

November 5th interview with Marjorie Deges about the Copper Country in the 30's

Int: Ok when were you born?

MD: 1915

Int: 1915, and when did the depression first effect the U.P. or when did you guys first feel it?

MD: I would say like 29, 30, 31 and I graduated in 33 and I couldn't get a job for two years after, it was very hard you couldn't find work anywhere I mean there just wasn't any jobs I got tried of lying around you know? and then when I finally got a job that be I was called by the Hancock Woolworths I'll be darn if I was called by the Houghton woolworths and Penny's and I would have been in Houghton but I already excepted the one in and

Int: So you worked at Woolworths?

MD: Yes, and that was in 1935 I started there for nine dollars a week forty-eight hour week.

Int: What was school like you had been when it started freshmen or sophomore?

MD: It was fine I mean you had the schools we had wonderful teachers I will say that and we didn't have to buy our books or anything I mean it was you know

Int: Was there any schools that had to buy there books or all public funding?

MD: All public ones were free but all catholic had to buy their books but not

Int: They didn't close? The catholic schools stayed open?

MD: They were ran yes

Int: Even through the depression?

MD: Let me think now I might be wrong. Yeah they had catholic schools and they had to buy there books they probably don't now I don't know what they do but eventually they closed and came to the high school, the funded high school

Int; What did your parents do?

MD: You mean in working? Well my dad was a lead burner he was sent by, he worked for Atlas Powder Company in Dollar Bay

Int: What's that? Atlas Powder, What do they do?

MD: the company sent him away to Missouri to learn his trade at being a light burner my father

only went to the fifth grade in school and you couldn't stump my dad at arithmetic or anything like that, that we got stuck my dad was there to help us he was self educated in that way and they sent him down there to Missouri to learn this trade he did working with dynamite your talking about dynamite and he if there was a hole in there it was his job to mend it, and one time it had been excepted by my father by the inspector I came home from work one day my dad was laying on the coach like this his hands up here and ? on his face and there was one spec they didn't see it was so tiny it was down in corner and they didn't see it and that blew up in his face. He went for weeks to the doctor and had to have lead put all over his face.

INT: You mean there was a dynamite company in Dollar Bay he worked at?

MD: Yes it was the powder company. And he had to repair, the troughs and that. What he did, what he actually did, I really don't know that much but I remember that incident, you know. During the Depression we had five children, they had five children. There wasn't that much work there so he was put as a fireman and he has already walked home from Atlas Powder which is four miles out from Dollar....or two miles from Dollar Bay I guess and then four miles from Dollar Bay and then home. He's walked that in the winter.

INT: Did he keep his job?

MD: They put him as a fireman because of having a larger family.

INT: So he got work.

MD: Yes, and he got paid and then of course when it gradually picked up again you know but for the time that is what he did.

INT: He got paid for being a fireman? Do you know what got....

MD: Oh yeah. He went down there and kept the fires burning to keep the plant going.

INT: In the mine?

MD: No, no in the plant not in the mine.

INT: At the powder place.

MD: Yes. He still worked for the company.

INT: At least he was lucky then to keep his job.

MD: Yes, even like the drug store and that...Well people knew my mom and dad they were honest I remember when MR. Brooks told my dad.... my mom was sick a lot. Mr. Brooks told my dad " Don't you ever go without your medication for your wife Julius because he said " I know you got it, you will pay your bills." And they lived pay day to pay day that is what they did. Sometimes you paid some on your grocery bill, your grocery and your meats departments

they carried you know. They knew when you had it that you would pay your bills.

INT: There was a lot of credit through the local stores?

MD: Sure there had to be I mean you know.

INT: So you said that there were five kids..children.

MD: Yes.

INT: What was an average day like, what did you do day to day too survive?

MD: I don't know we just did I guess you know. We took each day as it came that is what you did and like I say when I graduated in 33 it was very very hard you couldn't get a job, so what I did, a friend of my mothers had a boarding house in east Houghton for Tech students Erivin ? mother and she called up my mother and said 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 I would go out and help her set up the tables at noon time and then I'd go home and go back again and set up the tables.

Int: When was this? After high school?

MD: Um,um yeah, that was one of the years when I, like I said I laid around you couldn't find I tried and tried and tried you just couldn't find a job that was it.

Int: When did you meet grandpa?

MD: When did I meet grandpa? Oh my goodness, 19 ,I meant him I was working and I worked seven years in the dime store, like I said I started out at nine dollars per week and when I quite I was making \$12.50 and I worked seven years and that was good wages. I mean that was good wages that I was making.

