

Neal Pietro's Interview
with
Mr. Talbacka

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Me: My name is Neal Pietro and I'm interviewing Sulo Talbacka for the Nat'l Mine Red Dust. He was a student and also a bus driver for the school. The date of the interview is Dec. 6, 1990. It will be held at his house out on 581.

Me: When and where were you born?

Mr. Talbacka: Neguanec, April 8, 1917.

Me: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Mr. Talbacka: One sister.

Me: What was her name?

Mr. Talbacka: Limpy

Me: When and Whom did you marry?

Mr. Talbacka: Helmi Locksu from Michigamme.

Me: When?

Mr. Talbacka: 1927, September 25.

Me: How many children do you have?

Mr. Talbacka: Two. Two boys.

Me: What are there names?

Mr. Talbacka: Ronald and James.

Me: When and where were your parents born?

Mr. Talbacka: In Finland.

Me: When?

Mr. Talbacka: (a little mixed up) My mother was born in eighty...
nineteen... eighteen eighty-seven and my father
was born in 1888. (pause) December 25, Christmas
Day.

Me: A little while ago heh? (pause) Ok., now we'll switch to
about the school Nat'l Mine, we'll talk about that for a while.
What years did you attend Nat'l Mine school?

Mr. Talbacka: (thinking) Oh, nineteen twenty-two, when I first started
in kindergarden.

Me: What was kindergarden like?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, like lots of us boys from the farms we couldn't talk
English, and ~~she~~ had a teacher by the name of Limpy Rüssy
and she was Finish, we got along pretty good back then

Me: What was she like, your teacher?

Mr. Talbacka: She was a nice teacher.

Me: Do you have any stories about her?

Mr. Talbacka: No, no

Me: Do you remember, did you go to jr. high?

Mr. Talbacka: I went as far as the tenth grade.

Me: Tenth grade, Do you remember any of your teachers from there?

Mr. Talbacka: Uh, I remember Mr. Annala, Mr. Baths, he was the superintendant, and Guy Scott was the superintendant first when I started school.

Me: What were they like?

Mr. Talbacka: They were nice teachers, very, very good teachers.

Me: Do you have any stories about them.

Mr. Talbacka: No, no, but they were good honest teachers.

Me: Well, what was the first day of school like?

Mr. Talbacka: (thinking) Well, it was pretty rough, (laughing) hated to go back.

Me: How long were you at school, was it seven hours or....?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya, about seven hours

Me: How did you get there?

Mr. Talbacka: Walked.

Me: Through rain and anything, hay?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya, there were no buses.

Me: About how far was it?

Mr. Talbacka: Oh, about half a mile

Me: Half a mile?

Mr. Talbacka: Yup.

Me: What kind of subjects were taught?

Mr. Talbacka: Oh, there was mathematics, and spelling, penmanship, History.

Me: Did you do your spelling and that in English or Finnish?

Mr. Talbacka: English.

Me: What was your favorite subject?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, when I got in ninth grade I used to like Algebra.

Me: Algebra? That's what I like too.

Mr. Talbacka: (laughing a little) I even went night school on it.

Me: It's pretty fun.

Mr. Talbacka: Ya

Me: It's not that bad.

Mr. Talbacka: I couldn't do.....

Me: Well, what would have been your most difficult subject?

Mr. Talbacka: History.

Me: History? I don't mind History it's not that bad. I don't like English though, I don't get it.

Me: Why didn't you like it?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, it didn't more or less go with my type of life or what ever, American history and World history....

Me: How were you expected to behave in those classes?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, we really had to toe the mark, If we didn't under the teachers desk, sit under that desk, or stay after school till 5 o'clock, and the teacher stayed with you too.

Me: Not like nowadays heh, where sometimes the teacher leaves and you have somebody else.

Me: Well, if you were bad like what kind of punishments did you get besides going under the teachers desk?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, you would have to go stand in the hallway, stand out there for any length of time.

Me: Did they used to hit you over the knuckles with the ruler or ball?

Mr. Talbacka: Yes, many times,

Me: What would happen if you were out in the hallway and the principal came by or something?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, he'd question you,

Me: Must have been weird if you were out there.

Mr. Talbacka: Ya.

Me: (after a short pause of thinking) Well, how did you dress, I mean did you have to wear suits and that while you were there or could you dress however you wanted?

