

Renee Valente's  
Interview with  
Mother Constance  
Valente ①

M: This is Renee Valente interviewing Connee Valente at her home out on 581 on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1993 for our Red Dust interview.

me: mom, where were you born?

mom: Well, I was born at the Ishpeming Hospital on May 17, 1946 at 10:45 p.m. and it was a Friday.

me: Oh, what were your parents' names?

mom: my father was Samuel Hill, he was born in National Mine. My mother was Emily Wood and she was born in North Lake location. He worked as a maintenance repair mechanic, um, for CCI and he worked at the Cliff's Shaft in Ishpeming and then he transferred to the Empire mine and retired from there, but he had also worked in his earlier mining years at the Tilden when it was still an underground mine. And my mother was a house wife and graduated from National Mine School.

me: Oh..... what were the names of your sisters?

mom: um, my oldest sister was Carol Judith and my middle sister was Donna Bernice and they both graduated from National Mine School also.

me: Obviously, you were married. (giggle)

mom: Yes, I married G. Stuart Valente who was born in Gwinn and moved to Negaunee and went to school in Negaunee and graduated from Negaunee High School. We were married ~~in~~ November of 1966.

me: Where did you go to school?

mom: Well, I started school in kindergarten in National Mine and I graduated from National Mine, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1964 and when I started kindergarten, kindergarten wasn't required by everybody, and when I first started kindergarten, I rode to school on the bus, but I was fortunate, because we moved to Green Creek and I was able to get a ride home from my uncle who was retired. He'd come and pick me up every day from kindergarten. Otherwise I wouldn't have been able to attend the kindergarten because they didn't have a bus route to take them home.



mom: I also then went on to school after National Mine and I went to Northern Michigan University and I completed my Bachelor's degree, Bachelor of Science, in 3 and one-half years. I graduated January 26, 1968, and then I started my masters and I got my masters from Northern August 21st, 1970 and that was a master of Arts and Education. (2)

me: Do you have any special memories of growing up in this area?

mom: Well, National Mine area was a warm, close community. Whenever anyone got married they always had wedding receptions at the town hall and everybody from the community attended. The kids were always welcome. They took part. They would go in and have lunch and often play games outside around the town hall. There would also be dancing and just ~~every~~<sup>about</sup> everybody from the community would attend those.

me: Sounds kind of fun!

mom: Lots of fun, right. They also had a lot of programs at the school. I enjoyed singing and I was in a lot of programs that Dorothy Gleason put on, she put Christmas operettas on, and also spring programs, and uh, many parts of the school were included in the programs because in the spring the Home Ec classes would also have a modeling show of outfits that the girls had made in Home Ec. and one year, the girls had to make themselves an outfit and also make an outfit for a younger child, a cousin, or a niece a neighbor and I made one for my niece Dee and we modeled them together in the spring. We had matching outfits.

me: That sounds kind of fun. It sounds like the stuff we do with Mrs. Betts, with all the programs.

mom: Uh-huh!

mom: We also had lots of programs at church, and I attended the Methodist Church that was in National Mine for a while and then when the Methodist church in National Mine closed down, we went on to the Salisbury church which was the closest Methodist church to National Mine and after that I transferred membership into the Wesley United Methodist Church in Ishpeming. We also had programs at the church. I remember a lot of class parties at school. Every year for different holidays each class would be in charge of putting on the party and have the decorations and we'd have get togethers, lunches and dances. They were just fun activities for



Mom: class parties at school. We also had youth center activities.

Most of the National Mine students went to the Ishpeming and the Negaunee Youth Centers. The Ishpeming Youth center was at the High School Gym and they'd have dances on Friday nights. And Negaunee would have them on Friday and Saturday nights and they had a building on Iron Street. Another big thing in the the community was going to the Ski tournament that was held in February or March and one year, I remember, It was canceled due to bad weather on a Sunday and they decided to have it on the following Monday and school was let out for the afternoon for anybody who wanted to attend and had purchased a button or whatever and had parent's permission we were excused from school in the afternoon and were able to attend that ski tournament on that afternoon which was something very unusual.

me: I can see that! (laughs)

Mom: (Laughs) I remember a lot of fun on Band and Basketball trips. We'd go to Band Festivals in Menominee or Escanaba, and it was just a fun day. Lot of the students would save money, save your allowance or money earned or whatever, and it was always a big outing to look forward to because you'd go down and play and be evaluated by the judges and the kids would all get to go out in the community and go and do some shopping and go out and have lunch and just different kinds of things that you didn't get to do everyday. So everyone looked forward to going to the Band Festivals, and then also on the Basketball trips, it was fun to go on a bus trip, you'd sing songs and just have silly times on the bus, (Laugh), and just have good times with your friends, go and enjoy the basketball game, then get home late, and be tired the next day in school. But it was lots of fun.

