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**FINNISH FOLKLORE AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE GREAT  
LAKES MINING REGION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1972-1978**

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Mr. Bat Bigando  
August 7, 1973

W. E. Anderson

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SUBJECT:

SOURCE: Bat Bigando

INTERVIEWER: W. Anderson

COMMENTS:

I: This is an interview with a fellow who is going to celebrate his ninetieth birthday tomorrow morning, so the first thing I think we should do is to wish you a happy birthday a day early.

R: A day early...heh...that's right.

I: The interview is being conducted with Mr. Bat Bigando at 1504 Hecla Street. Is this Calumet or Laurium? Calumet, isn't it?

R: Yes...this is Calumet.

I: ...Calumet, Michigan on seven August, 1973, and the interview is conducted by Wally Anderson. Mr. Bigando, let me ask you one question first. How did you get the name Bat?

R: My name is Batista...in Bat...my name is Batista Bégando.

I: Oh, I looked in the telephone directory and all it says is Bat in there.

R: Oh, they call me Bat for short, you see, but Batista.

I: Well, Mr. Bigando, what year were you born?

R:

I: And were you born in this country or were you born...?

R: Italy

I: In Italy...whereabouts?

R: Close to Torino...about five or six miles from Torino, you know.

I: And what kind of work did your folks do over there?

R: My father used to have a mill...flour mill, you know, grind the wheat, you know. My father used to have that; and he used to... well he played in military bands for years...that's how he was thinking about music all the time. He was great for music...that's how he started us, you know. He started me first then my brother.

I was seven year old and my brother was five years, see. And before they give you in Italy...before they give you an instrument...where here they give you an instrument by school they give you instrument right away...but I'll tell you they give you a year, year and a half studied all the scales and everything, you see. Learn the music before they give you the instrument.

I: And what year did you come to this country then?

R: Ah, let me see...what year...I was seven year old then.

I: Seven...and did the whole family come together?

R: Yeah...my father and mother...we come to Spring Valley...my father come to...they send for my father to come to Spring Valley to lead a band down there and then we was only there about three years from there then they send for him to come up here in Calumet.

I: How did they ever find out about him? Get him over here?

R: Well, he come...there was a fellow here, a good friend of his. He was a musician too, you know. They got him to come to Spring Valley and when they got into Spring Valley coal mine...we were there for three year...we were starving there. I didn't have no shoes to use. The mine was striking all the time there, you know. It was awful time there. I was only seven year old and my brother was five.

I: Was there a large Italian settlement there?

R: Oh yes, it was Italian...large one.

I: Were most of them working in the mines?

R: Mines and.

I: Those were coal mines?

R: Yeah, and then there was a river close there in Spring Valley... pretty close to the town, you see.

I: And then three years later you came up to Calumet.

R: Well, yeah, one of the good friends of my father sent for him to come up here. He come up here and he didn't work very long up here. Well, I was two and a half - three years down in Spring Valley, Illinois, then we come up here and I started work for the company, 1899.

I: For Calumet Hecla?

R: Yeah, 1899

I: How old were you then?

R: I was seventeen then...sixteen when I started. I went in the mine...I worked in the mine two years...

I: What kind of work were you doing in the mines?

R: Drill boy, you know.

I: Carry the drills for the miners?

R: Carry them for the miners. I remember/<sup>before</sup>then I would get up in the morning and peddle milk for a dollar or two a month. Jeess, I started work for the company, South Hecla that old mine, you know, sixteen year old and my brother he started in Auscota...he started at Auscota when he was fourteen in the mine.

I: That's pretty young.

R: Yeah...I know when I work in the mine there in South Hecla...the first pay I got I worked twenty-seven days. Twenty-seven day... twenty-eight dollars. Gee, that was big then in 1899.

I: Lots of money.

R: Well, you take good miners, you know,<sup>good miners...</sup>/was only sixty-four dollars a month at that time...1899. And (???) was fifty-eight and timberman was forty-eight just a month. Twenty-seven days and ten hours.

I: Ten hours a day.