Int: Did you still live at home?

MD: I meant him, in a I'm trying to think back the years I started Well I meant him first in about '39 and I went out with him and naturally I didn't like him very much and we you know I'd run into him out 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 said would you like a ride home? and I said yeah I sure would. So his brother got out and I got in and his brother got in the back and we went home and I went in and I said to my mom I bet I'm going to have a date tonight and my mother said what makes you think so and I said just wait and see. He wouldn't ask me in front of his brother we 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.

Int: When did you finally get married then?

MD: In lets see the war started in , dates I'm not very good with anymore, I went out well '42 I

was married in '42, I went out to San Francisco and we went we got on the bus and went to he was off he had Saturday night and Sunday liberty he didn't get of the ship till four o'clock and I meant him downtown, we got on the bus and went to Reno rode on the bus to Reno and got married and got on the bus and went back to San Francisco, and then I we went up to our room that we had it was a light house keeping room it was nice, it was clean and it was nice it had a little plate I even fixed steak on that plate and we had you know neat coupons and stuff so I had saved them for when he would come in and then we would splurged a little bit but then I said we went back and I changed and I put on my wedding dress that I would have gotten married in but with going on the bus I wore a suit instead which was ? but it's a suit and then we went downtown cause I had to call my mother and dad to tell then that I was married and that was that day and he left lets see he left Monday morning and I didn't see again until Tuesday night so that was my honeymoon.

Int: Do you know what he did during the depression?

MD: He was a truck driver,

Int: Did he work?

MD: He worked, he was a very good driver and he drove a great big semi for Haus Brewery. That's when I meant him that's what he was doing. It was the Haus Brewery. He drove a big big semi and one night he came home and after he came home from service got out of service he was four and half years in service and when he came home he didn't take time off two days he was back to work and we were living on Owen Street and he came in that night and he was kinda upset and I said what happened and he was coming down Snake River Hill which was steep steep steep at that time and the trailer the back of the trailer was along with his truck what do they call that thing? cab it was there and he looked up and there was the back of his truck and his boss was Jewish and he always used to tell him drive fast but don't have an accident you know. But then, we were still living on Holland Street, when the bell, he never applied at Bell Telephone Company for a job, he was approached. They were starting up a new crew of, lets see I think four men in the crew if I am not mistaken, and they wanted him to be the driver, he was a very very good driver, I will give him credit for that. And he so he was driving ? all that stuff, he worked for the Bell Telephone Company for 30 years.

INT: So he kept his job, driving truck during the depression too?

MD: yes,

INT: What, when did the government relief start?

MD: Oh gosh, That I really don't know, that I couldn't tell you.

INT: Did your family get any type of relief,

MD: What

INT: Did you family get any type of relief, Government relief?

MD: No. We weren't that bad off, we you know we always had enough that we didn't have to have relief. But oh my mother was very economical in fixing foods, you know, my dad would always say, take what you can eat on your plate don't overload, there is more there if you want more, but don't waste food, you know, and of course we mixed that oleo and little with that little old yellow thing in it, and I said to this day I use butter, I won't eat that oleo. I said as long as I can afford butter I am going to have it. But no my folks were fortunate in that they kept enough ahead and you see my mother took in boarders from Tech. and they ate meals with us and they stayed and they gave up there bedroom, there big bedroom, and my mom and dad did, we had these two students stay with us, they came in as freshman and they stayed to there Junior year, and there last year as seniors they wanted to be nearer to the college and they moved, they had made friends and they moved in with a friend out there. They were like my brothers, they were like two more brothers, our table was really laughter and fun and that because what they couldn't think of my brothers could so.

INT: So you took in boarders, and your dad kept working, do you know what kind of wages he got?

MD: That I don't know, I don't ever remember seeing it a check for my dad, it came home and my mom took over that was it. you know. But we just like I say they weren't very much.

INT: And you lived right by the high school?

MD: Yes, I was two years old when they moved in there. I never remember living in any other house then that. My dad did all the repair work that needed to be done, all the carpentry work my father would do.

INT: How long were his days, work days?

MD: They would be on the train, they had a train that went out to the Atlas when it was running full time.

INT: That stopped during the Depression?