me: Yeah! (sighs)

Mom: I was also a baton twirler for National Mine School. In junior high and also High School, I twirled with Judy ~~Johnson~~<sup>Kujansuu</sup> and ~~Denise~~<sup>Eleanor</sup> Hytinen who were fellow classmates, and then I went onto be the majorette for the Ishpeming City Band and also for Northern Michigan University for all the years that I was there, and that was lots of fun, too.

me: Yeah. Is there anything about Ishpeming or Negaunee that has changed quite a bit since you were young?



Mom: Well, a lot of the buildings and that, there are some that are still there, but no longer operating the way they did when I was a kid. Many women in the community worked at the Gossard including my Aunt Hazel, my mom's sister, and the Gossard no longer operates as the Gossard, but it's now a mall. And uh, my dad worked at Cliff's shaft, and that's still there, but it's been closed for a good number of years and now they're looking maybe have it as a local point of interest for people visiting, tourists, whatever. The Mather Inn also was a special place that many people used for parties, wedding dinners, or rehearsal dinners for weddings. My sister had her rehearsal dinner there when she got married and I remember going there, I think it was the first time I ever got inside of the building there, and it was probably like, maybe ten or eleven years old. It was the first time I'd ever been inside and I remember that, being very impressed, because it was just a unique building.

me: which sister was that?

Mom: That was my sister, Donna.

me: oh.

Mom: And I remember old Ish always being there, except for a couple of times when it was taken down for repairs or restoration, painting, whatever. Ishpeming and Negaunee always had special activities on the Fourth of July with parades. I remember the old road to Negaunee. A lot of times we'd go to Negaunee and you'd go past Suicide Hill and then take a turn to the left and, um, it was supposedly a shortcut to Negaunee but that's closed now, due to caving grounds from the mining areas, and also many areas in Negaunee are blocked off. I remember Violetta's Music shop in Negaunee being up at the end of Iron Street and that's no longer there. I remember I got my clarinet for beginning band from Violetta's Music store. I often went there for repairs or buying extra music, whatever.

me: Well, what kind of things did you and your friends do for entertainment?

Mom: Well, basically, we went to dances at the youth center. Basically in the summer, Champion Beach was a Sunday afternoon activity after church. Families would go up.



Mom: for picnics, um, the moms would make pasties, and wrap them up, take them for Sunday dinner at the beach and the kids would get to go swimming and spend the day at the beach in the sand and water. Sometimes we'd go up in the summer for a week of camping, camping out in tents which was really roughing it!

me: (Snickers)

Mom: We went to movies and dances at the youth centers basketball games, we used to go out to Cedar Beach to swim. We rode bikes a lot. I even rode my bike for driver's training classes when they were held at National Mine School Cheryl Salmer and I used to ride our bikes up to driver ed. class. Judy Braun and I used to ride our bikes into town, sometimes just to go to town, do a little shopping, have a picnic lunch and come home. Carolyn Alderton and I had a funny experience once when we went to Cedar Beach. We got a ride out with some friends but on the way home we got a ride back as far as her house and to get me home from there, because my dad wasn't home at the time, he was gone somewhere with his brother or something, and my mom didn't have any way of coming to get me, so Carolyn gave me a ride home on her brother's motor scooter.

me: (Laughs)

Mom: And at the time, we didn't know the bike, the motor cycles brakes didn't work very well, and also it wanted to sputter and die all the time so we had a hard time keeping it going and once she got me home I had to kind of get off before she could really come to a full stop because she was afraid to stop it that it might not start again! (Laughs)

me: (Laughs)

Mom: So that was kind of a funny experience!

me: well how old were you when you got your first job?

