

Doug Bleau's Interview

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with
George Watters

Me: My name is Doug Bleau. I am interviewing Mr. George Watters of Stoneville Street in Ishpeming. Today's date is ~~Sept~~ December 16, 1990.

Me: When and where were you born?

Mr. W: (clears throat) I was born, ahh, September 14, 1924, in Ely township, Green Creek location.

Me: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. W: I have 5 brothers and 5 sisters. Ahh, 2 of them are deceased, and the rest are still living.

Me: Do you know their names?

Mr. W: Names? The oldest boy James, Russel, Clinton, Ethel, ~~Robert~~, Olive, Robert, my self George, Katherine, Raymond, Betty, and Grace. (Wife hollers Ray), (says back)- I said Raymond.

Me: Where did you go to school.

Mr. W: Where did I go to school? When I was, I think, between 4 and 5, I went to the Ely Township school, which was just up from 581 Cash Market, on the same side of the road, and ahh, that was 3 miles from where we lived, ~~and~~ we lived on road PD, of course it wasn't at that time. We used to walk back and forth 3 miles to school each day. I was a one-room, cold school, with one teacher, and ahh, it had a woodstove, which would go out in the night and she would have to start it up in the morning and warm it up. I think a couple hours we ~~would have~~ used to work with gloves on and for our drinking water, we had a cow cord bucket with a dipper, and everybody drank out of that same dipper, and the same bucket. We, ahh, there was only one outhouse for everybody.

Me: Yeah? Is that...

Mr. W: And, we went, from there we went first, second, third grade, and then the Ely Township School Board decided to send us to the National Mine School. Ahh, because I guess it was getting so that, ahh, the state was after them, because of the conditions at the school.

(Mr W cont...)

And, ahh, then we went to the National Mine High School. We walked into that school, it was so much different that it was like going to a big city. And, ahh, From then on I graduated at National Mine High School in 1942.

Me: Mhmm. Ahh, how many kids were in the smaller class?

Mr W: The classes ranged from, I would say, 7 or 8 to 12 to 15; That graduated. Course, during the class, during the, ahh, umm, eighth or ninth through twelfth, there were always some dropouts. So we ended up with, ahh, between, I think there was 7 that graduated in my class, and that was a small class. Later on there was 10 or 12 or 15 in some of the classes.

Me: Did you walk or drive to school? Drive the bus.

Mr W: Ahh, well, when we were out on 581 ~~I~~^{we} used to walk three miles to school and back every day. And then, of course, when we moved to the National Mine High School it was about six miles, so, ahh, the, ahh, Ely Township Board had a bus, ahh, had bought a bus and had Anderson drive the so that we had a bus ride back and forth to the National Mine School. And we used to sit in the seat and behave, and I don't think there was one time that Anderson had to talk to any of us. Cause, if he did, I'm sure it'd get back to our parents. (Grabbing the paper) Describe the school? ~~It was a good school~~ The school was, it was a good school, and there were discipline in the school, and the people that, ahh, go to the National Mine school today, it was built, I think in 1928, and that's a long time ago, and that school is still in perfect condition, and this is due to the discipline

(Mr W cont...)

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that was at the school for all these years, with the teachers we had. Mr Annala, Mr Bath, and, ahh all the other teachers. There was no running in the hallways, we didn't throw any papers or pencils on the floor. And, ahh, everything was really kept up in good shape.

Me: What were the punishments and consequences if you did something wrong?

Mr W: Well, we had, ahh, Mr Annala would take us up to the office ^{of course} and speak to us but, ahh, there wasn't too much hitting, except we had one teacher, she only had one arm, and, ahh, and she could really use that one arm.

Me: (laughs)

Mr W: she would jerk your head back and hit you with that one arm at the same time. I don't think anybody ever ducked. She was one of the better teachers we had in the school. And the school had a good curriculum, where at that time, ahh, it would compare with some of the larger schools: actually and the school board and all the people there I think felt that it was really a good school. We had typing, and shorthand and the girls had Home Ec, sewing, cooking. And we had a good musical program, which the Red Dust in 1990 had pictures of one of the programs that Mrs. Gleason had put on. And, ahh, there was something going in the community and the community, the people really attended these events. And, ahh, of course where the lunchroom is right now that was the auditorium with the seats in it, I think there was almost 150 seats in there lots of times. It was filled up and ahh - ...