R: Yeah, ten hours a day, yeah.

Did they have many young boys working?

R: Quite a few young boys. There was lots of old timers, you know... they used to be these old...well Calumet Hecla had seven - eight thousand working them days down in thos old mines lot of them were working, you know, there was a Auscota, there was Ahmeek and cripe there was lots of them.

I: Did you go to any of the schools here then?

R: I went to...not very much school. I went to...as far as fifth - sixth grade.

I: That was in the regular Calumet schools?

R: Yeah around here schools...five or six grade and then I started to pick up jobs, you know, started to work.

I: Well, did your dad and mother speak English?

R: Oh yeah.

I: Did they have to learn the English when they got to this country?

R: They had to learn English when they got to this country, yeah.

I: And did they speak Italian all the time around the house?

R: Oh yeah, all the time Italian.

I: How did you learn English?

R: I don't know but pick it up pretty fast, I guess.

I: When you have to.

R:

I: And do your children speak Italian too?

R: Not much...not very much. They can talk it, you know. See I got three. The oldest girl married this John Augustine...but her in the A & P, then I got George, he worked for Calumet Hecla twenty-nine - thirty years, then when they closed it...now he's down at Ishpeming working for four years. He's sixty...he'll be sixty-two in January.

I: Do you still have any of the Italian customs in the family?

R: Oh yeah

I: Traditions or is there quite a connection...do you maintain quite a connection with your Italian heritage and that?

R: Yeah, once years lots of Italian, but it's very...in 1905 and 06 there was seven - eight Italian lodges here. But now there's one lodge and there's hardly nobody in it.

I: You know that's a shame.

R: I belong to that Columbus Lodge and there's about...I think there's about a hundred in the lodge. At one time there was about five or six lodges. Every town had a lodge in it.

I: It's kind of a shame though for people to lose this background. But I think it's happening not only to the Italians but all of them. The Finnish people...all of them are kind of giving up their background. Well, how did you get started in music here then?

R: Well, I started when I come here I started to take...I started to play...well the Italian band with this picture I got here, see.

I: Did you have to take lessons from somebody?

R: Well, my dad.

I: Your dad was here to give you lessons.

- R: We started Italian band and then when I was seventeen years old... my brother too, he was trumpet player and took lessons from Mannercook and Mannercook when he was sixteen - seventeen year old they put him in the band, you know and they made a good trumpet player out of him. And I took a few lessons from some old timer clarinet player...I was about seventeen - eighteen...seventeen year old when I joined the old C & H Band and they gave me a job...I got a job. I was working in the mine and they didn't want me working in the mines because you see you have to work three shifts and the band them times the band had lots of work, you know. Had a pretty good time...lots of work...had a pretty good band, you know, lots of work. Work a stretch and have rehearsals and they didn't want me workin and they got me a job in the paint shop.
- I: So you worked days all the time.
- R: Days...yeah. I was in the paint shop fifty-seven years.
- I: That's a long time. Well, when the C & H had their band, what did they use it for? What was the band used for?
- R: Well, the band used to...when they had a band here they used to go different mines, you know, and play concerts...Isle Royale, Lake Linden...all where the company had...C & H had...one time was running Isle Royale mines, you see, and used to go to Isle Royale and play all over them little towns...Alaway, Ahmeek, North Carrisich, the concert in the summer, you know.
- I: Then you would have a concert in the evening?
- R: In the evening, yeah.
- I: For the miners and their families to come and listen to.
- R: And then there was the Electric Park going in then, well then on Sunday we used to have the band concert Electric Park...Sunday afternoon. And then Electric Park there was sometimes dance three four nights a week, they'd have a orchestra there then.
- I: So they'd break the band up into orchestra groups and...
- R: Oh, you'd have four five orchestras going that time. Well see, they didn't have them speakers like they do now. Now you take they go with a guitar or accordian and a drum...we used to play a dance with a ten- twelve- piece orchestra, you know, them days. But now days they go two or three they make more noise than twenty.
- I: And no music...
- R: No music, just noise.
- I: Just noise, I agree with you. I can't stand it. Well these concerts that you held then, were a lot of miners and their families come to these concerts?
- R: Oh, we used to draw a big crowd to those concerts. We used to

not get much money them days, you know. You get what two dollars and a half - three dollars a concert...that was good them days. Was more than what you'd make for the company working ten hours them days.