Mom: I think I was a senior in high school, probably about seventeen, <sup>maybe</sup> almost eighteen. It was just before I graduated and I started working there part time and I worked there part time in the summer, um, I worked as a sales clerk. I operated the



Mom: cash register. I worked in almost all the departments at Penney's in Ishpeming, upstairs in the ladies department, on the balcony in the children's department and downstairs where they had the sheets and bedding and in the mens department and in the shoe department and also downstairs in the basement level where they sold sewing supplies, material, um, needles and thread, zippers and what-have-you for people interested in sewing, and that was kind of fun. It was interesting work and I learned a lot. I worked there only about maybe a year and a half and then I got a job that was a little bit more steady as far as I knew when I was working on a regular basis even though it was still part time and that was at smitty's restaurant and I was attending Northern so I couldn't always go on call like at Penneys a lot of times they like to call you on short notice to come in, and that was kind of hard, so then I got the job at Smitty's and I waited on tables and worked at the lunch counter. Sometimes I ran errands and made deliveries because Smitty also made doughnuts at his restaurant that he would sell like down to the dime store or wherever so sometimes I got to go deliver those. It gave you a little break from being on your feet all day.

sorry about the mess here :)

me: Where do you think you were employed the longest?

Mom: I probably worked the longest at Republic Michigamme Schools. I've been there for twenty-five years. Um, I'm not retired yet, I'm still working after 25 and a half years of teaching and four years being clerk, waitress and also worked as a teacher aide at the National Mine school one summer.

me: What made you decide to become a teacher?

Mom: Well, I like children, I had many babysitting jobs, I used to babysit for Alice Johnson and her husband Bucky. They had three children that lived close by and I used to babysit for them. And I also babysat for some of the other neighbors and



Mom: also my sister had a little girl, my niece Dee, and I helped out with her and babysat with her often. And I had a chance to help out in the kindergarten at National mine when Dorothy Gleason was there and she was out sick and they needed somebody to help out in the kindergarten and I worked as a teacher's aide for a week or so and then also I worked in the summer program as a teacher's aide with Mrs. Magnuson and Mr. Ruesing one summer.

me: Um, what were some of the main duties of your job, teaching?

Mom: Well, most of my teaching years have been in first grade, basically the three R's; Reading, Writing, and arithmetic, though spelling, phonics, science, social studies, health, manners, and behavior are all important and get many hours a day I've also helped with student teachers, I've had quite a few. I think that's important for teachers to help train new teacher. The special training I've had for teaching, I had four years of classes at Northern and then I had to put in many hours of classroom observation, I had to do student teaching, and I also had to get so many hours beyond my bachelors, I think 18 it was, but I went on and got 30 and earned my masters degree, and even after that we are encouraged to attend workshops and take some classes and that type of thing to help stay current with teaching and teaching practices

me: Did you have to have any special equipment or clothing for teaching?

Mom: Not really. Most teachers dress, basically pretty



Mom: professionally. When I first started teaching, ladies didn't wear pants suits to school, but there was one brave substitute teacher who started to wear pants suits, I think that it was probably my third year of teaching, and after she started it, many of the other women teachers <sup>also</sup> started wearing pants suits. But many ladies nowadays still wear dresses and skirts and sweaters and suits to school as well dress slacks. As far as special equipment, there really isn't any that's required. We use phonographs, tape players, and that type of equipment, but those are basically provided by the school. A teacher should have lots of patience, endurance, be a bit creative, and of course have a sense of humor.

me: Did you have to follow any special rules or anything?

Mom: Well, basically each school has certain rules that are characteristic of their building. Most places teachers work under a teacher contract that spells out specific rules and regulations that they'd have to live by. Nothing real major, just general good conduct good manners, good behavior.

me: What would you say would be the most rewarding part of your ~~career~~?

Mom: I think seeing the progress the first graders make from the beginning of the year to the end, and how they grow, and the delight that comes when they suddenly realize that I can read all by myself!

me: Well, did you find anything really challenging in your job?

Mom: Ah, well starting off with non readers and helping them become successful, confident, readers by the end of the year. the hardest part about being



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Mom: being a first grade teacher I think is the end of the year evaluation of students in regards to possible retentions and recommendations that have to be made.

Me: Did any of the duties of your job change over the years?

Mom: Well basically when I first started teaching we ate with the children, we played with the children, we didn't have too much time for ourselves. Now preparation time is made for elementary teachers, um, also we have an uninterrupted lunch period, we don't eat with the children now as we did in the past, so in some ways, that is helpful, um, teachers do need a lot of preparation time to prepare for classes, um, to have conferences at times, to correct papers and do all the needed things a teacher is required to do during the day. Even then I end up taking home a lot of <sup>extra</sup> work in the evening and it's a rare evening that I don't have paper work!

me: Not to mention schoolwork I need help with!