Me: what kind of shows did they show in the auditorium?

Mr. W: Well, it was mostly put on by the (4) different classes or one whole class, maybe a Christmas program, the small, the smaller ~~one~~ one through six, or something, would have a Christmas program and then the high school would also have a Christmas program. And also in the high school we had a good, ah, at that time what we would consider a good athletic program.

Me: Were you involved in sports? Extra-curricular sports?

Mr W: Yes, ah, the main thing we had in those days was basketball. There was some softball also, but, that's just about all we had in that school was basketball and, ah, we were a Class D school, and, ah, we played schools, that ah, most people don't remember, St. Paul's of Negaunee, ah, a Catholic School, we had, ah, Champion. Champion had a high school and they had a basketball team. Michigamee had a high school and they had a basketball team. Palmer had a high school and they had a basketball team. And, ah, let's see; am I missing anybody? And we played all of those schools; Class D.

Me: Were you on the team?

Mr W: I played, ah, four years, basketball. We had a couple good years where we won district championships. We had another good school that was really a powerhouse and that was Palmer, at that time. And I think they beat us ~~at~~ in the tournament

Me: Did you ride a bus over there? Over to the other schools?

Mr W: Yes, we had a bus that took us to the various events.

Me: Did you have pep rally's or anything?

Mr W: Oh yes, it was almost like today. ⑤

except I, I, I don't think, you know, they had ah, times were hard and maybe ah they didn't have many of the things they have today, but we still managed to have pep talks and time off from school. We had good times in school.

Me: Did anybody on your team, on your basketball team, make it to college, or even to the pros? That you know of?

Mr W: Nobody went to the pros that I know of but we had a lot of good players, but ah, you have to remember, back in those days I don't know if there was any pro basketball like you see it today.

Me: Really?

Mr W: I don't know. I couldn't say for sure that would be it, but I, you know, you take today, the world is small. I don't think when I, the first time I left Marquette County is when I went in the service, after I graduated out of high school. Now people go all over the state, and all over the country and all over the world. It's a different set up all together.

Me: Do you remember any funny stories about certain teachers?

Mr W: I think when we were real small, only about the third grade, we had a man teacher and he went in the john one time and, of course this was an outhouse and I guess everybody knows what an outhouse is. And ah, a couple of us took a big stick and hit the rear of the outhouse with the stick and it made a big wam!

(Mr W cont...) And he come bailing
out the front door with his pants down. (Both laugh) And it wasn't very funny, it wasn't very funny
to him, but we all ran as we laughed, and we caught
heck for it anyway.

Me: What happened? Did you get in trouble?

Mr W: I don't think he did anything. After a while
he probably cooled down. That's what (stopped talking)

Me: What was your favorite subject?

Mr W: What was my favorite subject?

Me: Mhmm, In school.

Mr W: I liked geography, Mr Gleason took geography.
I don't know, I guess being up here and ahh not seeing
any part of the world. Ahh, I always found the geography
books were ahh, real interesting, easy for me to understand, too.

Me: Mhmm, what was your worst subject?

Mr W: I think Algebra was my worst subject. Of course
they didn't push mathematics in them days. It wasn't ahh,
they didn't push that very much. It was kind of a extra-
curricular thing actually.

Me: Really?

Mr W: When we went to school, ^{I think} they taught the three R's
more. Reading, writing, and arithmetic. And ahh, the tables
you had to understand. And I don't know if they teach this on
the same scale anymore. And I know another thing I
noticed, the writing, for even the young students today.

(Mr W cont. ...)

We were taught penmanship, for maybe an hour a day. And ahh, you see some of the writing today that you see some of the students have ~~today~~ I think penmanship should be part of the curricular today.

Me: Do you want to add anything else about when you graduated? Anything about your school life.