I: I suppose this was one of the major forms or recreation for people then.

R: Yeah

I: Well, wasn't it kind of hard to get around to these different places?

R: No, no, they had the...they used to use...Calumet Hecla they had big trucks, you see, and they used to take us around, you see. And then street cars...some places you used the street car and go Lake Linden, go Alloway, them places.

I: At these concerts, did they play any special kind of music...style of music?

R: Well, pretty heavy stuff, you know. Big overtures...(???)Overture ever hear by (???)...all them big...played pretty good. Oh, they had a pretty good band.

I: Did they play many popular music pieces at the time or.. ?

R: Once in awhile between, you know. Gees, I used to have lots of programs...I don't even know what I done with 'em.

I: How about music from different countries? Did they play like Italian music and Finnish music...?

R: Yeah...and Finnish music and all kinds of music.

I: I suppose if you went to Lake Linden you had to play a lot of French music.

R: Well Lake Linden was quite French.

Stop in tape.

I: You're the same as me. I've never smoked. I don't think I've smoked a pack of cigarettes in my life. Mostly always pipe and once in awhile cigars. In fact, I'd be lost without my pipe. Well this C & H Band, it got to be pretty well known around the country, didn't it?

R: All over the country pretty well. Cripe to Detroit we went two years straight, you know. With the booster once for a week and one time we left by boat in Houghton we got to St. Ignace, you know where, and then there's the island...

I: Mackinaw?

R: Mackinaw and we went from the boat...Mackinaw first we went there and get the governor and the Governor Husband was the governor

was the governor of Michigan then. We pick up the government from there and there then on the boat and then to Detroit with the government.

I: All the way by boat?

R: All the way by boat. Boy we did a lot of drinking that time

I: Lot of drinking huh?

R: Oh...yep!

I: Well where did they play in Detroit then? Was it a contest or a competition?

R: Competition concerts, you see. Play concerts different halls and ...did my brother tell you about them?

I: Yeah he mentioned...well he didn't mention the Detroit one. He mentioned the one going to Milwaukee...

R: Oh yeah

I: ...and winning the competition there. Well the company then paid most of the expenses for all of these.

R: Yeah, well the company used to stand for the...

I Uniforms?

R: Yeah

I: Well, were there quite a large number of different bands? up in the Copper Country then?

R: Well Gees, there used to be...Alloyan had a band, Tamarack had a band, even Aushola had a band that time. And then there was the Red Jacket Band. There was all kinds of bands and there was work for everyone...pick the Tamarack...you heard about Tamarack Park?

I: Yeah

R: Yeah, well we used to picnic in summer...jeees there's lotsof picnics in Tamarack Park.

I: Well who financed these different bands...the villages or...?

R: Well, the societies, you know, there was so many societies and some for every society there was picnics, we used to go down as far as...we used to have an old boat on Hancock. We used to go to (???) or Canal, you know, picnics. There was upwards of four five barrels of beer and stuff and then get on a boat, lodges, you know. picnics...White City.

I: All the different lodges then would have picnics

R: Yeah

Well, music must have been quite a thing up here then.

R: Oh, went to Duluth with this band, and to Canada one time during the war...World War I...we played in Canada. Went by boat.

I: Where was that? Over to Port Arthur?

R: No...Canada...I forget the name of the place. Quite a place there you know, quite a few concerts there.

I: Who were some of the pretty well-known musicians up here at that time?

R: Well, there was coronet player, had a fellow by the name of Jack Williams. He was a great coronet player. Then they had a fellow by...Harry King...euphonium...trombone and euphonium. He was a soloist. And then Fred Crowley, he was the manager of the band and he was quite a musician and he used to be chief clerk in the pay office. They had some good...they had a bass player called Pop Rossett. He was a Swissman, you know, boy he was a great bass player. When Sousa come up here...Sousa directed the band up to the band room, you know.