Mr. Talbacka: Yes, in the winter time we had gold seals and breeches, that was the clothing them days, cortoroy breeches they were blues, and then you would have it on your underwear when you get all wet. (ha, ha, ha)

Me: Well, when you were at school did you here any sayings, were there any sayings at your school? What people used to say lots.

Mr. Talbacka: No.

Me: No? Well then, what kind of music did you listen to, I mean it couldn't be like now days?

Mr. Talbacka: Just a radio.

Me: Radio?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya.

Me: What kind of music was it? Who sang or that?

Mr. Talbacka: It was just guitar music mostly, guitar and accordian.

Me: Did you listen to any Finish music?

Mr. Talbacka: No!

Me: After school was over and that were there any extracurricula things they had after school.

Mr. Talbacka: Well, there was the basketball team and that, but we never had nothing really.

Me: Were you on the basketball team?

Mr. Talbacka: No. (pause) I was a bench warmer, (ha, ha, ha)

Me: Did the team win any trophies or that? Championships or anything?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya, the teams that was before me, they won the Championships.

Me: Did it effect how you went to school, I mean did use if your team won a big game did you not have any homework that day?

Mr. Talbacka: No, we went school just the same as.....

Me: How far did the teams have to travel about?

Mr. Talbacka: Ishpeming, Negaunee, and Marquette.

Me: What was the farthest place they had to go?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, they went one year to lower Michigan for a tournament game, they won the U.P. Championship.

Me: Must have been exciting?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya

Me: What year would that have been?

Mr. Talbacka: I don't know, it's in the cover even on one of the Red Dusts picture, George Cordero, Tommy Hill, and all them?

Me: Well, we'll get back to school now. Who was the principle of your school?

Mr. Talbacka: When I was going school?

Me: Yes,

Mr. Talbacka: Oscar Swanson.

Me: Did he go with the basketball team when they went down state that one year?

Mr. Talbacka: No

Me: What was he like?

Mr. Talbacka: He was a good teacher.

Me: Well, what kind of books did you have?

Mr. Talbacka: More or less you had to read a book and they'd give you a test

Me: Were the tests hard?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya.

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Me: Did you usually get good grades on them or what?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, sometimes

Me: Sometimes, (pause) Well, how much homework did you get?

Mr. Talbacka: Oh, we had quite a bit of homework the teacher made sure of that.

Me: Over the weekend did they give you lots?

Mr. Talbacka: Yes.

Me: Yes? Not like now days where over the weekend they don't give you much.

Mr. Talbacka: Ya.

Me: Well, after the first part of school was over what was your lunchtime like? Did you have good meals there?

Mr. Talbacka: No, we carried a brown bag

Me: Did you? Where did you eat, outside?

Mr. Talbacka: In the lunch room.

Me: Did you set up tables then?

Mr. Talbacka: Tables.

Me: So you didn't take hot lunch at all?

Mr. Talbacka: No, Sandwich.

Me: Well, back then to make your lunch that you took about how much did it cost?

Mr. Talbacka: I don't know, my mother would put homemade bread in there and sometimes deer meat.

Me: So it didn't cost too much then.

Mr. Talbacka: (referring to the last question) And mustard.

Me: Was it homemade?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya.

Me: Must have been good?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya.

Me: Where was the cafeteria? Was it by any room?

Mr. Talbacka: At school?

Me: Yes.

Mr. Talbacka: It was a big room right across from the manual training room. I don't know what's in there now but....

Me: After you got done eating what did you do, did you go outside and play for a while?

Mr. Talbacka: We'd go outside and play

Me: Did you play football?

Mr. Talbacka: No, more or less teasing some of them high schoolers
and then they'd chase us.

Me: They went in the same school as you did didn't they?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya.

Me: (pausing) What did they do if they caught you?

Mr. Talbacka: Give you a pounding. (ha, ha, ha)

Me: Did you tease them anymore after that?

Mr. Talbacka: Yes, that didn't make no difference. (ha, ha)

Me: When you were in the tenth grade did people make fun
of you?

Mr. Talbacka: Yes.

Me: Did you ever catch any?

Mr. Talbacka: (laughing) No.

Me: During the course of the year, like when Christmas
came about did you have any plays?

Mr. Talbacka: Well we had a Christmas play, ... before school left out,

Me: Could you describe what they were like? If they were big or whatever?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, I can't remember you know it's, but they use to put on, Mrs. Gillson, use to put on the plays. She put on some darn good plays on. She was a music teacher. She put some real good plays on.

Me: You didn't participate in any did you?

