

me: This is Laura Sleeman conducting an interview with John Pontti. Today's date is December 31, 1996. The focus of our interview is to find out what it was like to be the administrator at the West Ishpeming School and the North Lake School.
Where and when were you born?

Mr P. Ok, I was born in Negaunee Michigan in December, December 3 of 1936. There was a little Twin City Hospital they tell me I don't remember anything about it but there was a little hospital down there called Twin City Hospital where I was supposedly born, but I've been living in the Ishpeming area all the rest of my life.

me: What is your full name?

Mr P. My full name is John Norman Pontti. N-O-R-M-A-N, and my mother named me that I guess because her middle name is Norma left out an n. So apparently that's ~~the~~ must be the female version of Norman.

me: What were your parents' names?

Mr P. My mother's name was June Norma and her ~~name~~ ^{maiden} name was Silas, Silas I guess it was a Sweedish name.

me: How do you spell that?

Mr P. S-I-L-A-S, S-I-L-A-S was her last name, her maiden name and my fathers name was Val. V-A-L and his middle name was Waldeman I guess it was pronounced with a V but it was actually spelt with a W W-A-L-D-E-M-A-N I believe it was spelled, and Pontti. Now Pontti is a Finish name, but it doesn't sound like it. Most people think it's an Italian name, but I think it's been changed a few times.

I think it was originally spelled or pronounced Pontti or something like that anyway.

me: What were your brothers and sisters names and what years were they born in?

MrP: Oh golly! I probably won't remember all of those. I remember their names, but I probably won't remember all of their births. I came from a family of eight children, and there were four boys in our family and four girls. I was the not the oldest lets see my oldest brother was Bob or Robert. Then come my sister Carol then I'm third in line John, then I have a brother younger than me, Micheal, and a younger brother Graig, and my sister Connie worked in there also I think she was right before Mike, Connie, Mike, Graig, and then Lynn, Lynn Louise and Sue that was all of the family. I probably would never remember all of their birthdays. Some are younger and some are older than me, but four and four.

me: Where did you live when you were growing up?

MrP: When I was growing up I lived here in Ishpeming, grew up on North Second street in Ishpeming. Moved from the ten hundred block to the thirteen hundred block and lived growing up there most of my public school years going to school in Ishpeming and then eventually went down to Marquette to go to Northern Michigan University and during that period I had a chance to live a couple of summers in Maine while I was going to school, and also for one summer in Mexico and in Los Angeles, California. So I lived most of my life spent in the Ishpeming area.

me: When did you become the principal at North Lake?

MrP: I believe I would have become principal at North Lake in nineteen-seventy lets see, it must have been about nineteen-seventynine, because I first went to work in the Nice Community Schools District in the year that they were building the West Wood Highschool, and I came to work as a community school director for the District. That was in

1973 that I went to work there. And I worked as a Community School Director for all of the schools in the district. So I went to every one of our schools North Lake was one stop, Ely Elementary, West Ishpeming, Notional Mine, and Champion, and then that was the year that they were building the West Wood High School. And then opened up. So I continued on as a principal for the next six years, or not a principal but as a Community Schools Director, so it was in 1979 that I believe it would be that I became a principal at North Lake and West Ishpeming School.
me: What were some of your duties at North Lake?

Mr. P. Well I _____ fun type kinds of things to do as the principal we were responsible for the programs. All of the instructional programs at North Lake, all of the students we had there were kindergarten through the fifth grade, and we had four classrooms, five classrooms over at West Ishpeming at the same time which were basically first and second grade at West Ishpeming. Also, then lets see did we add a third grade over there. I think we kept our third grades over at North Lake so we only had first and second grades at the West Ishpeming school. So responsible to the students, to the parents, to the teachers. Kind of as a principal you kind of fit in between all of those things. And then the immediate supervisor of us would be the superintendent of the schools and also of the school board of course, but I had to be responsible for the program and for the safety of the students and the teachers, and the operation of the building, that took place as long ~~as~~ ^{we kept} the West Ishpeming and North Lake schools open. West Ishpeming School closed first and then I became principal at North Lake and Ely Elementary at the same time and that went on for a few years until I decided to move back into North Lake only because my assignment was then North Lake School and I had assignments for the rest of the school district meaning I was in charge of the gifted and talented programs

some of the early elementary curriculum, some of the testing through the district for special programs that were coming up for help. So my principal job was at North Lake but I had responsibilities through the district for elementary kind of programming

me: What was an average day like of being the principal at North Lake?

