in 1933

Me: Did you like school?

Mrs. Solka: Mostly I think yea ha ha ha. Yaw I
guess I liked school, I missed very little
school. I was just reading a uh a thing
I had saved out of the paper honorables
and that and they also the people who
hadn't missed any school for ^{one} semester and I was one of them. ^{ha ha} I
guess I liked school yaw

Me: Um, do you remember the names of
some of your grade school teachers?

Mrs. Solka: I remember the names of all my grade
school teachers.

Me: You do?

Mrs. Solka: Yes, I had Miss Jeffrey in kindergarten,
Miss Rowins at first grade, Miss Lajoy
in second grade, Miss Roberts in 3
grade,

Mrs. Solka: Miss Lumblot in fourth grade, and ⁴
(continued) Miss Peterson in fifth grade and
Miss Milamaki in sixth grade, ha, ha,
So I remember you all and high
school teachers I remember those,
that I had.

Me: Which ones stand out in your mind the
most?

Mrs. Solka: Oh, I don't know, uh. In the grades
I remember Miss Roberts the third
grade teacher I, I knew her quite
well. She was from National Mine and
she was born and raised there. And I
remember one day I guess I was mad
at her for some reason. And I put
my head down on my desk and I, ha, ha,
she came around to talk and I put
my hand up and I hit her. So then
it was right around the time our
family, we were going to have our
family picture taken and went to
one of the neighbors to get my hair
cut, and she said "Oh so you're
going to have your hair cut before
you go to jail for slapping your
teacher. ha, ha, ha, ha. And I was
really you know kind of upset

Mrs. Solka: about that. But that I remember 5.
(continued) that. And I remember Ruth. She
was a really nice, good teacher, nice
teacher. I liked all my teachers. I
remember all of them.

me: Do you have any interesting or
humorous stories about any of your
teachers?

Mrs. Solka: Mm, I can't think of anything
right now.

me: Do you have any interesting or humorous
stories about school? Anything that
happened at school? Friends maybe?

Mrs. Solka: Gee, I know, I remember when I was
in kindergarten. I can remember
that, or first, kindergarten. One of
the girls, we had to bring our own
cup to school if we had anything to
drink and mother gave me just a
regular old cup. And this other little girl
I don't what, but we were fooling
around and she broke my cup. And I
cried and I felt so terrible and I,
I, the next day she came with a
real pretty china cup for me and me

Mrs Solka, was just an old kitchen and she
(continued) brought this beautiful cup for me
ta, I don't know if her mother
knew if she brought it or not. Ha, Ha,
ha. But I remember that from
kindergarten but, I don't uh remember
other, too many other things about the
grades, I remember I had a long way
to go. We lived down in the beginning
part of National Mine and I had to
walk up to ~~where~~ where the school
is and we had no buses and we
walked in the winter as well and
took our lunch at noon we could eat
there but after we got into the seventh
grade we weren't allowed to bring our
lunch because the lunchroom wasn't big
enough for everybody. So we had to
walk home at noon and eat and come
back to school. So it was a long - I don't
know that quite away from down you
know down where Alie's grandmother
lives. We lived down there.

me: Now that's a long way

Mrs Solka: So we had a long way to walk
Yaw, uh. But I guess when it stormed

Mrs. Solka: we had no radios to tell us that
(Continued) there would be no school or anything
we just took for granted that they
wouldn't have school in stormy weather.
So we just stayed home I suppose but
otherwise it was, it was a long walk
in the winter.

Me: What was your first day of school like?

Mrs. Solka: The first day of school, gee I don't think
I can remember that. I don't, you know

Me: How long was the school day?

Mrs. Solka: From what I remember I, we started
school at nine o'clock and we were out
at four in those days. Gaw so, it was kind
of a long day

Me: Well about the same as now

Mrs. Solka: Now you start at eight mostly I guess
but it seems to me we started at nine
and went till four. Gaw.

Me: Um, what was your favorite class?

Mrs. Solka: My favorite class? Well I liked English
and I loved music, that's what I liked
a lot, my sister and I we used to sing
together a lot at programs and everything.
Ha, ha. I liked music, but uh I think
English was one of my favorites.

Me: Did you play an instrument?

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Mrs. Solka: I played the piano not, we didn't have any orchestras or bands in school, but I played, I took piano lessons when I was in the second grade, and uh Miss Harvey in National Mine gave everybody piano lessons, Ha, Ha, Ha. So I took piano lessons. I didn't take very long, but I learned enough so after I got older I put my mind to it and played a lot more, and I still play. I enjoy music.

Me: What kind of lessons were taught?

Mrs. Solka: What kind? Well, the regular English, math, arithmetic we used to call it, and uh geography, and uh history, science, and uh we had cooking and sewing classes when we got into the seventh, eighth in the high school.