Mom: (Laughs) Right!

me: Um, uh this is really silly to ask, but did anybody else work at Republic Michigamme

Mom: Well that's not a silly question! Your father worked there for twenty-two and ~~a~~ half years and he was the band director, um, Stuart Valente and then he also became the elementary/vocal director for about two and a half years so he was there for a total of 22 and a half years and then retired, and he loves being Mr. Mom at home



me: what were your co-workers like?

Mom: Well, when I first went to Republic there <sup>were</sup> some very experienced teachers in the elementary, and they were very helpful to me when I first started teaching and we became very close friends. They were always there, ready to help out with questions or problems, ready to give advice, and always ready to help each other out and I've tried to do that now as some of those people have retired and replaced by new teachers. I'm one of the oldsters on the block now and I get to give help when needed to others but even the young teachers that are coming in are still fun to work with and help each other out too.

me: What were some of your biggest responsibilities?

Mom: Well, educating first graders and being responsible for their wellbeing and safety in the school situation from the time they get there in the morning until they go home at night. um, Basically watching out so they don't get hurt and to see that they are motivated and encouraged to do the best they can possibly do, to be the best that they can be.

me: Did you receive any special rewards? For being a teacher?

Mom: Well on April 29th, 1992 I was selected from our school for excellence in teaching, excellence in education, outstanding teacher from Republic. That was a program that CCI sponsors. We had a tour of either the Tilden Mine or the



Mom: Empire Mine, I was able to go through the, um, Tilden Mine and I was really impressed. It was very educational, we had breakfast first, and then the tour and then we went to the Northwoods for lunch and there we received a plaque and also had our picture taken as we received the plaque, and it was a fun day, educational, just as well as interesting.

Me: Have you had any hobbies or leisure activities you like to do?

Mom: Well I like to read. That's a good thing to do. I guess, since I enjoy teaching reading. I also like to sew and I have been learning to crochet. I'm being taught by my aunt who lives in National Maine, Helen Solka and we have learned to make many different things such as crocheted towels, dishcloths, hot pads, uh, quilts, afghans, pillows, snowflakes, slippers, many different things, I like to walk and I enjoy listening to music.

Me: Have you been involved in clubs or any organizations?

Mom: Well when Todd was in elementary school I was secretary of the parent/teacher and we did some fund-raisers and bake and craft sales and we had some of the meetings at different peoples homes, and I had a meeting at our house at one time and then the PT Club kind of folded for a while and I had the book for a while and I finally turned it over to Mary Johnson and I've also been active at the Wesley United Methodist church.



Mom : on the education commission, and have been the chairperson for quite a few years there and I've been interested in helping out in the Sunday School and I was also a substitute Sunday school teacher, and I did teach fourth grade in the Sunday School for a couple of years when my second child was born.

me : overall, what would be your fondest memories of your career?

Mom : Well, the good fellowship with the teaching staff sharing problems and successes with the neighboring teachers, everyone ready to help each other out, give advice or just lend an ear when needed and, of course, the students and seeing their successes and how they grow and develop and, uh, this year and last year I've been fortunate to teach with one of my former students Nola Marshall who I had as a first grade student and now she's teaching math and chemistry in our high school at Republic.

me : were you a member of any kind of union?

Mom : Yes. At our school all the teachers belong to the Republic/Michigan Education Association which is affiliated with the MEA and the NEA, and I've also served as secretary of our local association and am now president elect and will be president in the future.

me : If you could do it all over again would you choose the same career?

Mom : Yes, I think it's a great schedule for a working mother. It's very fulfilling to see progress in the children as they grow and develop and you feel like you're helping to educate future citizens. I think it's



Mom: great career for anyone, especially for a wife and mother because of the schedule that's closely related to your child's schedule.

me: Do you have anything else you would like to add like anything else about school when you were going to school, when you were young growing up in National Mine.

Mom: Well, I was very fortunate to be able to attend National Mine I think it's always been a good school. It continues to be a good school and I was very happy that my children were able to attend National Mine. Todd went from kindergarten to eighth grade at National Mine, and now you've been able to through kindergarten to eighth grade, with a few little incidents in eighth grade that made an "exciting" year for all.

me: I'm sure.

~~Mom~~: Mom didn't you say something about freshman initiation?