MD: Yes, and they would be on the train I think at seven o'clock in the morning and then they would come home. I don't think they had more then if I saw half-an-hour I think that I am exaggerating for their lunch. It was just long enough to have a pipe and a lunch because there was no smoking out there because of the dynamite. They had to be in a secluded spot to smoke. Then they would come home but we were allowed to go on the train. We used to go with him and that, they had blueberries out there and we would pick blueberries. We would make a picnic out of it but we would come home with washtubs full of blueberries. My mother would take what she wanted and then use kids, that is how we made money! We had our regular customers that were waiting around for us to bring blueberries around. And we would babysit from five o'clock sometime in the afternoon and it all depended lots of times you fed those kids, you did the dishes, you got them to bed, you made them and put them to bed for ten cents and sometimes fifteen cents and sometimes you did not get home until, sometimes it was eleven o'clock before

you would get home. That money, it was ours and that was the way that we made money. We were allowed an allowance, not during the worst of the Depression, but when the money began to come in a little better she would give us a quarter a week. And we had to make up our minds if we wanted to go too a basketball game, or a football game which you went to for ten cents, remember that. And then for fifteen cents you would have a beautiful tin roof and I mean a tin roof with scoops of ice cream, and real whipping cream on it and nuts on top of it with chocolate. Oh boy, you couldn't touch it now!

INT: The high school football that didn't get cut?

MD: No, they had their teams. I went to school when they had the best football and basketball team that Houghton had had for many years. Because I was there with Terthewey, and ?????, and ????? they were wonderful. Gullstrand was the center. He was a tall, tall, tall man, I mean lad I thought that he was a man. He never tried to make a goal, you know a basket but this one night I don't know what possessed him but he turned from the center.. that was the most perfect basket I have ever seen made in my entire life it went in that hoop just like that. Right from the center of the floor!

INT: Did programs get cut like as far as extracurricular... I don't think that they had hockey in the high school...

MD: Hockey was not in the high school, no.

INT: But like they had football, basketball, did they have track?

MD: I don't remember much about track, if they did I don't really remember much about it I wasn't that interested in it.

Int: What about through gym class was that....

MD: Oh yeah they had gym class.

INT: So they kept all their basic programs

MD: Oh yeah they had all their basic programs. I never had to take gym because I had, had a hernia as a youngster I had an extra study hall and I liked that! The kids all came to school always well dressed there was I mean there were some of them that came from the farms but they were always well dressed. There were a lot of kids that came in from the farms and they had buses that ran and brought them in.

INT: Do you remember the regulations of school like you had to go for so many weeks a year?

MD: Well we started after Labor Day but we were never through until June into June not in May, we were always until June. It seems more like the middle of June and we would have our two weeks at Christmas. But we never had Easter time we would have awhile like Friday like a longer weekend that was it. When I started school see the old school burnt down and we us kids

in the grade school that were two old homes across you know where the parking lot is across from the old school now. There were two older homes there and that is where we went to school and I was in the fourth grade when I finally got into the new school. When we got the new school that was something, boy oh boy. It was something compared to what we had had. I couldn't tell you anything about the old school because that I don't remember a thing about.

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

MD: They had what?

INT: kindergarten through 12th grade?

MD: Oh yes. I can remember when my brother Bill started and I was in the sixth grade. Bill was the youngest and I could hear him crying in the kindergarten class from where I was in the sixth grade. I knew it was him because he didn't want to go to school and leave mamma, he was mamma's boy. We had good... I suppose they do now, we had good and we had bad teachers. But I always remember the one in the sixth grade, and she was very, very, very strict and she would when we were to go in there from the fifth grade we would march in a ??? from one room to the other. And we went in there and my girlfriend and I were standing there and without a ??? our knees were knocking I mean we were so scared to go into this teachers room her name was Ms. Nanderfield. And she just said go right up back there I am not ready for you yet I haven't dismissed my class yet. So then she dismissed them and she assigned us seats and talked to us and I learned more from her then any teacher that I have had in my entire life. And then I went from her room straight to the seventh grade, she called me one day and she said "Marg", she said " If you ever have problems don't ever feel afraid to come and ask me for help." Actually, I learned more from her then any teacher I ever had. And then my brother Bill had diphtheria when I was in the sixth grade and we were quarantined so the boys and my dad stayed next door and Betty and I stayed home with my mom. We missed three weeks of school and when I went back and arithmetic was my bugaboo, I loved history, I just thrived on history. We had an arithmetic test and I flunked, so the next time we had an arithmetic test I had an A on it and she held me up as an example to the class you know, what you can do. She couldn't do anything about what I had, because I hadn't had the books or anything, we couldn't take, if we had any school books at home they were all burnt, library books were burnt, none of those books could be returned that had been taken home they all had to be burnt.