Me: What was your most difficult subject.

Mrs. Solka: Difficult, I think math, algebra, geometry I didn't like, Ha, ha, ha.

Me: Not many people do?

Mrs. Solka: I don't think so. I think, I think its ~~by~~

Mrs. Solka: Hard for most people I think, there
(continued) aren't many who really enjoy math.

Me: How were kids expected to act and behave
in class?

Mrs. Solka: Well, in those days I think most every-
one behaved well in school. Cause we had,
the teachers were strict I mean we really
had to ah listen and behave. Ah, I don't
remember anybody really acting up in
school or having problems with teachers
you know in the grades or in high
school.

Me: Oh wow. Nobody acted up at all?

Mrs. Solka: Oh, well there might have been
some, you know like that were not
mean but acted kind of silly. Or
didn't do things really mean

Me: Obnoxious?

Mrs. Solka: Pardon?

Me: Obnoxious?

Mrs. Solka: I didn't understand you.

Me: Are they like obnoxious?

Mrs. Solka: Well I, ha, ha, ha

Me: Um, How did kids dress?

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Mrs. Solka: Well, I know we didn't have a lot of clothes. We wore the same clothes, uh maybe we had two or three outfits so that you'd change off every other day or something. So that, but most like myself had a lot of hand me downs or homemade clothes and we didn't have the snow pants and the kind of boots and everything that kids do nowadays. Everybody was sort of short of money in those days too we um I remember when we went out to play we always, we just had long underwear, long socks, long stockings. And our boots were like rubberized cloth with buckles ya know that. But, ah, there wasn't anybody that really, ah, dressed real fine. I mean everybody was in the same class as far as clothes and that went. And clean and neat mostly they dressed that way.

Me: Were there any special fads or sayings?

Mrs. Solka: Any special what?

Me: Fads or sayings?

Mrs. Solka: Fads or sayings? Oh, gee I can't think of right now, uh. Not that I can remember. I know there were, but I don't remember just

Me: What kind of music did you listen to?

Mrs. Solka: Oh, there was um, I liked most any kind of music. I liked classical music, I liked, uh, popular music. The songs that were popular in the days that we... Uh, my sister and I sang at a lot of different things and we had a lot of, uh, music, uh various ya know we had both classical, popular, or religious music or ever we were going to sing we had the songs we needed for that type of program. And, uh, I never did like sort of jazzy music, I liked the more common, quiet music.

Me: What kind of extracurricular activities were offered?

Mrs. Solka: Well, they had, mostly boys basket-ball. The girls didn't seem to have

Mrs. Solka: much of anything extracurricular. 12.
(continued) We, in those days there was no
girl's uh, we had gym of course. But
ah it was mostly boy's basketball
and, uh, we didn't have out there like
tennis or, or. They didn't have football
at National Mine or uh, so the boys
of course played baseball and girls...
There just wasn't much for girls, we
had no swimming or, I learned to
swim when I was a kid, but I. We
used to go to Iron Mountain and visit
a couple of weeks with my relatives
and I learned there, I guess, to swim.
We used to go out to our cottage on
weekends and that's where I learned
to swim, I guess I could swim enough
to save myself, ha, ha, ha, ha, Now I don't
know, I haven't tried it for a long
time. But I, otherwise extracurricular we
didn't and then of course we had our
music clubs, Glee clubs we called, girl's
glee clubs and the mixed groups and we
had Miss Austin she was, I remember
mostly, the music teacher for years and

Mrs. Solka: we put on Operettas, musical plays, and¹³
(continued) things and that was a lot of fun.

Me: Did any of the teams win a trophy
or a tournament?

Mrs. Solka: Any of the teams win trophies? Yes,
well, when I was in high school, uh
the basketball team they won, uh. In
fact the year before I was in high
school my brother was on the senior,
he was a senior and he was on the
basketball team and uh they won the
U. P. tournament in 1929 that was
and they went down state and played.
But they did get beat, they won their
first game down state, but they got beat
their second game down there, and then
I think when Harold, my husband,
when he was in, he played basketball
through high school and they won
some district championships. I don't, I
think, I don't think they did win a
U. P. They just missed out on a U. P.
championship, But, there were a few
trophies in those days when I was

Mrs. Solka, when I was in school.

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(continued)

Me: Did you enjoy watching them?

Mrs. Solka: Oh, I went to every game, ha, ha. Basketball, I well Harold and I were sort of good friends and I didn't want to miss any of the games cause he was one of the star players. Ha, ha, ha. So we managed to get to the games even though it was hard because in those days there weren't many people who had cars to go, ya know. I know my family didn't have a car and uh. But I went to most I think I ~~was~~ in my junior year in high school when Harold was a senior and I don't think I missed any games.