Mr. Talbacka: Yes,

Me: What was the one like that you were in do you remember?

Mr. Talbacka: No.

Me: Do you remember any humorous stories about them?

Maybe someone goofed up and everyone started laughing.

Mr. Talbacka: No, these were more Christmas season you know.

Me: Was there singing in them?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya, there was singing, and reciting poems.

Me: If you were, like, goofing off during that what did the teachers make you do?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, they didn't think too much of it. (ha, ha)

Me: Were there any rules to follow at the school, any real strict rules?

Mr. Talbacka: No.

Me: Did you chew gum in class?

Mr. Talbacka: No way.

Me: What would happen if you got caught?

Mr. Talbacka: You'd sit in the corner.

Me: Did you have to wear a "Dunce" cap?

Mr. Talbacka: I never, but I'd seen kids with them. (ha)

Me: You had 12 grades right?

Mr. Talbacka: Yes.

Me: You didn't go all the way through school?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya right through kindergarten to 12th grade

Me: You only went to tenth grade right?

Me: Why did you only go up to tenth, did you have to work in the mine?

Mr. Talbacka: I went to work in the woods.

Me: What was that like?

Mr. Talbacka: Hard Work

Me: Did anything you learned in school help you?

Mr. Talbacka: No.

Me: Must not have been too good teaching back then. (ha)

What ever you learned didn't matter much. (laugh, laugh)

Me: Do you still see your friends from when you went to school?

Mr. Talbacka: Oh yes!

Me: Did you and your friends have a teacher you didn't like too much?

Mr. Talbacka: No, there wasn't that I can recall.

Me: Who was probably your favorite teacher through your years going to the school?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, I use to like Mr. Anaala, and Mr. Baths(?) and Patrick Gleason, the manual training teacher.

Me: Did they affect your life at all?

Mr. Talbacka: No

Me: At the end of the year did any of those teachers take you out on a picnic or anything?
(the class)

Mr. Talbacka: No

Me: Did they bring anything to the school for the class?

Mr. Talbacka: No.

Me: Not even for Halloween?

Mr. Talbacka: No, no. Valentine's Day sometimes.

Me: What was Valentine's Day like?

Mr. Talbacka: It was just a small celebration.

Me: Did you and your friends give any Valentine cards out?

Mr. Talbacka: No, not many, didn't have the money.

Me: Well during the school years did anything happen any year, like maybe there was a fire or something?

Mr. Talbacka: No, the only fire I can really remember was when the National Mine School burnt.

Me: What was it like?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, it was a big roaring fire, I was in kindergarten when that happened.

Me: Were you in the school when it happened?

Mr. Talbacka: No, it happened in the evening.

Me: Did you go watch them fight the fire?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya, me and my dad went to watch.

Me: How long did the fire go for?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, most of the night, if I remember right, the day before they had filled up the coal bin, the coal bin burnt for a couple of weeks anyway.

Me: How long was it before you went back to school?

Mr. Talbacka: It wasn't long, we got different churches
 there in Nat'l Mine, I had to go to the
 Betal Lutheran Church, on the hill behind
 Annala's Store.

Me: How long did it take you to walk there?

Mr. Talbacka: Oh, about half an hour,

Me: A long time

Mr. Talbacka: And no roads plowed (tough lude)

Me: Trudging through snow up to your waist high,

Mr. Talbacka: My father bought me a sheepskin and a pair
 of skis in the fall and that's it.

Me: Where did you live, did you live in Nat'l Mine then?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya, past the school this way.

Me: And you lived on a farm?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya.

Me: Since your out of school now what do you think
 the biggest change in the school is?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, there is more sports, different types,
 when I went to school it was just a basketball
 team.

Me: Now days the have all kinds of stuff.

Mr. Talbacker: Ya,

Me: What are probably your fondest memories of Nat'l Mine?

Mr. Talbacker: Well, it was all nice people, everybody willing to help each other.

Me: Getting back to when Nat'l Mine burnt down, what did the teachers do about it, did they want the school to go back up where it was,

Mr. Talbacker: I imagine, well, like all the teachers they use to board in different houses in Nat'l Mine there were lots of out-of-town teachers, they had no way of traveling anyway. The use to stay in different houses.

Me: So you mean they use to stay in other peoples houses?

Mr. Talbacker: Ya,

Me: So they had to walk to school too?

Mr. Talbacker: Yes, but they were closer to the school, the teachers who stayed at Harvey's in Nat'l Mine they had to walk to school.