Mr. P. Every day was pretty different. Normally my day would often start at home early in the morning with phone calls getting some substitute teachers. If a teacher got sick or couldn't come in I would usually start getting calls at six-thirty in the morning, and then I would make phone calls to substitute teachers to make sure that we had a full staff to start our day, and then I'd try to be at school by eight o'clock or shortly thereafter and I would spend like a half a day at one school and the other half at one school starting off like one day I'd start off at North Lake school my first day and then the next day I'd start off at the opposite school like when the West Ishpeming School was open I'd open up the West Ishpeming School on a Tuesday morning and then I'd come to North Lake in the afternoon the next day I'd start North Lake School again and then come back to the other school. And I did the same thing at Ely School when I had the both schools North Lake and Ely Elementary. I'd switch off every morning so I'd get a half day at each one of them about and try to keep it pretty equal.

me: What was the average salary of a principal at the time that you were principal?

Mr. P. Well, that's a good question I almost hardly remember that right now what the average salary was because I had been in schools teaching here in Ishpeming first of all and I had been in Ishpeming about fourteen and a half

years before I moved to the Nice Community Schools district and so the salary that was offered me was my teaching salary plus some extra for working as a principal over there and we got a yearly salary at the time so I probably began my salary some where around oh I suppose 32,000 dollars a year at the time I think that's just about what it was when I first started.

me: How did you deal with children that misbehaved?

MrP: Well, everyone was different elementary children may have had some difficulty as far as knowing what our rules were all of the time and remembering them and we would try to explain a rule to ~~them~~ somebody rather than just frighten them off or threghthen them in any scary way. I like to bring elementary children to a place where I could sit down and talk to them sometimes it might be in a hallway, sometimes it might be in the cafeteria or in my office if I was nearby and we'd sit down and talk about what happened, what the problem was what was not working very well and once we got things all worked out I think I would like to try to make a friend of that person so we would not have problems again in the future with the same kind of a problem anyway, and I kind of enjoyed that kind of thing working with the boys and girls in the elementary school to make them feel like whatever they were doing was important at their school and if they wanted to help make some rules or change some rules they had an opportunity to do that.

me: What grades were taught at North Lake School?

Mr P: Kindergarden, and we had alot of classes over there. We had morning and afternoon Kindergarden, and we had two classes of first grade, two of second, two thirds, two fourths, and two fifth grades, and before I left we had three of each of those, except for the kindergarden stayed the same, and but we had three classes of each grade through the fifth grade, and that's pretty much the way it stoyed and every body who left the fifth grade went on to sixth grade, seventh grade, and eight grade either went to Champion or to the National Mine School.

me: Are there any employies that you remember from North Lake, if so who do you remember and what do you remember about them?

Mr P: Oh, I remember lots of employies from the North Lake School yet, and I think everybody was very, very important. Especially teachers, because teachers were of course very, very important to the program, but people who were in our support, our custodians, and maintenance and bus drivers, and our cooks helper, I can think of, each one of them having their own contribution to the program and were very, very helpful. My secretary I can remember, Mrs. Johnson of course. She was a key person at the North Lake School I understand. She was my secretary the whole time that I was there, and a very, very key person in because she knew what was going on all around the school all the time, and kept me in touch by telephone whenever I happened to be.

always kept me informed as to what was happening, and what needed to be done. So of all the people that I think that I worked with the custodians, the ~~be driver~~ bus drivers, the cooks and everybody I think probably Mrs. Johnson was the probably the most important person to me that I remember most of all, because she was such a helpful person, me: What kind of special programs did you have at North Lake?

Mr P: O.k. Special programs that took place at North Lake over the years that I was there was different kinds of programs. We always liked to have programs that would be real helpful for kids to have fun and to learn and sometimes there were special programs in music that would come up. Special programs for entertainment that we'd bring people in. We'd have special programs in our little auditorium gymnasium. I like we had special programs even outside. I think our playground area we liked to think as a special program, because it was a place where the North Lake kids had to spend usually a whole hour, and we would try to make it fun for them, and safe, and something they could remember as they left North Lake School, but I always wanted to have programs that were entertaining. Weather we'd have people who would come in who were entertainers, maybe play the piano, or maybe brought along some of their hobbies, or animals

or whatever they happened to have that would be entertaining and yet educational for kids to be with, and of course all of the programs that we put on our self through the musical programs, art exhibits, special programs that would take place. Programs that we liked to do were programs that were entertaining for kids and also ~~programs that we educational~~ educational, and sometimes programs that we ~~were~~ ^{might be} putting on were programs that individual classes or classrooms were putting on for spring or for Christmas, or for the beginning of the school year, or we'd bring entertainment into the school. It might be a piano player. It might be some musicians. It might be something that we were going to do outside, special programs like maybe some snow sculptures in the middle of winter, maybe something going on in the spring nearly close to Easter, or something like that. We used to go out and hide things in the snow for the kids maybe like pieces of candy or eggs in the snow and something that they would understand was specially for them and it was a program that they could have a part of and help plan, and I think those kinds of programs were really fun. Gifted and Talented programs that I was involved with also had to do with usually the whole school district, but we always wanted to have some participation from every school.