Mom: Oh yes, In those days, initiation day was a big highlight of the freshman year. The, uh, I think it was the juniors that set up all the guidelines for the freshmen and I know the year I was a freshman the girls had to wear a bone in their hair, they had to put all kinds of colored band-aids all over their face, they had to wear men's long underwear, one hipboot, a necktie, and they had to carry a lunch pail full of candy and when we met an upperclassmen or talked to them for the day,



Mom ; we had to hand out candy to them, 14  
and do whatever they wanted us to do and then  
boys had to dress up in ladies things. I think  
the boys had like uh, ladies pajamas on, and  
jewelry like earrings and necklaces and then they  
had to wear makeup, lipstick and eyeshadow and  
eyebrow pencil and had to carry a shawl and a  
purse to hand out the candy from and we had to  
dress like that for the whole day in school and then  
that night we had a school party and the freshmen  
of course were the entertainment. We had to do  
different things that were set up for us by the  
juniors and I think that night I had to propose to  
Donald Niemi ; I had to get down on my knee  
and ask him to marry me and other people had  
to uh, one of the girls had to walk through  
spaghetti noodles blindfolded, somebody else  
I think it was Billy Mason, had to do some  
kind of a dance, and he had ~~had~~ hula skirts  
Bobby Thibeault had to have a baby's bonnet on  
and drink from a baby bottle, some had to  
do some dances, some had to ~~do~~ read some  
silly things, others had to sing. I think Gail  
Wickman had to feed David Wood some applesauce  
or some kind of funny mixture. Eleanor had to  
get up and read a funny story or something  
and, Karen Christian had to put <sup>face</sup> powder on  
one of the boys. There were many different  
things they had the freshmen do for entertain-  
ment and then after that we had eats and  
dancing and just a good time. Once that  
party was over we were officially freshmen  
and didn't have to look forward to initiation again  
until we were in charge of it for the  
freshmen. And of course every junior



(15)

Mom: look out their revenge on the freshman class that they got to initiate into high school. But it was all in good fun and nothing was mean or \_\_\_\_\_ it was just in fun, and now when you look back on it, it was, it was a lot of fun, and it made for some fun memories

me: Did you mention something about being in a lot of pageants?

Mom: Well when I went on to Northern and I was at Northern as the baton twirler, Northern's Golden girl, um, I was called from the exchange club and asked if I would represent them in the Miss Harvest Festival pageant in the fall of 1965. I was a sophomore, and I said yes and I did enter the harvest festival pageant and it was run just like a Miss America pageant type contest and we had to do a talent which I used my baton twirling and I think I twirled to trumpeters holiday or something, ... Buglers Holiday. I guess it was and we also had swimsuit competition, and we also had formal competition, and interviews with the judges, and we had to answer questions on stage and I did come out of that pageant as Miss Harvest Festival 1965 and also came with it the title of Miss Marquette ~~county~~ county. I went on to be in some other contests, I was in the Potato contest and I became Miss Potato Queen for Marquette county and I went on to the state fair contest and I was 1st runner up in the W.P. State Fair and then I went



(11a)

Mom: and then went on to the Miss Michigan contest, I knew about 2 weeks before I went that I could go, they hadn't sent anyone for quite some time and they were finding out for the following year to send somebody and they decided if I was willing they would send me and so I went and I was number 42 and there were about 56 girls in the pageant that year and it was a really good experience it was a lot of fun, it made you think about presenting yourself in public. I learned a lot

I didn't win that Miss Michigan but I did go on to the Miss U.P. Aerospace contest and I won that and was sent downstate to Detroit to the Miss Michigan Aerospace contest and I did win that and I was crowned by Governor Romney and spent some time in Detroit and then I had to go back to the Aerospace show that was held that year and had to reign over that airshow and I was escorted to the dinner they had that evening by one of the ~~new~~ members of the Blue Angel Flight team and then when I came home I was involved with homecoming at Northern and I was on the Homecoming court and that was considered an honor at the time because being a commuter at Northern, most of the commuters didn't get involved in Homecoming activities. And I was a lot of fun, I learned a lot I got to meet a lot of people and had a lot of really good experiences.



Mom : and I think it helped me grow as a person, and it gives you a lot of good memories to look back on and enjoy with your children when they are growing up.

Me : Is there anything else you'd like to say ?

Mom : Well I think I was fortunate to have attended the National Mine School from grades K through 12. I think it was a good school ~~back~~ when I went there and it continues to be a good school. I'm happy my children went there. ~~to~~ I went from Kindergarten to eighth grade there and Sean went from Kindergarten through second grade and also Renee has been able to go to Kindergarten to eighth grade. She's had an exciting year in eighth grade with some definite memorable experiences for her and her teachers. I'm sure they won't forget her and she won't ~~forget them~~ National Mine nor will I.