Mr W: Well when (pause) School life was, ahh, I enjoyed going to school. Of course, when we lived on the farm here, we'd have to get up at six o'clock in the morning, and I had about four cows I had to milk, we had to feed the cattle and we had three horses which had to be watered and fed. And of course it took an hour or more doing this, these chores, _____ our break. The students ~~today~~ today don't have that kind of work schedule. So ahh, of course, when you go home in the evening there was always wood to haul in. Mother had a Kalamazoo wood stove, which had to be fed all day long so we were going to have our meals on that woodstove. Also the hearth in the living room used wood and this was a big job hauling and cutting wood and getting wood into the house for heat and for cooking on.

Me: What year did you graduate from National Mine?

Mr W: We graduated from National Mine in 1942. I was 17 years old. I turned 18 in the fall. And that was the war years. And the next March of 1943 I went into the service.

Me: Where were you stationed?

Mr W: Interesting enough, well of course (8)

I, during the, first of all you got a letter from the president saying you had to report to Marquette for an exam and we had an exam in Marquette and ~~later~~ we went home and later in a few weeks. And a big troop train left from Marquette and it was in March and there was an awful snowstorm that day. There must have been 6,700 young men 17-18 years old on that troop train. From there we went to Fort Sheridan, Illinois. That was the place where we received all our clothing and such, and then we were to move on to other areas of Fort Sheridan. We were there for maybe a week, and ah, one of the things I've never experienced in my life was a top bunk. And of course I was given a top bunk and I think I hung on to that railing for I don't know how many hours at night before I fell asleep. I was afraid I was going to fall on the concrete floor. Of all these young men there, there was some that were crying and crying and crying and they were homesick and it made everybody feel that way. I guess they survived anyway. Then I was going to go to the Fort Knox, Kentucky, in the armor divisions and I was all set to go and ah I lost my, either I lost my cap or somebody stole it. So they always had alternates to go so the alternate went in my place. I don't know who it was. He went to the armor division in Fort Knox, Kentucky. Most of the

boys I knew at Sherdon that went to [unclear] that school ended up in the Battle of Bulge in Germany and most of them never came back. So I was lucky. I don't know, God was with me or something. I didn't get to go with that group. Then the next day we left for Miami Beach, Florida. We were going to be airplane mechanics, they had a school down there for airplane mechanics. We started the school for about six months and finally the word came down we didn't need airplane mechanics. And this is the way the government works I guess.

Then I ended up in Fort _____ New York. It was an old artillery, real old fort. It must have been from back in Civil War days. It was right on the side of New York and I suppose it was used to guard New York City. And then I ended up in the Motorpool. I was dispatcher in the Motorpool there for a short time. Then I got my orders to go overseas. ~~I got my orders to go~~ I was stationed at Iceland, at an airbase there. The airbase I was at, the first German plane was shot down over that airfield. The job we had there was, the planes coming in _____ from England and France would refuel there and then come back to the states with wounded soldiers from, most of them were stretcher cases. They land either Iceland or Greenland or Newfoundland and then come back into the states. It seems like that's a long way around but it's the shortest route if you look at the map. Iceland was a nice place to

(Mr W cont...)

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put your tour of duty in.

Me: Was it cold up there?

Mr W: The only snow and ice we seen was way up in the mountains. It never snowed in the lowlands or by the ocean, because of the warm jet stream that comes by the island and keeps the temperature up. There was a lot of rain and we slept in _____ huts. I stayed there until the war was over in Germany and Japan. Then I flew back home from there.

Me: When you got back to the states, did you go to college?

Mr W: Then I went to college for one year when I got back.

Me: Where did you go?

Mr W: I went to Northern. But there were so many GI's there that we didn't have any books of anything else and it so difficult to get any material of any kind. I wish I would've waited a few years before I went. A lot of them dropped out after the first or second year because of the fact you couldn't get the material we needed to do our work. Then I got a job, I got a job at ~~_____~~ Daily delivering milk and I stayed there.

Me: For how long?

Mr W: I worked _____ for 32 years, I had a whole sale milk route in Ishpeming. I lived approximatly

(Mr W: cont. ...)