Including certainly North Lake and the West Ishpeming and the Ely schools. So that the kids could get in and try something different other than the day by day everyday kind of program that would take place on a regular basis. So try to always have some special programs that would be fun and entertaining and educational too. Parents were really helpful with programs like this too. We had a really good parent teacher program there. They always came out to help us out with some things.

me: What was the most important rule you tried to enforce at North Lake?

Mr. P: Safety I think. I was always concerned about ^{safety of} kids not getting hurt or lost. In North Lake I remember we used to have boundaries around the play ground area that would say you can't go further than this because there might be somebody back there hunting or trapping or doing things like that so we tried to keep kids on our playground where we could see them, and they could still have some fun. But safety was really important. Education you expect to be part of the school program, because that's what it's all about, but when your having entertainment and fun outside you want to make sure that kids are having a safe time also. And the same thing in the gymnasium. Our little gymnasium auditorium at ^{North Lake} their school was one that was pretty crowded at times and I always was afraid that someone could get hurt in there if they run into a wall, or into a window, or through a door and something like that. So safety was something that we were real concerned about. The other schools that we had like the West Ishpeming School

had a little gymnasium also. The Ely School of course had a nice gymnasium that was added to their school about 1954 and that was probably about one of the nicest gymnasiums in the whole school district that was added up there. That was really nice.

me: What was the average population of North Lake?

MrP: The average population of North Lake School was probably about 285 I'm guessing. I think we did go over 300 on a few years, and we may have got up to 340 ~~people~~ people at one time, but we probably got back down normally around 260 to 200 and ~~20~~ to ~~20~~ 280 seemed like a pretty average while I was there.

me: How many students were in an average size class at North Lake?

MrP: It varied a little bit, but we tried to keep our classes some where between ~~22~~ 22 and 28 students. I know that we did go over that sometimes and I think we got up to 30 students in a classroom sometimes and sometimes we got down to 21 in a class which was pretty nice if we could do that because you got better instruction, and more instruction more attention by the teacher. The classes pretty much stayed the same that way. Even when we ran classes between North Lake and West Ishpeming. We kept about a 100 students at West Ishpeming or a little better than that all the time, 120, and those first and second grades would eventually become part of our third grades as they moved

Mr A. on to on to North Lake School also.

me: How many teachers were there teaching at North Lake in an average year?

Mr P: In an average year I think we had like 15 teachers over there. And alot of support help in teacher aids custodians and so on, but we always had one teacher for every 22 to 28 students and so with the kindergarden two firsts and two seconds all the way up to the fifth grade or in some years when we had three of each so we had a pretty busy and a busy schedual and alot of people in that ^{little} building the whole time. On average I guess some where around 15 or 18, 22 in the building at a time.

me: What do you remember most about being principal at North Lake School?

Mr P: I think the thing I remember the most is the students themself all the children that come there that were alot of fun to be with. They seemed like it was kind of a small, but very friendly school and kids seemed to enjoy being there, and they enjoyed their teachers. I'm sure that didn't happen all the time, but I enjoyed being with the kids. Like noon hours I really liked going out and playing with the kids during their noon hour, because it was a long noon hour and I liked to get on my snow boots and go out and have some fun with them also.

me: What is your fondest memory of North Lake School?

Mr P: I guess I'd have to say any programs that we had at the school that they could participate in and we would have some special days special days that was maybe indoors and out doors something was put on some kind of a special program. Maybe certain times

of the year. That was just sometimes something that we needed to do because sometimes it seemed like the school year got very very long, and we needed to have some fun, and not be just serious all the time. So we put on special programs where we could take our classes indoors or outdoors or visiting from one class to another. Taking our kids on walks outside side the school around the playground around the area. One year we had a parade I remember around North Lake School, and we got everybody to participate in the parade. We got dressed up and marched "all around North Lake in the streets and the people really thought that was neat. They came out with

folding chairs, and sat in their front lawn when we went by and paraded up and down ~~at~~ the streets with all of our ~~cost~~ costumes on, but I can't remember exactly what it was that we were, it was not any special holiday I think it was just a kind of day that we made up. That this was gonna

be a North Lake Day. Our students had a lot of days like that. For instance we even named some of the streets in North Lake when they had to change some names in North Lake, and in West Ishpeming. Our students had contests to name them. So names like Patriot Street over there and some of the others, School Street, those we named that some of our students actually named in a contest and changed them. Over in West Ishpeming they used to have an Iron Street I recall, and they changed it to Steel Street, because we needed to change some names according to the Ishpeming Post office. So those were special events that we did to have some fun.

and to do something that would be helpful in the community

me: When you look back at your years of being principal at North Lake, is there anything you would like to change about them?