I really enjoyed the basketball games.

Me: How did the teams get to the games?

Mrs. Solka: They used to, uh, the coach of course had a car and when, that's when we were in high school and uh Harold, he used to get his brother's car or his sister's car and he'd take some of the

Mrs. Solka: boys and the coach would take ^{15.}
(continued) some and then maybe some of the
other teachers or board members or
somebody would take cars, there were
no buses to transport them or any-
thing.

Me: Who was the principal when you
were a student?

Mrs. Solka: When I was in high school Mr. Annala,
George Annala, was the principal. And
uh, he was for one year or so, but we did
have Mr. Swanson. He was the principal
when I was like a freshman and sophomore.
And, uh, he taught, he also taught biology
and that, but he was the principal.

Me: Was he nice?

Mrs. Solka: Well ya, ha, ha, ha. He was, he was nice.
He was kind of stern, but I don't
think that the students all really liked
him a lot like we did some of the
teachers. He wasn't there too long, I
don't remember how many years he
was there, but he was there for part of
my high school years. I don't know just
how many years he was there.

Me: What were your text books like?

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Mrs. Solka: Well, just regular, I don't know, ah, they were the same I guess as they are now you know. I wouldn't know of any, I can't remember them much different.

Me: Um, how much homework did you get?

Mrs. Solka: Well I think mostly every night. I had to bring books home. We had homework. Probably most like English and math that we had to do at home.

Me: What was lunch time like?

Mrs. Solka: Well we had ah, ah lunch room and when we were like I say in the grades we could bring our lunch and they had long tables and benches and they didn't, we all had to bring our own lunch. They didn't cook the meals or anything at the school. Everybody brought their own.

Me: Oh they didn't?

Mrs. Solka: Pardon?

Me: They didn't?

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Mrs. Solka: No. And as I said before when we got into the seventh grade and through high school we weren't allowed to bring our lunch because there wasn't room enough for everybody in the lunch room. And so they just had it for the younger people, the kids through the sixth grade. And then there were a lot of kids that came in from out like on the farms and things. They had to bring their lunch so, ah, we that lived in right at National Mine had to go home for lunch after we got into the seventh grade through high school. So we had to go up in the morning, come back for lunch, + go back to school, ha, ha. So we had two trips up and down to. That was a long way. We'd have to run to make it at noon time. Get back in time for school.

Me: How long was your recess?

Mrs. Solka: I think it was probably an hour and maybe an hour and 15 min. Seems to me we probably had to start at quarter after

Mrs. Solka: one you know and got out at noon, 18.
(continued) So, ah, we had to rush to get home
and eat and go back.

Me: Did you have any special plays or
programs?

Mrs. Solka: Well you, we had ah like I say we
had operettas that the music teacher
used to get together. And we'd, a lot
of the kids in the high school and
different grades would take part in it.
And, ah, we also had class plays. Ah,
~~it~~ was in, I remember being in the when
I was a junior I remember being in the
senior class play and then of course our
senior class had their play. And I remember
being in a couple of operettas and I was
just looking through my book and I had
a ticket. A ticket yes and it said adults
20¢ and students 10¢ for the price, admission
prices. And, and we in our class play we
took in like 55 dollars and some cents. I
had written in my book after expenses
were paid we used the rest of the money
to take the senior class to the Mather
Inn for dinner or a banquet. For a senior
banquet. We had just taken in 55 dollars
So in those days the things were a lot

Mrs. Solka: the prices were a lot different, 19.
(continued) cheaper.

Me: were there strict rules to follow?

Mrs. Solka: Pardon?

Me: Were there any strict rules to follow?

Mrs. Solka: Rules? Well I don't remember anything really outstanding. I guess we had to be quiet in the halls I know and not run and race through the halls during class changes and things. Teachers would stand by the door with a ruler, ha, ha, ha.

Me: Did anybody ever get hit with it?

Mrs. Solka: Oh, in class sometimes I remember in sixth grade the teacher we had then she always kept her ruler handy and if anybody was acting up she'd crack them on the knuckles a little bit with her ruler.

Me: Yeah, that would keep people in line.

Mrs. Solka: Yeah, that's right.

Me: What was the graduation ceremony at National Mine like?