I: He did?

R: He was surprised. He said that he'll tell you on this slip he didn't know how some of those fellows hang around this part of the country. You see them days the theatres would have an orchestra and then around...that time the theatres and the cities started big orchestras then all those professional players they have around here they left and went to theatres, you see. Like my brother he went theatre...he went down to Madison Theatre in Detroit and Adams theatre for about twenty years, I guess. That's how they done in them days.

I: I suppose the money was a lot better down there

R: Why, of course. I think them days, you know, 1908 and '10 that that seventy dollars a week was big money them days.

I: Oh yeah...and how! And you stayed right up here, though?

R: Yeah

I: How did that 1913 strike affect the band?

It didn't affect the band much that 1913. I remember when that strike, when that disaster happened in that Italian housing, the band...we were playing in the Misquabee Club when that broke out down there. And then there was no fire at all...just...and we

all left and went out on their...they were piled up, you know, the stairway from the door...there was seventy-five already. One on top the other, you know, all squeezed up under there. Start to run out...some jumped through the window. Oh, it was awful.

1913, yeah. Well, the band...then were you helping to get bodies out of there?

No, cripe, I couldn't do nothing. We hadda go back to Misquabee Club then again you see, and finish up. Oh, that was awful.

Well, then did the band continue to play right through the whole strike period?

R: No, they stopped then.

I: They stopped then.

R: Well, Misquabee Club was lifted, you know, we went there and finished up. Cripe, there was about a hundred fifty - two hundred at that big party there and stuff like that. Cripe, they were all sitting pretty good then and stuff and singing, they didn't know what was going on.

I: Well, you played in a theater-orchestra here too, didn't you?

R: The Carriage Theater.

I: The Carriage?

R: Yeah, was down there eighteen - nineteen years...Carriage Theater.

I: You must have seen some of the big stars of the theater at that time.

R: Oh, cripes...Princess Pat...showed Princess Pat...all them big shows they used to get 'em up here, you know. Well, they used to see the show for about a dollar and a half...at most two dollars them days, you know. That was big, you know, when you get a big show and you take...when I started at the Carriage Theater in 1911 1913, the downstairs the seats were for the picture, you know, one show only.

I: That's a big house.

R: Thirty-five cents was the...balcony was twenty-five and gallery ten cents.

I: Ten cents?

R: Yeah. Oh the gallery used to hold two - three hundred cause they had a big gallery, you know. They used to pack up that place when

they get some good shows. And then they used to get lots of stock companies used to come there.

I: Oh, I suppose. That was one of the big forms of amusement and there wasn't too many...that and the taverns, huh?

R: Well, I'll tell you not taverns...there was lots of saloons but there was no ladies going saloons them days. Once in awhile there when the wife used to go. But most fellows...you never see people lying around taverns like you do now adays. More womens and childrens around now taverns then...

I: Then there are men.

R: You want a bottle of beer?

I: No, not this early in the morning, thanks.

R: Shot of whiskey?

I: No...no, I just finished breakfast. Well, you've seen a big difference. Calumet and Laurium have really changed. There must have been an awful lot of horses then for people to get around.

R: You know, on Sunday they used to get them hacks...four seater, you know, team of horses and put on a half a barrel of beer and stuff, they used to go as far as the cliffs...they couldn't go very far you know to horses and stuff. Picnics all the time.

I: How about during the wintertime? What did people do?

R: Well, people in the winter...

I: They stayed home and shoveled snow, huh.

R: No...I was pretty busy in the ice rinks then playing hockey games and skating parties. Well, I was down at that theater seventeen . eighteen years, you know, we were in that.

I: Was hockey a great sport up here then?

R: Oh goodness, they had that professional hockey then early in the Palestra...the Colluseum then they moved the Palestra from Laurium down to Marquette, you know...they moved that. Used to be the Palestra and then there used to be the Calumet Ice Rink there. They got a nice rink there now. They had professional hockey there for awhile. Gibson...Hoot Gibson and Doc.