Mr. P: When I look back at it now I guess not, I can't think that I would want to change anything a whole lot, because during those years that I was there I think it was, I couldn't expect a whole lot more, we had a lot of materials, in our school. We didn't have a ~~whole~~ lot of need. We weren't short by any means ~~by~~ ^{of} having materials and programs and things that we didn't need. We had a very small school. We always thought we would like to have more space of course, and now that's finally coming about with a new school, Aspin Hills I think it's called? I think that was the name of the new school I heard, and it sounds like it's going to be really nice to be able to work there and have a lot of room, a lot of space, we were crowded at North Lake, I guess if I were going to change anything I would have liked to have larger classrooms and a new gymnasium. It would have been very nice but it was a very small and friendly and family kind of a school. Both North Lake, and West Ishpeming School and the Ely School also, I'd have to say.

me: How did the school change through the years that you were the principal at North Lake?

Mr. P: I think we became less strict about how we handled things. When it first came it seemed like every thing was so very, very strict about ^{what} ~~how~~ we did it, and we needed to have more ~~opportunities~~ ^{opportunities} for ~~and~~ students to say this is some of the things that we would

like to have, I think we started a student council while I was there. So we had two or three students from each classroom on the student council. So they would have some opportunities to help plan some rules and things that we had at the school, and I think that was important because the school had to be for students not just run by adults, and have the students follow the rules of adults, because students had a lot of good ideas and they had an opportunity to share some of those ideas and plans with us at the school and the student council was one of those things that I really enjoyed having at our school and I think Mrs. Tribilcock at the time was one of the people who helped run our student council so did Mr. Vial, and they did a nice job of working with students as well. I was just kind of a helper when it came to those kinds of things, but I really enjoyed knowing that our students had an opportunity to plan.

me: What year did you retire from being the principal at North Lake?

Mr. P: Okay, I have to go back and think about that. ^{Its 1996} This is the last day of '96 in fact that were here today. So it had to be three years ago that I retired in June of 1993 and I was not sad. I had a had, had an opportunity to have some fun in the school, and I had been in public schools between Ishpeming and the Nice School District ^{for} 35 yrs, and I thought that's enough for anybody to be spending in a school. For especially me who thought I'd never

go back to school ~~for~~ again once I graduated from high school, I thought I'd never ~~be able~~ see the inside of a school again, and wouldn't you know ~~just~~ after four years later, just after I finished my college years I was back teaching in Ishpeming again, and continued on, and never missed any school up until the time I retired. But it's been good I really appreciate it. I've had three years of retirement right now and I've been just as busy as I can be teaching skiing at two ski areas six days a week, and working here at the Ski Hall of Fame which is really exciting also.

me: What degrees did you receive, from where, and when?

Mr. P: What was the question again Laura?

me: What degrees did you receive from where and when?

Mr. P: Could you state that in any other way?

me: Did you receive any degrees?

Mr. P: Yes, When I graduated from college I ~~graduate~~ graduated Bachelor of science degree and I taught art and American History here in the Ishpeming Public Schools, and then like about six years after that I got a masters degree in special education where I was working with handicap students here in Ishpeming and I did that in the Ishpeming Schools for about fourteen and a 1/2 years working with all grades in every school in Ishpeming I worked in. Working with both the art program and the special education program so I guess when I went down to the Nice Community School District as a community

schools director in 1964 and I was, Let's see I think I was 18 years old at the time, I must have been. No I turned 18 in December so I was 17 years old when I graduated from high school, so I had a little head start. I started college when I was 17 and turned 18 during my freshman year. So I got a little head start therefore I got a ~~head start on my teaching~~ also started teaching when I was a little older than 20 years also, and maybe then got a little head start on my retirement also.

me: What college did you attend?

