

Interview with Marjorie Deges, 11/5/94

It is November 5th and I am speaking with Marjorie Degeso my grandma Marjorie Deges about Copper Country in 1930s. When were you born?

MD: 1915.

When did the depression first affect the up? When did you guys first feel it?

MD: I would say like '29 '30. '31 and I graduated in '33. I could not get a job for two years after that. it was very hard. you could not find work anywhere. there was not any jobs. I was very tired roaming around. finally I got a job that day I was called by the Hancock Woolworth and i'll be darned I was called by the Houghton Woolworth and Penney but I would have been in Houghton but I already had accepted?

you worked at Woolworth's?

MD: yes and that was in 1935 I started there for \$9 a week, 48 hours a week.

what was school like? You had been a sophomore basically when it started.

MD: it was fine. we had the schools we had wonderful teachers and we did not have to buy our books or anything.

were there any schools in the area that had to buy there books or all public?

MD: all public ones were free the catholic had to buy there books.

they did not close the catholic schools stayed open. even through the depression?

MD: ya. they had catholic schools. they had to buy their books they probably don't now but eventually they all closed and they came to the high school.

what did your parents do?

MD: my dad was a laborer he worked for atlas powders company in Dollar Bay and the company sent him away to Missouri to learn his trade. my father only went to the fifth grade in school and you could not stump my father in arithmetic problems or anything like that. if we got stuck my dad was there to help us. he was self educated in that respect and they sent him down to Missouri to learn his trade and he did the working was with dynamite. there was a hole in the line that was his job to mend it in the line. and one time it had been inspected by my father by the inspector. I came home from work one day and my dad was lying on the couch with his hands up here pillow over his face there was one speck that they didn't see it was so tiny it was down in the corner and they didn't see it he went to the doctors for weeks and had to have lead taken out of his face

There was a dynamite company in Dollar Bay  
MD: ya that was powder company and he had to repair that. The troths actually what he actually did but during the depression we had five children and there was not that much work there and he was put as a fireman and he had already walked home from atlas powder and about 2 miles from Dollar Bay to home. he walked that in winter. they put him as a fireman because of having a larger family. he got big under the depression and gradually he picked up/

he got paid being a fireman?

MD: oh ya he went down there to get the fires burning to keep going the company. No no in the plant not in the mine he still worked for the company. And I'll tell ya even the drug stores and that they well my people knew my mom and dad ?. I remember Mr. Brooks told my dad, my mom was sick a lot, Mr. Brooks told my dad said don't you ever go without your medication for your wife Jules because he said I when you've got it you will pay your bills. And they lived payday to payday that what they did and sometimes you paid some on your groceries then or groceries in your meat departments. They carried you you know. and they know when you had it that you would pay your bills

so there was lots of credit through the local stores?

MD: sure their had to be.

so you said there was 5 kids, 5 children and what was a average day like what did you do day to day to survive?

MD: I don't know we just did I guess. Just went we took each day as it came and that's what you did. Like I say when I graduated in '33 it was very very hard you couldn't get a job. Well what I did was a friend of my mothers had a boarding house in east Houghton for tech students Ervin Pulps mother and she called up my mom one day and she says how would Marge like to come out and wait tables for me. And that's what I did to make my own little spending money and would go out and help her set up the tables and then I would go home and go back again.

when was this after high school?

yea that was one of the years when I like I say I laid around you couldn't find jobs. I tried and tried and tried you just couldn't find a job that was right for you

When did you meet grandpa?

When did I meet grandpa. Oh my goodness. I met him, I was working, and I worked 7 years in the dime store. Like I said I started out at \$9 and when I quit I was making \$12.50 and that was the wages that we made then. I met him in, I'm trying to think back the years, I met him first in about '39. I went out with him naturally I wanted him very much. I would run into him and that but we never really went out and one night I was going home from work and he

went by with his brother in the car and he stopped and he said would like a ride home? and I said yea sure would. so his brother got out and got in and his brother got in again and we went home and I went in and I said to my mom I bet I'm gonna have a date tonight. My mother says what makes you think so. I said just wait and see he wouldn't ask me in front of his brother. He went across the bridge to the gas station and he called me and we went to the movie and that was the beginning of it.