INT: When did the depression start to lift? like the war

MD: The war helped a lot. The war helped a lot. Then everyone had money. It was gold, actually gee I don't know.

INT: Do you remember when the mines started to reopen.

MD: NO. No. See the mines didn't run for quite a while. We used to have everytime we would have company in the summer that was one of the things we would did, you would go up and, the men at the mines we found out after they didn't like that very much but we would go up and watch them go down on those carts and go up on those carts, you know that was part of your

companies trip you know.

INT: yeah.

MD: But they ran I am trying to think because I know there was an accident in Ripley where two men were killed on a, they were going over a trestle and something happened, the train went down I don't remember just what it was, they ran but limited probably you know. I don't remember what year they closed, I don't remember that at all.

INT: Was it early? in the depression, it started the stock market fell in October, I think the 29th.

MD: and a lot of people, when I started working then, there were a lot of people that they had I suppose relief checks like, and I remember this one lady I picked up a check off the counter in the dime store and it was signed and I went in and turned it into the office. That lady lived up on the hill and she was gone down the street and she came back, you should of seen her she was so scared, she went to one of the girls and counter it had been on and I had happened to go by and picked it up and she had told her I had found it and I had turned it in. That woman came up to me and she was almost crying and she said you don't know I just missed it, that was my food and everything else, that was her money for the month. It was rough and yet I can't really say I was never deprived of anything that much, I mean we had food, we could go out, and we had and our big thrill on Friday, on Saturday, not Friday stores were open on Saturday night, we worked until 9 o'clock, and then a bunch of us girls that worked at the dime store would go down to the Venice and we would have a steak oh about that size and french fries for 40 cents. I mean you filled up for 40 cents. you pay \$10 for that now.

INT: If your lucky only \$10. What type of projects, Civilian Conservation Corp, the Works Projects Administration, what type of stuff did they build around here or do?

MD: Oh, you mean the

INT: The WPA

MD: yeah, I couldn't think of what I wanted to say, yeah you know that ship up there going up to the harbor, that was built by the WPA workers.

INT: That stone

MD: Yeah, that stone ship. That was built by them. And of course they had a lot of CCC camps they called them. And a lot of the younger men went, that is where they went, they worked in the woods and that, I suppose chopping trees I never did know what they did, but that is where a lot of those men, you know that is where, there wasn't work for everybody. So that is where they went. There wasn't work for everybody, so they went out there in those camps.

INT: Was there camps around here?

MD: not directly here, seems to me there was one up towards Ontanagon, that way somewhere,



but I could remember them, I never saw one. Then when the war came so many why so many felt like they ? the 15th division there was 100 men left that one day.

INT: is that what kind of spurred the economy around here again, everybody needed raw materials.

MD: and they ah that was a day, stores closed they marched on the street, everybody was down at the depot saying good bye, that was really something.

INT: what kind of transportation was available?

MD: When I was younger we had street cars, then it went to buses. you know, and people had cars, I mean they had cars, remember you could get gas of course in comparison you had to think of the money you had and that. you know. And we had the theaters to go to there was the old star foltun, down where there was a drug store in there after that and the carriage which burnt, and we used to go they had ? heaven, they had the ground floor, the balcony and then they had ? heaven. And when they would have these plays that is where us kids would sit in ? heaven. because you didn't have the money to, but we were aloud to go, we would climb those big steep steps.

INT: Was it called that for people who couldn't pay or because it was kind of segregated?

MD: People who didn't have money, it wasn't just kids that sat in Niger Heaven, a lot of adults too.

INT: Was there much segregation as far as the races.

MD: WE didn't have that actually if you would see a negro, I think it was a barber that was a negro, we had very few, now in our neighborhood, we called us the nation whatever you want to call it, my dad was German and Danish and my mother was English, we had Cerian next door, we had Chinese down on the main street just down below us and we had this negro man and his sister that lived around the corner from us, we were called the Niger nation actually that is what it was. Oh they were nice, I can't tell you about his sister, I tell you that, she would not go out until she would go at night and us kids would run like heck because we were scared of her, she would never hurt you, I mean we were kids, we would here this clunk clunk clunk she was out with her brother's shoes on we found out later that is what it was, she was more afraid of people, and our neighbor went to school with her and she was a beautiful girl and she had naturally curly hair. And the teachers were so jealous of her, that was before my time too, you know they used to hit her on the head from side to side like that and punishing her and she had a fear of people she wouldn't go around, she would go out at night, so I didn't know what she looked like, I never really saw her. But she and her a brother lived up there in one of those houses. I didn't even know what he did, he must have had some kind of job.