I: How did the different groups get along then together? Did they get along pretty well?

R: Oh yeah. See, there was Houghton, Calumet...well there was five different groups, you know, hockey players from Eagle River,

Marquette. I played with the C & H Band in 1905 and '06 when they opened up the Soo Locks. The Soo...the locks...when they opened up Soo Locks...that must have been about sixty - sixty-five years ago. And there was thirty-five bands in the parade there.

I: Thirty-five?

R: Yeah, and then the big hall and the banquet, oh it was wonderful. The Soo locks they opened up.

I: I suppose they had the governor and everybody else.

R: Oh, everybody there.

I: People from Washington...?

R: There was five or six big orchestras there, bands

I: Any of the Presidents ever come up in this country?

R: Ah...Roosevelt.

I: Teddy Roosevelt?

R: Teddy Roosevelt came up here. We met him...he come to the (???) and we went down with the band to the (???) special train, you know, oh cripe...the people that come up...and he was a big guy, you know, quite a...and after he talked there about an hour in the (???), we played there and then the special train they come and...I don't know if it was the...I think it was the Palestra in Laurium, that's where he went to speak. That's quite awhile ago Teddy Roosevelt came.

I: Yup, it sure is.

R: I don't think there's any other one. Governors and stuff like that, but not the President. That's the only one, I think, that ever come up here.

I: Yeah, I suppose that was a big event

R: Hum?

I: That was a big event when that happened

R: Oh yeah. Have you been up here quite awhile?

I: No, I married a girl from up here...yeah and I was here for about two years after World War II and now I've been here since 1962.

R: Your family and stuff...are you relation to Harvey?

I: No, my daughter married Mike Harvey.

R: Oh, your daughter married Mike

I: Yeah

R: Yeah, Mike Harvey is a big friend of my nephew, Michael Augustine

I: Yeah....yeah

R: Them two used to be pretty good golfers, Mike Harvey could hit that...he got pretty good thing now, Mike?

I: Yeah, he's working for Buick.

R: Buick, eh...General Motors.

I: Yeah...in Flint.

R: Mike is down at Tech. Take care in winter that ski thing and now in summer he's at the golf course.

I: Yeah, I know Mike

R: You wanna smoke a cigar?

I: Oh, no thanks. I'll just fill this

R: I'll give you a cigar...just a minute

I: Okay.

Stop in tape.

I: How old is your wife?

R: My wife is eighty-three

I: Eighty-three? Boy she was really pretty, huh?

R: She was seventeen when we married and I was twenty-three.

I: Was she an Italian girl too?

R: Yeah, Italian.

I: Was she born in this country?

R: Born in this country.

I: She was a pretty girl.

R: That's her brother.

I: He's changed.

- R: I guess so...he's changed. There's mine...red hair...look at the difference.
- I: Yeah, but you look alike.
- R: Now, there's a picnic Tamarack Park...the band playing to a picnic ...that's a long time ago.
- I: Yeah, that park...that's no longer there. I guess there's a little bit of a park up there, but nobody uses it, huh...the Tamarack Park?
- R: No, it's gone...it's gone down. There's a picture when we come from Italy. My mother and my brother and me.
- I: Did all the band members have to buy their own instruments or did C & H buy the instruments for you in the band?
- R: Some did C & H buy.

Stop in tape.

- I: Do you remember anything at all about the trip from Italy over here?
- R: Oh yeah...in the boats...we were in the boats. It took us five weeks...five or six weeks. There's my mother...she's a big lady
- I: Oh yeah...yeah.
- R: Different than my father.
- I: Yup...where did you start from Italy...from Torino?
- R: Yeah, from Torino where it...close to Torino. I been there. My mother when she was a...in Italy she used to take care...she was a big woman you know, raise many people's children...nurse for the baby when they have...
- I: Oh, a nurse.
- R: Yeah...she was doing that over there.

Was this boat full of people coming to this country?  
all the people...