When did you finally get married then?

MD: Dates I'm not very good with anymore. I went out to San Francisco and we got on the bus and we went to he was off he had Saturday night and Sunday Liberty. He didn't get off the ship until 4:00. I met him downtown. We got on the bus and we drove to Reno and got married got on the bus and went back to San Francisco. Then we went up into our room that we had that was a lighthouse keeping room it was nice it was clean and it was nice had a little plate. I even fixed steak on that little plate and we had the neat coupons so I had saved them so when he would come in then we could splurge a little bit. Then I said we went back and I changed and put on my wedding dress that I would have gotten married in but for going on the bus I wore a suit instead. Then we went downtown because I had to call my mother and dad and tell them that I was married. That was that day. then he left on Monday morning and I was heading back on Tuesday night that was my honeymoon.

do you know what he during the depression?

MD: he worked as a truck driver.

did he work?

MD: he was a very good rider. he ???? he drove big big semi. after he came home he got out of service and when he came home he took time off and we lived on holland street and he came in upset. he was coming down on ? it was steep steep at that time and the back of his trailer was between his cab and it was there in the back of his truck drive past but do not have an accident. he never applied at the bell telephone company he was ?. they were up a new crew I think? and they wanted him to be the driver and he was very very good driver so he would drive around in his truck and he worked for the bell company for 30 years.

he kept his job driving truck during the depression too.

MD: Yeah

when did the government relief start?

MD: oh god, I really do not know.

did your family get any kind of government relief?

MD: no, we were not that bad at all. we always had enough we did not have to have relief. my mother was very economical. my dad always said take what you can eat on your plate do not overload. there is more there if you want more don't waste food. and of course and to this day I don't eat butter? I said all I can afford

is butter .? my folks were fortunate that they kept enough ahead and then they see took in boarders and ate meal with us and my parents gave up their big bedrooms and we had these three students who stayed with us and they came in as freshmen and they stayed through their junior year and their last senior year. they moved in with their friends later on. our table was ?????

so you took in boarders and your dad kept on working do you know what kind of wages he got?

MD: that I do not know I don't think I remember seeing a check for that for my dad because he came home and my mom took over and that was it you know, like I saw they weren't very much

Int: and you lived right by the high school?

MD: I was two years old when they moved in there. I never remember any other house but that and my dad did all the repair work that needed to be done, carpentry work, my father was a very good carpenter.

Int: How long were his work days? like 8, 9, 10 hours

MD: they would be on the train, they had a train that was when it was running full time and they would be the train I think like at 7:00 o'clock in the morning and then we would come home I don't think more than if I saw half an hour I'm exaggerating for their lunch just long enough to have a pipe and a lunch cause there was no smoking out there so they had to be in a secluded spot then they would come home but we were allowed to go on the train and we used to go with him and they had blueberries out there and we picked blueberries and we'd make a picnic out of it but we'd come home washtubs full of blue berries and mom would take what she wanted, that's how we made money, we had our regular customers that were waiting for us to bring blueberries around and we would babysit for from 5 o'clock sometime in the afternoon and it all depended you fed those kids you did the dishes you got the to bed you made them , 10 cents sometimes 15 cents, you didn't get home till 11 o'clock that money that was ours that was the way we made money so and we were allowed an allowance not during the depression but she would give us a quarter a week and we had to make up our minds were we going to football game which you went to for ten cents then for 15 cents you could have a beautiful tin roof I mean with scoops of ice cream whipping cream on it and nuts on top and chocolate you can't touch it now

INT: The football high school football team. they didn't get cut?

MG: Oh yeah the had their teams they had their teams I went to school when we had the best football team and best basketball teams that Houghton had for many many years provided with Louy and tom I think was his name they were wonderful all strainer was the center and he was a tall, tall, man and he never tried to make a goals a basket but one night I don't what possessed he charged from the center and that was the most perfect basket made in my

entire life. it went in that hoop just from the center of the floor.

INT: did any programs get cut? like the curricular wise I don't think they had hockey then in high school.

MD: no high school was not hockey then.

INT: they football, basketball, and track.