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I lived in Ishpeming and had to drive to Marquette every day and I don't think I missed a day in 32 years that I worked there. It wasn't the highway you see today. It was an old two-lane ~~highway~~ road going to Marquette, I think the ~~only reason I didn't miss any work~~ that curved all over the place. I think the only reason I didn't miss any work was because they didn't close the highway and you drove between the trees, because the trees were a lot closer to the highway than they are today. But I've always been kind of a salesman. Even when I was a boy I sold rabbits. We had rabbits on the farm and around Easter time I had small rabbits and I sell these rabbits. I also was selling seeds to the farmers in the area. America Seed Company in Philadelphia and they, everybody really liked these seeds and I used to sell quite a few packs of seeds every year. You got to remember these were the Depression days in the 30's. Jobs were hard to get. I used to also do some trapping and I used to get some weasels and you skin out the weasel and get about 89 or 90 cents. That was a bit of money those days.

Me: When did you start working at National Mine?

Mr W: I started working at National Mine in probably '85 at the National Mine School they had an opening \approx for a part-time janitor, custodian and that was because of the new addition put on. So they hired more people to keep the place clean. And ah,

(Mr. W cont. . . .)

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The jobs we had to do there were make sure the desk tops were clean, especially the kindergarten ~~area~~ where they used a lot of glue, keep that washed down. Course rugs, you had to vacuum the rugs every night. Dusting, and ohh, the — had to be kept clean.

Me: This is a part time job, right?

Mr W: This was a part time job to just carry me over. Normally till I retire, when I retire.

Me: How did the community feel about National Mine School?

Mr W: The National Mine School. Ahh, I think the community felt it was one of the better small schools in the area. They attended all the events and they gave money to run extra-curricular activities. They also had a good, good courses for a school of that size such as typing and shorthand and Home Economics and sewing and a good musical program and ahh the people really supported the school. My attending events was down there.

Me: How has the building changed over the years?

Mr W: The building has changed. Well, they added four classes and a library. The library when I went to school was on the top floor. I think next to the typing room. I don't know what it's used for now. Then of course the study hall period was for grades 9-12. And the 6-7-8 grade was in where the library is now. The musical room was down by the Home Economics and I think 5th and 6th grade was across from the Home Economics room. Of course, where the lunch room is now we never had a lunch room. We always brought our lunches in a paper bag and we ate where the art room is.

(Mr W cont. ...)

was the lunchroom, There was a table set up in there for us to eat our lunch.

Me: So it's changed a lot then, hey?

Mr W: And ahh, with the addition on there, it makes the school look a lot different, It was a good Class D school at that time. Everybody, I think all the people that went there could go on further to college without any difficulty.

Mr: They've already added two more portables outside. There's two more ~~rooms~~ rooms now.

Mr W: Yeah we got so many people. Where the Ely Township School was out there in those days when I was in 1st, second and third grade. That is part of Ely Township. That would be a different township now if it wasn't in the N.I.C.E. School District and most of the students in National Mine are coming from actually the Ely Township School District at that time, And even yourself Doug, you're place there is Ely Township. IF you lived back there in those days you wouldn't be going to Tilden either, You'd be going to this one-room school in Ely Township. Each Township had ~~the~~ their own school board because transportation was a problem, Not like today. We got people from 581 going to Diorite, today, But in those days it was impossible For us that lived out there to go to Diorite school which was in Ely Township.

Me: Have you stayed in contact with your former students or co-workers?

Mr W: I see most of them every once in a while.

(Mr W cont...)

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Most of them are around the area, I think one of them are deceased, _____ is deceased. He moved to the west coast. Joe Pietro lives right out 581. He was in my class. _____ and Jimmy Mooler, I think, lives in National Mine. Lloyd Cox lives in Republic. The girls, some girls live downstate, and some live in Marquette. Two classes got together a year or so ago and had a reunion.

Me: What were your greatest challenges faced during your job?

Mr W: The job at the school?

Me: Right.

Mr W: I think the greatest job was trying to make sure everything was all right we had a certain length of time to do the job. And sometimes, especially during the holiday seasons like Christmas and Easter, the rooms were really used and we had a lot of extra cleaning. These were about the only challenges we had as a custodian at the school.

Me: What were your fondest memories of National Mine School?

Mr W: Well I think we used to, we were really close knit people that lived in the area there. We used to do a lot of things in the summertime, together. The school kind of was a binding. A binding place where people met. People didn't have much money. They didn't go very far. If something was happening at National Mine School everybody seemed to attend. This was, I used to see the