INT: But there wasn't much racism?

MD: No,no

INT: Was it a pretty tight community?

MD: Yeah, and we had there was a ??? would be out at Tech there was a fellow from ??? going here and he was boarding, roomy at this lady's house and he asked if his brother could stay here. And she said "Oh sure", because he was younger and he was coming up to go to Tech and when he came he was black and he was the seventh son of the seventh son and the woman had to tell the brother that he couldn't live there because the other boys wouldn't put up with that. He found a place to stay and he went to school.

INT: What is the seven son of the seventh son?

MD: The black came out in the seventh son of the seventh son I never heard of it before either but that is what they said. I was told at the time....

INT: She didn't let him stay there because he was black?

MD: Yes, now boy there is not any difference. Then of course a negro .. seeing a negro was rare you didn't have that many. I know when I went to California and that is the first time that I have ever saw that. There was this marine and he was tall and the marines really ??? they were beautiful and he was walking down the street I actually I can't , I mean I have nothing against them I don't mean that at all they have much right on this earth as anybody else. But it stopped me I stopped in the street because he was so tall and he was with a little short negro girl and that didn't look right to me you know not having seen that stuff but it is common now. I mean it was then to, it got common during the war that is when they started to see a lot of that, mixed. Well there was a girl in Hancock.....

INT: The marine was a white...the marine was white?

MD: Yes, this girl from Hancock went down to Detroit....a lot of people went down to the cities and got jobs. And a friend of hers went down there and rapped on the door and a negro came to the door and she had married this man, and nobody here knew it!! She came after that, she did come back and they had two children, they ad beautiful children, beautiful girls. But these small towns were not used to that I mean you did not have that.

INT: Do you still think that they are not used to it?

MD: And of course there weren't that many that came to Tech either you know. But I always remember that ??? ???? wanted his brother to get in and he couldn't.

INT: Are there any stories in particular that stick out in you remind about the 30's?

MD: No, not really I can't think of any off hand. I know we were lucky we were the one of the fortunate families and that my dad did keep working and my mother was ??? to have borders and we were fortunate.

INT: So financially you were....

MD: We were pretty good, we were good. But I can't think of any particular story of that time.

INT; What do you think learned about the Depression, something that you might think of today?

MD: I guess you know having to do without sometimes that you really wanted and not having. I know I wore a lot of made over clothes, my mother could take nothing and make something out of it actually. She would never make pants but he made boys shirts and Betty and I... my folks had friends that had money and they left Hancock when they left Hancock and they had two girls that were that much older then my sister and I and boy we would get boxes of clothes from them and that was fantastic, I mean nobody from here knew that anyway. We had all those clothes we never would have had, mother did make a lot of our clothes Like I said she was a beautiful sewer. Then when she tried to dress Betty and I are alike , I mean the same pattern, to save on patterns is what it was. Different colors but. I was always tot he pink and the red and Betty was more to the blue but we had to wear the same pattern. I don't know, we all got through it and I know a lot of people that had it a heck of a lot worse then we did and some of those families, they just didn't have anything and we didn't have much but I can remember at Christmas this one family, one of the boys were in school with me and ah my mother she always preserved, pickled and everything like that, and we always took a box over to that particular family at Christmas time, and they had a big family you know we were five and they were more that that. People had big big family's in those days, lots of them did you know. But seems like everyone got through, I don't ever remember anybody just starving to death or anything like that you know, there was always some then of course there were some of those that were getting aide and they didn't know how there was a lot of waste on alot of that stuff because they weren't eating the food that they were been given you know they had to much that they were been given

Int: Did you ever feel guilty?

MD: No

Int: Cause your parents keep their jobs and a lot of people didn't.

MD: No, no guess I was young I didn't even think about that.

Oh I mean you know, I can remember when my dad saying one time it's pretty bad when a man can't even have a nickel to go down and buy a cigar. I mean we had we didn't have a lot but we were better of than alot of them were you know but we had a mother and father who knew how to manage pretty well too.

Int: If there was anything that you learned from that time you could pass on to people now what would you tell them?

MD: Um I don't know, put your trust in the lord I guess and just go on from that you learn to live differently and that you learn to do without these things, like I said you have a nickel, were you going to get an icecream cone, or were you gonna get a bar or were you gonna go to the movie, you know I mean you had you didn't have money like they have had, and then when the war was

on everything went, everybody had money.