- R: Oh Jesus,/it took about...I don't know they took sick, you know, them days with boats, you know, it was crowded. People sick, you know, rocking...it took a long time to come from Italy them days, you know, take...I forget how many weeks, you know, far as New York.
- I: I suppose they had everybody in big rooms...they didn't have separate rooms for them on the boat or...
- R: No, they had big rooms and then there was lots of drinking on

the boats them days too.

F: Lots of drinking, huh?

R: Oh gees.

I: Then they came from there to New York.

R: Yeah, we come to New York. Then from New York...

I: To Illinois

R: ...we went to Illinois. I don't know when we left New York...got on a train...the family...me and my brothers and sister and mother and the father...the father the train stopped at certain depot and he saw a tavern and he got up...he got off, you know. He didn't come back and the train left him. Then we didn't see him...for the next day but he caught up then. I know them old musicians in those days, you know, he used to like his drinks, you know, used to enjoy it.

I: I suppose your mother was really worried...no husband...

R: No...just us kids, you know.

I: Not being able to speak English.

R: But he caught up.

I: Yeah, I think about that time there were very many Italians that came to this country...about that time.

R: Oh yes, the boat was banks, you know, one on top the other one, you know, Christ all over the place.

I: Well, conditions in Italy must have been bad that so many of them came.

R: I remember I was only six - seven year old...I used to...father used to play in band and they used to go in the wine places, you know, like a saloon, you know. He used to get a shot of brandy for two cents them times.

I: Two cents?

R: Yeah, two cents them times. But now you pay must as much as here for it.

I: Well, it must have been a big difference to come from one country to another country and the different way of living and all the rest of it. And I suppose that people expected when they got here that everybody was gonna get a big job and everybody was gonna make a lot of money and then when they got here and found out they

weren't, they must have been pretty disappointed.

R: Un huh!

I: Did many of them go back?

R: Well, they couldn't go back...they didn't have the money. Some they sent them the money to come here, but...and they kept on working, but gees in the coal mine and stuff there was always strike, you know. They wasn't steady work. Right here they was working but you see the pay wasn't...

I: Wasn't much.

R: Yeah.

I: Well, these people, had they been miners over in Italy?

R: No...miners around here...that's a well see a (???) of eight or nine thousand working here...with all the mine goings. And the ones was making about in 1901 - 1902...miners was making \$64 a month...that was big money.

I: Yeah, but I mean they had to learn the job of mining, though.

R: They start as drill boys, you see and break in as the drill and stuff like that. They learned pretty quick.

I: They didn't do much mining in Italy.

R: No, not in Italy.

I: There weren't many miners there. What kind of jobs basically did the Italians try to get into in the mines up here? Ah...I know I talked to a man yesterday and he said, "Well, gee, the Frenchmen you could never get underground."

R: No

I: He said, "None of the Frenchmen want to work underground." And he said, "That's why they all settled in Lake Linden because they worked in the mills."

R: Yeah, the mills and stuff.

I: How about the Italians? They were underground.

R: Oh yeah...there was lots of Italians at one time was fully Italian and you couldn't get many Finns to go underground in them days. Now there's all kinds of them but Finns wouldn't go underground.

What'd they do...what did the Finns want to do mostly, farm?

R: Farm and surface work.