Me: If they had a family did the family stay with them too?

Mr. Talbacka: No, just the teachers.

Me: What would happen if a teacher had gotten sick, did you have a substitute?

Mr. Talbacka: I imagine there would have been somebody coming in, or some teacher take a double burden.

Me: Did you ever get sick while you were going to school?

Mr. Talbacka: I had pneumonia when I was 11 years old.

Me: Did you miss lots of school then?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, I got it during Christmas Vacation.

Me: Bad time to get it, Did you have lots of homework when you got back?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, I wasn't out too long. I got it riding with the old teamster. It was a horse and sleigh, I was cold and stubborn, darn if I'd get pneumonia. Ended out on the Grace Hospital in Ishpeming. My Father hauled me down with the Model T Ford Torin.

Me: How come he didn't drive you to school, or did he have to get up early and go, is that why he didn't bring you to school?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, we never really thought about that.

Me: So back then you had to travel through rain, and snow and every thing, must have been kind of wet when you got to school some days.

Mr. Talbacka: Oh yea, I remember in the lower grades some kids bare feet coming to school, no shoes, ya I seen that lots of times. But I was lucky my father could at least buy me shoes.

Me: If you had a message for the kids at Nat'l Mirror today what would it be?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, probably - How's everything? (ha, ha,)

Me: Would you tell them they should stay in school?

Mr. Talbacka: Ya,

Me: We got it lucky now days, we got a bus.

Mr. Talbacka: Yea,

Mei: You drove a bus, right?

Mr. Talbacka: Yes.

Mei: What was that like?

Mr. Talbacka: I liked that job. I was making two trips in the morning and two in the afternoon, hauling 117 students between the two loads. I had to come way out to the boundary road out here, below the store. And I had 1 passenger, Rom Lawrence.

Mei: Were the kids on the bus rowdy?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, they were well-behaved kids, ya they were real well behaved. Well the ruling was if they didn't behave they walked.

Mei: Did you have to make any kids walk?

Mr. Talbacka: No, they were all good kids I had.

Mei: What were the buses like that you drove?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, like the bus I drove was a 1939 Ford, it was a good bus at that time. Once in a while I would have to go on a little basketball trip with the team and some students and fill up the bus.

Me: Well, where was the farthest you went with that?

Mr. Talbacka: (pausing) Oh, I went to Marquette.

Me: Did the bus have any trouble when it was raining, did it get stuck at all?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, almost sometimes, and then kids would want to get stuck in the morning, I mean in the evening, but in the morning they wanted to get stuck. (?) Yea, get some tough going and they'd be bouncing in back of the bus (ha, ha, ha). In the evening they were quiet.

Me: Well, did you just drive the bus then did you work in the school? ^{or}

Mr. Talbacka: I just drove the bus. Ya, I liked that job.

Me: How long did you drive the bus?

Mr. Talbacka: '41 and '42.

Me: What did you do after driving the bus?

Mr. Talbacka: I went to the Greenwood Mine.

Me: Did anything you learn in school help there?

Mr. Talbacka: No.

Me: Math didn't help at all?

Mr. Talbacka: No.

Me: Where there any interesting things that happened on the bus?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, a couple of times, when we'd let the basketball coach off, the kids would grab their cigarettes and start smoking.

Me: Did you get on any of them for doing that?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, it didn't do no good. (he, he) Leave the coach off in Ishpeming, boy the bus was so full of smoke.

Me: Did you have any heat in the bus?

Mr. Talbacka: Yes, there was a heater.

Me: Was Nat'l Mine the only school then?

Mr. Talbacka: No, there was one at the, that we use to call the Prairie School, where Rintimati's live now, and then there's one on top of Hunganin's Hill there on this side the Wayside we use to call the Red School House, and then there's one up on Cliffs drive up by Furnace Lake, one room school.

Me: Did you have a name for that one?

Mr. Talbacka: I can't remember what it was called.

Me: Well, how big was Nat'l Mine when you went to school, was it a real big school?

Mr. Talbacka: Yes, it was a fair sized building.

Me: Were there 2 floors or just 1?

Mr. Talbacka: Two.

Me: How many kids were in a class?

Mr. Talbacka: Well, I imagine somewhere around 10 and 20. Less maybe some, but.

Me: Well, did they come from Ishpeming?

Mr. Talbacka: No. From Nat'l Mine and surrounding area.

Me: Well, I think that'll be it. Thanks again.