MD: I don't remember much about track if they did I don't really not much interested in that. they had gym class. they had a lot of basic program. I never had to take gym because????? I had an extra study hour? they had and the kids came to school hours I mean there was some of them came from farms. and the had buses that brought them in,

INT: do you remember regulations at school like you had to go so many weeks in a year?

MD: well we started after labor day and the school went up to June not May. and we would have 2 weeks of Christmas time. we never had our Easter time. when I started school see the old school burned down and we had there were two older homes that was where we went to school and I was int the fourth grade when we got into the new school.

INT: and the had in the school they had kindergarten through 12th grade?

MD: oh yeah, I can remember when my brother Neil started he was the youngest. and I could hear him crying from the kindergarten and I was in the sixth grade. he was mama's boy. I always remember one in the sixth grade she was very very strict. we always had to march in a body and my girlfriend and I were standing and our knees were knocking. I mean we were so scared to go into this teacher's room her name was miss Anderfield and she said go line up back there. I am not ready for you. I haven't dismissed my class yet and then she dismissed them and assigned us seats and talked to us and I learned more from her than anyone in my entire life. when I went from sixth to seventh grade she called me and said Mary if you ever have problems don't be afraid to come and talk to me. actually I did learn more from her than any teacher that I ever had. and then my brother Bill had diphtheria when I was in sixth and we were quarantined the boys and my dad stayed next door and then I stayed home with my mom. we missed three weeks of school. and I got back and arithmetic was my bug a boo that was my bug a boo I loved history and I we had arithmetic class, so the next time we had an arithmetic test I got an A on it, and she held it up as an example for the class what you can do, she couldn't do anything about what I hadn't ya know because I hadn't had the books or anything we were not. If we had any school books at home they were all burnt. Library books were burnt and everything. None of those books could be returned that had been taken home they all had to be burnt.

When did the depression start to lift?

MD: The war helped a lot. But every body had money. There was

gold actually gee I don't know. I to go that there was one like up  
Do you remember when the mine started to reopen?

MD: No see the mines didn't run for quite a while. We used to have  
every time we had company during the summer we that was one of the  
things you did was go up. Then the mines found out after and they  
didn't like that very much but we would go up and watch them go  
down on those carts. That was part of your companies trip. They  
ran I'm trying to think because I know there was an accident in  
Ripley where two men were killed on a they were going over a  
trussel or something like when the train went down. I don't know  
just what it was but. They ran but limited probably you know. I  
don't even remember now what year they closed. I don't remember  
that at all.

Was it early in the depression?  
Because it started when the stock market fell in October.

MD: yea and they and a lot of people when I started working then  
there were a lot of people they had I suppose there were relief  
checks like ya know and I remember because I picked up a check off  
of the counter at the dime store and it was signed and I went and  
I turned it into the office and lady who lived up on the hill. She  
had gone down the street and she came back. You should have seen  
her she was so scared and she went to one of the girls whose  
counter it had been on but I had gone by and picked it up and she  
told her said well I have found it and I had turned it in that  
woman came up to me and she was almost crying she said you don't  
know she said just missed it and that was my food and everything  
else. That was her money for the whole month. it was rough and  
yet I can't really say that I was ever deprived of anything that  
much. we had food we had. We could go out and we had. Our big  
thrill on Friday and Saturday doors were open on Saturday night not  
Friday night we worked until 9:00 and the bunch of us girls from  
the dime store we would go down to the ? and they would have a  
steak about that size and french fries for 40 cents. I mean we were  
filled up it was plenty for 40 cents. You pay \$10 for that now.

What type of projects there was like the civilian conservation corp  
and works projects administration. What types stuff did they build  
around here or do you know

MD: I couldn't think of what I wanted to say. You know well that  
ship up there going to the harbor that was built by WPA workers.  
That stone ship that was built by them. And of course they had a  
lot of CCC camps they were called. A lot of the younger men that's  
where they went and they worked in the woods and that I suppose  
chopping trees I never did know just what they did. That's where  
a lot of those men there wasn't work for everybody and they went  
out there in those camps.

Where there camps around here?

MD: not directly here. It seems to me that there was one like up on the Naubenway up in that area somewhere. I can remember that but I never saw one. And of course then when the boat came