Mr P: I attended Northern ~~Michigan~~ Michigan University in Marquette, and I also did some extra studies at Los Angeles County Art Institute in Los Angeles California and also I attended art school in _____ in Mexico. and those are ~~basically~~ ^{principally} the schools that I attended with some other special programming that sometimes is away from the university setting but mainly it had to do with the art program that I began with or in special education.

me: What did you do during the time between when you graduated from college and when you were the principal at North Lake

Mr P: When I graduated from college I started teaching here in ~~Michigan~~ Ishpeming. My first year was 1958 and it was the year I graduated from college and an interesting part, one of my classes to that year graduate in business that ~~year~~ I had was I had to do some kind of assignment

So I began operating the Dairy Queen Ice Cream Store in Marquette. At that time we had a Dairy Queen, and it was part of the chain. I began operating that store in ~~May~~ the first of May, and it closed down after I started teaching. It was the first of October when I closed it, and I had already got in a year of teaching here in Ishpeming, but that was part of my assignment anyway so I had an experience in teaching, not teaching in business by operating the Dairy Queen franchise in Marquette, Michigan. Then I continued teaching that year in 1958 and the following year I began also coaching a ski team, instructing a ski team here in Ishpeming. It was ~~for~~ four way ski team both down hill and nordic events and that was part of my assignment ^{besides} ~~before~~ teaching. So when at the end of the school day I would meet with my high school skiers and we'd be heading out here to the AlQual Area or out to Suicid Bowl and practice our skiing ~~so~~ so we would have competitions with other high schools around the Upper Peninsula.

me: What were some of the difficulties of being the principal at two schools at the same time?

Mr. P.: Never being at the right place at the right time I guess would be the best answer I could say. Because when I was at ~~one~~ one school I'd be on the telephone with people at ~~the~~ ^{the} other school trying to find out what was going on there, and it always felt like I should ^{probably} be over there right now. You could never be at the right place at the right time when you were needed, but that was just page 17

that was just part of the job, but it's always a little frustrating because I realized that ~~the~~^a school really needs to have a principal there all the time. There's a lot to do that needs to be taken care of and done well, and you can only do kind of a part time job when you only have $\frac{1}{2}$ a day at a school. So it was always a little frustrating never being there a whole day.

~~me:~~ me: When did you become the principal at West Ishpeming School?

Mr. P: The same year that I became principal at the North Lake School. And that would have been I believe about 1979 that I had begun at both schools, because my first 6 years in the nice community school district was as community schools director and I became principal after the principal at North Lake retired and I decided it would be a good opportunity to try out that kind of work which I had never done before. So I believe it was 1979 then that I became principal at both schools, West Ishpeming and North Lake.

me: What were some of your duties as being principal at West Ishpeming?

Mr. P: West Ishpeming was kind of interesting because I never had an office really over there. I had a little desk in a corner. I spent a lot of time going from classroom to classroom. I really enjoy being in the classroom seeing what was happening, what was going on in the classroom, and if

page 18

assist with ~~the~~ the teacher I would, It was just keeping everything coordinated. Coordinating programs so that things happened at the right time. All the little details from the time school started in the morning when the buses came in. Timing the school lunch program everybody had some organization as to when they came to lunch, when they left lunch. What time the school was getting out in the afternoon, to make sure the buses were there, for the boys and girls to go home on. Making sure all the materials were there that were necessary for teachers to teach, because that was the most important thing that was taking place at school, teaching students.

me: What was an average day like as being the principal at West Ishpeming?

Mr.P: It was basically the same as being at North Lake. As I said I didn't have as many teachers over there, but I spent part of a day or half of a day at each school because each school was important. It would start off with taking care of any substitutes that we might need early in the morning, and getting them there to the school for 8:30, our school would start at nine o'clock, and we had to make sure that everybody had a teacher. That all the materials were ready to go at 9:00. ~~We~~ We finished school at West Ishpeming at 3:30 I recall, and then we'd hustle the buses from West Ishpeming over to North Lake to pick up the kids. So sometimes we wouldn't even get over to North Lake with our bus until 3:35. Sometimes it worked the other way ~~and~~ around so some of our buses came from North Lake to pick up students at West Ishpeming. So some of our students didn't get picked up until after the kids got out at North Lake. so it could have been 8 minutes later 10 minutes later depending on the weather was like, but we wanted to make sure all the kids got home ~~at~~ at night. Sometimes we had to answer the telephone ten times to find out they didn't get home. They got off the bus maybe a block or two page 19

early and went home with a friend, didn't come home yet. So we'd be getting a call at school saying what happened to my son or daughter who didn't show up yet. Did they leave school? Did you see them leave the school? And all that sort of thing, Were they there, Yes they were, Who was their closest friend? Maybe you should try there. We'd try to find somebody, ^{where do they live?} and that would happen every once in a while too.

me: How did you deal with the children from West Ishpeming who misbehaved?