- I: Yeah, he was telling me that the Italians were timber men. They were really good timber men underground.
- R: Yeah, timber men and trammers...there was some old time trammers ...them days they hadda back in and push the cars and now, you know, they got all machines there...even load the cars. Before they used to all shovel, you know, shovel and fill up the cars, so many cars and then push 'em out to the shaft.
- I: Well, there were lots of Italians that settled around the Painesdale area too.
- R: And South Range and all them places too. There was all kinds of them.
- I: Then how come...why did they stay up there?
- R: Well, I suppose some couldn't get no jobs here, you know. I remember I sat there with some relation who was committed...he have to wait ...they'd have to wait sometimes four or five months before you cout get a job to go in the mine. You couldn't get a job to go in the mine...they were full all the time. You couldn't get a job to go in the mine. And some some there was different parties, you know, that had boarding house and stuff, you know, like serve drink and stuff, some that'd buy the job, you know. Forty - fifty dollars to get a job...fifty dollars to get a job to go in the mine.
- I: Who did they pay for the job then?
- R: Huh?
- I: Who did they buy it from?
- R: The fellow at the boarding house, you know, where they keep him and sell him drinks, you know, little bit like that that it was crooked you know, them captains was crooked and the captains would go in those places and drink and then they give that fellow that...was lots of that done them days. All them captains hanging around them houses, you know.
- I: So if they didn't like a guy they'd fire him and somebody else would pay him to hire him and they made money both ways.
- R: I guess so.
- I: Yeah, I guess most of these places had big boarding houses all over, weren't there?
- R: Oh yeah...most of the houses. I know my mother had seven or eight and we only had six rooms. Three beds in a room them place, and the boards them days, they worked for sixteen dollars a month... fourteen dollars a month...three meals a day and room.
- I: Did they usually work...one shift would use the beds and when they

went to work another shift would use the bed?

R: No, they had the regular. They had so many...some houses had fifteen - twenty, you know, pile up.

I: Of course, I suppose if they didn't know English very much why all the Italians would all try to stay in one boarding house and make friends so they could make friends and talk and everything.

R: Oh sure

I: Well, these housewives must have had a big job then.

R: Oh I guess so.

I: Feeding all those men and washing all their clothes.

R: They kept busy.

I: The housewives of today don't know how lucky they are.

R: No, they don't.

I: Well, you said you were twenty-three when you got married, huh?

R: Yeah, my wife was seventeen

I: What year was that then about?

R: 1908...I was married in 1908.

I: Were you able to get your own house then when you were married?

R: No, I lived in my father-in-law's house for awhile; and then when I was working in the paint shop I got a company house. Was the first house I was in was a double house...two family house...six dollars a month; but you'd have to heat it yourself, you see. Most of the houses didn't have no...just a stove, you know, them hard coal stove and would just freeze, you know.

I: Yeah, that's much different than today. As soon as kids get married they can pick out their own place. Back in those days I guess you lived with the family for awhile.

R: You want a glass of wine?

I: No...no thanks.

R: I used to make my own wine one time. Gees, I used to make every year; but now Jesus, used to pay for a...grapes, thirty - thirty-five dollars a ton. Now it's a couple hundred dollars a ton. It costs you three dollars...three dollars - three and a half - four dollars to buy the grapes and make it. It's cheaper to buy it.

I: Yeah...I make choke cherry wine...I make some of that every year

couple gallons. Well, I think back pertnear everybody must have made a lot of their own things then.

R: Yeah, I guess so.

I: What did they do for doctors and that? They never got sick?

R: Calumet Hecla had their own hospital here, you see, then fourteen - fifteen room. I used to take of that hospital...take care of that hospital painting and stuff. I used to have a couple of fellows keep painting all the time and we used to pay employees two dollars a month...you had the medicine...you had the doctors.

I: Everything.

R: Before they had union. But when they got the union, I don't know, that kill it. They wasn't satisfied...satisfied and then they closed the hospital. It was just two dollars a month, used to get everything. Medicine and the doctor...the doctor would come around in winter with sleigh and cutter and buggy in the...

I: Right to the house.

R: Right to the house...they had nine - ten doctors. Well, there was seven - eight thousand people working that time. Get up during the night go down to Rambletown family and then a woman have a child just have it right in the house, you know.

I: And the neighbors just to help out. Did they have a lot of home medicine that they made at home or home remedies for different things?

R: Well, you used to go to the hospital and get it, you see. They had quite a supplies of stuff there all time, you know, everything you need. And they wasn't satisfied; but they went too far and they ordered...they were gonna build a bigger hospital and they voted against it for four or five cents an hour more.

I: Sure weren't using their heads, were they. Well after that big strike things kind of slowed down up here, didn't it?

R: Yeah, after that 1913.