Mrs. Solka: Well, when we graduated, uh, there were no caps and gowns. And, ah,

Mrs. Solka; and we graduated early because, ²⁰
(continued) ah, we had to graduate in May rather
than June, because in that time it
was ah, the depression was on and the
school was running short of money.
And so they gave us about a week to
get ready for graduation, but they
had to close. And we, ah, got our
program together and then we wrote I
remember when I graduated the girls
wore long dresses. And I remember
my dresses, one of my sisters gave me
one dress and my other sister that was
working gave me my other dress. One
for back locket and one for we just
had one night a commencement night
rather than the two nights at class
night cause they didn't have the
money or the time to get together
all that like class will prophecy and all
that we didn't have when we graduated.
But, ah, we had the students did the
major of the speeches and the super-
intendent. We had no special speaker
and our back locket we had a minister
and ah, the girl's glee club would sing

Mrs. Solka: we had that type of program. 21.
(continued)

Me: Do you have any special memories of graduation?

Mrs. Solka: I just, I remember ah, being that we couldn't afford anything to have very much of a graduation. It was very plain and we didn't have any party after or anything like that. And, ah, I do remember my dresses that I had that my sisters bought for me. My parents I suppose would have gotten something for me but at the time they were, you know, having it hard too cause the mines were just working like three days a week or something so.

Me: Were you able to maintain contact with childhood friends?

Mrs. Solka: Since I've been out of school you mean?

Me: Yeah.

Mrs. Solka: Ah, not too much. When I got married of course I didn't live in National Mine anymore. And, ah I went to school. I went away to nursing school. And so I never really, there were just two other girls

Mrs. Solka: other girls in my senior class and I.
(continued) one of them died quite a few years ago and ah the other one I do see her occasionally and talk to her and the boys I see once in a great while. And some of the kids I might see them down town or something and talk for a few minutes. And I not to really keep in touch to do things together or anything.

Me: Did you have any teachers that made a great impact on your life?

Mrs. Solka: Ah, I don't, I can't think of any special one. Uh, no I they were all good, ah, I liked them all but I don't remember any I really had any special thing ya know done.

Me: Did you have any special yearly picnics or outings?

Mrs. Solka: Oh, I remember one time a group of us with our music teacher, Miss Austin, us group of girls we walked from National Mine around the Cliff Drive. I don't know if you know where that is. Well right now you can't go all the way around because the Tilden Mine is

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Mrs. Solka: taking up part of that area, and
(continued) we walked from National Mine and
you go right around the Cliff Drive
out well you know where ah Cedar
Lake is where they go swimming
sometimes in the summer?

Me: Oh, no, I've never been there.

Mrs. Solka: You don't live out there, well it goes
you walked all the way around then
it come out or about a mile or so
from Negawnee. And that was a nice
long day, we'd take lunch and ah stop
along the way and I think I remember
that. And there were picnics the different
organizations used to have picnics up in
they called it the groove in National
Mine when I was a kid I remember
that. And, ah, of course we went family
picnicing you know.

Me: Did any tragedies happen when you
were in school?

Mrs. Solka: Tragedies? Gee, not ah, well I remember
yeah we had there was this powder
mill out in National Mine that happened
a couple of times they had explosions
there.

Mrs. Solka: where men ~~who~~ were killed. I 24.

(continued) remember I had a playhouse my dad had made for me out of lats. A real lightweight playhouse out in the back yard and one day when they did have an explosion it rocked, cracked it, it just rocked right over cause we lived about a mile or so from the place, but I remember that, I can't think of any other anything else when I was a kid.

Me: What do you think is the biggest change in school since you were a student?

Mrs. Solka: Oh, there's a lot of changes I guess. Oh, I well in their dress the way they dress these days, their hair a lot different and ah it's hard to say when you're not right in school with the kids to see these days. I have grandkids and it seems it's harder for them I think they their learning things in kindergarten I guess we didn't start learning till we were at least in the first grade. Kindergarten was more or less like a day care center you know. We just went there to get used to being in

Mrs. Solka: school I guess, so it is different 75.
(continued) cause the kids learn now they
learn quite a bit in kindergarten so
that I think they know as much in
kindergarten as we had in first grade.

Me: What are your fondest memories of
National Mine?

Mrs. Solka: Oh, dear I don't know uh. I guess
when I was a kid we played a lot
we went out uh we got together.

Me: If you had a message for the students
today what would it be?

Mrs. Solka: If I had a message for the students?

Me: yeah.

Mrs. Solka: Well, I guess to work hard at
everything they do, try to attain the
best they can do, and because these
days you have to have an education to
get anywhere to have any to get a job
you have to really have a good education
to get any kind of a job. In those days
when I went to school a lot of kids
quit school when they got into high
school they dropped out. There were
several that I know of that dropped out

Mrs. Solka: in high school. But you can't these 26-
(continued) days. You really have to at least
have high school and really now it's
almost necessary to have college education.

Me: Is there anything you'd like to add?

Mrs. Solka: I don't think so. It's just been kind
of interesting to talk to you.

Me: O.k. I'd like to thank you for taking
the time to let me interview you.

Mrs. Solka: You're welcome I'm sure.

Me: o.k.

The End