Mr.P: Misbehaved children over there. We would have the same thing. The student and I would have some conferences with the teacher to find out what happened, What was the problem that we had. If it was a matter of breaking a rule in the school or on the playground, Causing somebody else some problem by fighting or doing something that was going to hurt somebody else. We would sit down and have a conference with them. And if it happened more than once we would have to call the parents have them come over and visit with us about it also so that we knew that this was a problem that was not going to happen again. That we have a solution for it. And sometimes we had to through some kinds of problems where a student had to do some make up time or do some kind of writing or work at the school that would so that they understood what the problem was and that they were now going to do it right the next time around. And it might have been some kind of work you know. Sometimes if it was a problem like messing up somebody's desk or ~~maybe~~ maybe the washroom or that. We might have them come out and actually do some extra work. Have them come out and help clean up.

me: What grades were taught at West Ishpeming?

Mr.P: Mostly first and second grade, and in the back of my mind I think we had third grade there for a while year or two. Basically it was

early elementary ~~as we would call it~~ we referred to it as First and Second grade. We had no kindergarden. Kindergarden was at North Lake, but we operated the two schools together almost like they were in one building, but they were not so we tried to run the same program.

me: Are there any special employies that you remember from West Ishpeming, if so who were they and what do you remember about them?

Mr P: I remember the teachers over there especially, at the West Ishpeming School. The teachers were so important because when I was not there ~~the teachers~~ I had to rely on the teachers who were ~~not~~ actually teaching and in charge of their program. We had some wonderful teachers over there. Mrs. Blewet, Mrs. ~~Adam~~ Budmeny Mrs. Melochavich are two teachers that were there

There were several teachers that came and left. Some of them moved to others schools and did outstanding jobs for us. People who probably were there the longest were teachers like Miss Blewet and Miss Budmen who were running the second grade. Then we had a cook there by the name of Minny Chipman, that was really, really kind to boys and girls. She really looked after them. Just like she was there grandmother to everyone of the ~~boys and the girls~~ ^{kids} in the school, and made sure that they got something to eat everyday. She would encourage them to eat their food. So there were some really nice people over there. Even our custodians, and our bus drivers and all those people who had to work. Many of them worked at both schools in many ways. They were really good people.

me: Were there any special programs that were put on at West Ishpeming, if so what kinds?

Mr P: They always had special programs over there it seemed. In the early elementary the teachers are so creative. They're always starting little programs to entertain maybe another classroom, or the whole school. They were always doing something that was fun. The early elementary kids I think had more fun than later elementary or middle school kids sometimes, because they were always planning and teaching around fun. Fun things to do, and I always appreciated that because they kind of almost were parents to the ^{young} children. They really looked after them. They had to get off all their winter clothes everyday when they went to school, help get them all dressed up again before they went home. That was a big job in elementary. Especially early elementary schools.

me: What was the most important rule that you tried to enforce at West Ishpeming?

Mr P: Probably the same as North Lake, Safty. Having fun at the school, but always looking at the safty of the children. That they were not going to hurt themselves or anybody else. It might have been some little stupid things like not running down the hallways, or down through the stairways, or not sliding down the banisters in the stairway, or not going out the door too fast, and knocking somebody over. Running out to the bus and running on the wrong side of the bus where a car could hit them. Those were the things that I was always concerned about, because I guess you almost become a parent to ~~everyone~~ of the kids at the school, and you don't want anyone to get hurt. It does happen. There were accidents but you try to avoid them as much as possible.

me: What was the average population of West Ishpeming School?

Mr. P: I think our average pop. was about 120 students, That was the most that we. I suppose our average was probably closer to 100 because we had as many as 130, 140 there at a time, but we got down as low as 90 one time I think we had, but we always had at least four classrooms there, and sometimes 5 or possibly 6. I think at one time we had two classes in a gymnasium, maybe that's when we had the third grade there also. We had to put two classes in our little gymnasium, auditorium down there because we were really short on space for a while. So we had four classrooms filled. Lets see yes we did have a third grade, because we started a third grade by the cafeteria as well. We had a class or two by the gymnasium or auditorium. ~~It~~ It was a pretty busy little school.

me: How many students were in the average size class at West Ishpeming?

Mr. P: About 22, 22-24. I think that was pretty typical.

me: How many teachers taught at West Ishpeming?

Mr. P: At one time I don't think we had anymore than 6 teachers there at one time, probably six teachers there in the six classrooms that we had.

me: What do you remember most about being the principal at West Ishpeming?