I: Yeah, things slowed down. Did many people go back to Italy or anything or leave this area after the strike?

R: Some...but it was pretty tough them days, you know, in 1913.

I: I suppose they went down to the cities instead then.

R: Tried to get jobs...it was hard to get jobs then.

I: What was it like up here during the Depression years, you know, the 1930's?

R: Well, C & H closed for one year once

I: For one year.

R: Do you remember that?

I wasn't here then.

R: Oh, you weren't. Yeah, they closed the mines and...they kept some going and I was working in the paint shop and I was playing the (???) then and then the painting...there was a body work in Tamarack. They started up a Ford body and stuff. They got me out there running a painting job...painting them body strucs and stuff like that, you know; but didn't last, they went broke...it went up in the air...small place in Tamarack. Now the Houghton County got that building there.

I: Oh yeah. Well then how did the people get along up here then during the depression when there was no work?

R: Jesus, I don't know. There was no welfare, nothing eh?

I: Not like today.

R: Nope...today they give 'em more to a family...they don't need to work, eh?

I: Yeah, there's some of them I don't think would take a job if you gave it to 'em because it's easier to sit around.

R: There's one fellow went with my daughter there...next to the highway, cripe he never work in his life but he hadda go and they sent him to school and now he's on some machine shop there. He hadda go to work and I remember he used to get everything...even the car fixed and things in the house...radios and...

I: Yeah, I got a neighbor out there that's the same way.

R: Where...in Alloway?

I: Yeah, I live in Old Alloway. *alloway*

R: There was an Italian fellow used to be a cop for C & H...I wonder if he's around there.

I: Johnny Barsica.

R: Barsica, yeah

I: Yeah, he lives across the street from me.

R: Yeah? Big fellow...Johnny Barsica...he was cop for C & H for quite awhile.

I: Yeah, I should talk to John. He probably...

- R: My brother missed that fellow that come from Detroit...he live in a house there...I forget his name. I guess he dropped...he died. He used to be quite a fellow. He lived close to a gas station there in a house that used to be a street car house. I forget his name now. He died...ain't quite a year now yet.
- I: In Alloway?
- R: Yeah, in Old Alloway there
- I: Oh, I think down on the corner there probably. Just down past me. I live...you know where the street car used to go right back of the gas station there.
- R: Yeah, that street car used to be stationed there and this fellow lived right there...the other corner across the...the big house across the road from where the street car station used to be.
- I: I live in a big house there. I live there.
- R: Yeah! There was another fellow there called...my brother used to go there and see him. He was quite a smoker...cigars and...
- I: Stewart.
- R: Yeah, I think
- I: Yeah, Bill Stewart. Yeah, he died here
- R: Not very long ago
- I: ...not long ago. Yeah, that great big house there.
- Yeah, big one. And they said, "Cripe everybody go see him and they know everything they want." He was give.
- I: Yeah, his wife still lives there in that house by herself.
- R: They miss him there they say, he was a pretty good.
- I: Good neighbor.
- R: Oh, you know him good, eh?
- I: Yeah, I knew him pretty well.
- R: Oh, Alloway has changed from what it used to be.
- I: Yeah
- R: At least that's what they tell me. The whole area. Do you think mining will ever come back up here?
- I: They're trying now

I: Yeah, Home State is trying.

R: Home State. But it's gotta be all different work now. There won't be no more mills or anything. Everything like is gonna cost some money take lots of money to get this thing going. Now they got one shaft going, I guess, they're figuring on two - three if things work right.

I: Do you think there's enough copper down there?

R: Supposed to be. Keweenaw they say is full of copper. How low, I don't know.

I: Yeah, I wonder if it'll ever come back.

Well, lots of people have left this area that would have stayed here I think if the jobs had been available. Especially the younger people. Getting ready to have your company.

R: No, I gotta go down to the hospital yet, see. I go every day. If I don't go down see that...I don't know. Never thought I'd come to this. My brother he ain't very good neither, you know.

I: No, I was talking to him the other day.

R: He don't feel very good.