Mr. P: How friendly and small it was. You could get to know everybody, I knew ~~at the student~~ everybody by their first name. All the students and teachers and everybody, so it was like having a big family there.

Over a couple of years I got to know people very, very well. I got to know a lot of the parents too.

me: What is your fondest memory of being the principal at West Ishpeming?

Mr P: Friendships that I made with teachers, students and other employes in the building. We were very close. Small group of people there, so we had a lot of fun, but we were very, very close friends. Looking out for each other, helping out. It wasn't that way when I first came there it was kind of strange because the school was so small and I was new at the school compared to the teachers who had already been there so I was like the new kid on the block coming in there. It was a little difficult at first getting to know everybody and having everybody trust you as a principal that you were there to help, not to cause any problems, but at first the first year or two was difficult, but after you got to know everyone it got a lot ~~was~~ easier.

me: Is there anything you would ~~change~~ change if you could about your years as being the principal at West Ishpeming?

Mr P: No I don't think I would. I can't think of anything I would want to change there again. We had nice size classes. The space ~~there~~ ^{of course} again, we had three different floors where we had our school program. We referred to as ground level was where the cafeteria was and we had a couple of special programs there. A third grade there on that same ground level. First grades were on the next floor up, along with the gymnasiums and then the top floor was where the second grades, the upper classmen of the ^{whole} school lived. At the on the second grade. We had outside fire escapes, You had to go outside

and walk ~~down~~ down the metal ~~stairs~~ stairway to get out for fire drills. The play ground was like one whole block. You could play almost anywhere around the school. We had pretty good areas for the kids to play in. We didn't have enough play ground equipment probably, I guess that was something that I would want to change at both schools. Never had enough play ground equipment. I would have liked to have more.

me: How did the school change through the years that you were the principal at West Ishpeming?

MrP: Well they were old school buildings. The West Ishpeming School I think was built in 1926 or '25 some where in that area. Every year they became a little bit more run down because of the bricks and mortar and all of that kinds of things would begin to deteriorate. I was again concerned about the safety in the build, did it meet fire code? Could we get boys and girls out fast enough when we had fire drills, and that sort of thing. I think we did it in about a minute ~~or~~ to get the school emptied after we had fire drills and practiced them. I can't think of anything else that I would want to ~~change~~ add to that.

me: What year did the West Ishpeming School close during, and why?

MrP: I'd ~~like~~ have to go back to the records to find out exactly what year we did close. The reason that we did close was because it needed more work to bring it up to fire code and to take care of all the maintenance problems that we had. We had enough space over at the Ely Elementary School the numbers were going down, that we could move everybody from the West Ishpeming School to the Ely Elementary School.

The numbers were going down that we could move everybody from the West Ishpeming School to the Ely Elementary School and close it down so that we would not have to have moms and dads paying taxes to keep that building up anymore when it was as old as it was. It was worn out, and it was time to close it. I would have to say it probably got closed about 1980 or '81 some where along in there I think.

me: What were some of the differences between the North Lake School and the West Ishpeming School?

MrP: I guess the main difference ~~was~~ is that West Ishpeming is a early elementary school, one that only had the first, second, and third grades. The North Lake School had more people in it. It had kindergarden through the fifth grade, while I was there. I think the Ely Elementary school was the same thing. We had kindergarden through the fifth grade there also. So basically that was the difference. The Ely and The North Lake School were basically the same numbers, and the West Ishpeming had less numbers, but it was the early elementary first, second, and third grades.

me: How have the methods of teaching changed over the years?

MrP: It changed often, but in cycles so that in every ten years it seems as though things that we had been doing ten years ago would kind of come back as a cycle ~~of~~ again and we'd do something very, very similar with maybe a few little changes or add ons, but each year I think we got better at it all the time. The program became a little more technical a little more things were added to the program, but certain years we would emphasize

~~the~~ maybe more math, or more science. Then other years they would be emphasizing a little more reading. In the elementary ~~schools~~ ^{schools} reading was a very, very big part of the whole school program. Learning to read and write, Math was important too. I think it was fun to see kids learning to actually read for the first time and write for the first time, and continue on ~~by~~ over the years by adding on and becoming better about it. There were those kind of changes that took place. I guess I have to say it seems like every 10 years some of the same kinds of ideas would come back and take a little different shape or form.

me: Do you have any comments or do you know of anyone else that you think should be interviewed?

MrP: Who ~~could~~ could be interviewed for this? Yes. When I think about all the people that worked at the three schools that I was at that there would be a lot of them who would be very, very good. One of them would be Mrs. Johnson of course our secretary, who was the secretary for both West Ishpeming and North Lake. Then also, over at the Ely Elementary School our secretary was Karen over there. She knew a lot about the Ely Elementary School. She helped me a lot when I came up there as principal. We had not only different teachers, but we had some very, very interesting people work there like Mr. ^{Knutson} Conutsin, Earl Conutsin, was our bus driver and maintenance person at both North Lake and West Ishpeming School and over at Ely Elementary School the custodian was Don Grund. Donny Grund we referred to as the bus driver and the janitor/custodian over there and he'd been there many, many years. I guess just about the time when he graduated from high school he went to work there. Except for a couple of years that he ~~was~~ ^{served} ~~to~~ work in the army. He came back there again to work at the Ely Elementary School. So those people are really important. They know ~~the~~ all

about the area. People at the school themselves over at the West Ishpeming School, Mrs. Rudmen. Would probably be the person who would know that school and the whole staff best, as a teacher there. Over at the North Lake School the teachers who have been around there mostly were Mr. Vial and Mr. Helgren who have both been there, both of them ~~are~~ were there longer than I was actually. When I came they were there, and when I left.

me: When were you married and to who?

Mr. P.: I was married in 1960 + and my wife is Marilyn Sunburg, that was her maiden name. She's a teacher also. She's a speech therapist, speech pathologist. She still teaches. She works for Marquette Alger Intermediate School District. She travels from one school to another, working with students who have special needs in speech and language skills. So we were married in 1960. We have three children.

me: How many children do you have and what are their names?

Mr. P.: The three children that we have are the oldest is our son Mark, Mark Pontti. Our next in age is about a year $\frac{1}{2}$ younger is Todd Pontti. Their youngest sister is about 5 years younger than the boys is named Jill. They are all right now grown up and Mark works here in the Upper Peninsula in Iron Mountain. He's a communications relations manager at the paper company up there, something international paper company up there anyway. Our son Todd lives in California and he's a golf pro out there in California. Our daughter Jill, who is now married, our son Todd is not, but Jill lives in Austin, Texas right now and she works for IBM. International Business Machines. She just moved there a year ago. She used to live in Boca Raton, Florida where she was a cheerleader for the Miami Dolphins football team, when she worked for IBM in Florida.

me: Now that your retired, what do you do in yours spare time, and do you have any ^{particular} hobbies?

MrP: Yes I have lots of hobbies and interests and I guess I wouldn't want to be retired if I didn't have them. Ever sence I've been retired I've been here at the National Ski Hall of Fame working and I did this before I actually retired and it got to be such a big job I decided I had to retire otherwise the two jobs would conflict with one another. My job is I'm the president of the board of directors here at the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame Museum. Thats a national job so I do travel around the country on my job. Our head quarters are in Park City Utah. This is the only U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in the country, and its located here in Ishpeming for many good reasons, This is where organized skiing began. During the winter months I'm a ski instructor. I spend ~~6~~ six days a week working as a ski instructor. Which I enjoy very much. I take Mondays off. I work even on weekends because thats the ski business. During the summer months my hobbies basically are bicycling and sea ~~kyac~~ kyacing. I've paddled sea kyacs and travel all over the country with my sea kyac, paddeling in all the Great Lakes, & Great Lakes. I've been in the Pacific Ocean, in the Caribbean, and I still have to paddle in the Atlantic Ocean, and many other places I have plans for yet. That's my hobbie and sport. My interest of course and what I've began teaching ^{is the art program} in ⁱⁿ way back. I do alot of art work. A lot of display work here at the ski hall of fame, in planning and ^{also} actually making alot of the displays. page 29

That's also kind of a hobby of mine, drawing and painting and that sort of thing too.

me: What do you miss about being the administrator at North Lake School and at the West Ishpeming School?

MrP: Probably the thing I miss would be the contact with the kids all of the time. Having to have a big family ~~to go to school to~~ ^{like that everyday} deal with was probably the saddest part of not being there as principal anymore. I guess that's probably why I ~~took~~ ^{took} up ski instructing because I still get to work with students. Sometimes they're maybe 5 or 6 yrs old all the way up to, I think my oldest student that I taught skiing has been something like somewhere around 80 yrs old. Someone who wanted to take up skiing before they died apparently. So I've worked with both very young children and adults. That was not a problem with me because I've worked with young children before and I also worked with adults when I was a community schools directory, so I still teach, but a little different way. It's kind of like private teaching that I do my job is a professional ski instructor and I belong to the professional ski instructors of America. That's my job.