

Interview with Peter Arsenault  
December 3, 1998  
Interviewed by Ashley Butterfield

- Me: This is Ashley Butterfield, here with Pete Arsenault, and I'm interviewing him for the Red Dust Book. What is your full name?
- Pete: Peter John Arsenault
- Me: Why were you named this?
- Pete: Because my mother named all her boys after saints.
- Me: Ok, Did you have a nickname when you were growing up?
- Pete: I was called "Little Fizzer" (Laugh)
- Me: (Laugh) Why were you called this?
- Pete: I don't know, but I didn't have it for too long.
- Me: Ok, when and where were you born?
- Pete: I was born July the 8<sup>th</sup>, 1929, Salsbury, Michigan.
- Me: Do you remember any older family members from when you were growing up?
- Pete: Yes, all my older family members.
- Me: Was there anything they told you about? Like past experiences?
- Pete: Well, a little bit, mostly work hard and keep my mouth clean.
- Me: Did you have to do chores when you were younger?
- Pete: Yes, cutting wood, bringing it in, shoveling snow, washing dishes. being 7 boys and only 3 girls in the family, us boys had to do a lot of girls work.
- Me: Did you have one that you didn't like doing at all?
- Pete: Not really.
- Me: What would you consider the most important invention that has been made in your Life?
- Pete: I spose the space shuttle going up to the moon, and stuff like that, most important invention.
- Me: How is the world different from when you were younger?
- Pete: Well, when I was a child, we just had radio to listen to at night, until the 50's now they got t.v. and all the other things.
- Me: Did your family ever go through really hard times?
- Pete: Yes, we did. We were in the depression, we all had to some kind of chore. I remember back when I was 7 and 8 yrs. old, we went out in the woods to cut wood to support our family. My brothers were in the CCC camps , Civilian Conservation Corps, in the 30's, I had 4 brothers in there help bring home money home to support family, they were very tough times.
- Lois: Will you name all your family?
- Pete: Yes, there were 7 brothers, and only named after the saints, oldest was Paul, next was Patrick, next was Pasco, next was Phillip, next was also a Peter who was 2 old and then he died, then my brother Pious, and I was the last boy, and they me Peter. The two girls were Elaine and Ethel.
- Me: What were your schools like?
- Pete: Schools? I went to the Perolko School, 8 grades, which was ok. They taught us religion and respect for older people, I enjoyed my grade school more than I did the High School. In the convent school, the nuns are very strict, I remember I got

cracked a few times with the geography book for hollering out, mainly because boy behind me was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade for 3 yrs, and he was always flicking my ears and then I'd yell and the teacher would hit me with the geography book, and when I got in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and was a bad boy, my dad was janitor of the school he talked to me for 20 minutes and said get a tear in your eye and go up to the teacher, and at that time in the school there was a horse barn and Mike Laskyoung had his 2 teams that brought in wood and coal and in the morning I walked in from Salsbury to school, it was kinda early so I stopped in the horse barn, and when I came in in the mornings the teachers would say, do you have to spend your days in the horse barns? You smell like an old horse. I said but I like horses.

Me: What was your favorite subject in school?

Pete: Favorite subject was geography and math. I was good in math because my dad taught us how to play cribbage which made me good in counting. We played cribbage from the time we were 4 or 5 years old, so that was a fave thing to do then, my dad was a great card player and helped me out in my math.

Me: Do you remember any of your teachers?

Pete: Well, yes, I remember most of them in the grade school, Sister Lawrence, the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher who hit me with the geography book, and then the 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Patricia who always hit me with the edge of the ruler, and Sister Lawrence in the eighth grade teacher who just sent me down to my dad. In high school, I had a couple favorite teachers, the 3 years I spent in school, Arthur Strand and Loretta Macdona I spent 22 yrs, in school and I dropped out in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and joined the army with my mother's and father's consent, but after I got back from army I decided education was the way to go, and I finished High school through correspondence, and went on to college and got a master's degree.

Me: What was the degree in?

Pete: Industrial Education and a minor in Conservation

Me: Was there a dress code you had to follow?

Pete: Yes, there was a very strict dress code, you weren't allowed to wear overalls, but being from a poor family, we wore overalls, but one thing, my mother said they were clean and not patched. Not like today, you see people in overalls with knees sticking out and that, we had very clean overalls and they were patched occasionally, but there was nothing, soap was a little expensive, but the water was free so mother said there was no reason why we should be in dirty clothes or have dirty faces.

Me: You mentioned the kid's styles today, do you dislike them?

Pete: NO, being a teenager myself years ago you always had to have a little something put into a style and it kinda goes against my grain, but that's the style, I think that if the floppy pants and Jackets make em happy then well then I guess that's just the trend of the day.

Me: How old were you when you started dating?

Pete: I think 13 years old I had a crush on a couple of girls in my class.

Me: Do you remember any of those girls names?

Pete: Yes, one was Betty Lou and the other I don't remember, but there wasn't too much to do when I was a teenager, but we roller skated with the girls and stuff.

Me: Did you have to have a chaperone?  
Pete: Well, they weren't dates like today, we'd meet at the ice rink or the show, corse, being a from a poor family, we didn't go to many shows. I think the only show I went to was once a year, and we called it the patatoe show because if we brought in a sack of patatoes or a can good you got a free ticket to this one movie a year.  
Me: Has there been anybody in your life that you consider to be your soulmate?  
Pete: No not until I came out of the service, then I dated for a couple years and got married, my first marriage which lasted for 28 years and then my wife past away and then got married to my second wife and present wife, Lois.  
Me: What was your first wife's name?  
Pete: My first wife's name was Edna and she taught at the Ishpeming High School.  
Me: How old were you when you married?  
Pete: I was 38 yrs. old the first time and 55 yrs. old the second time.  
Me: How long have you and Lois been married?  
Pete: About 15 years.  
ME: How would you describe Lois?  
Pete: I think I had a fondness for teachers, because my first wife was a teacher, my second wife was a teacher, and I eventually became a teacher. Both were and are wonderful people that have helped me in my life.  
Me: What did you admire most about them?  
Pete: The honesty and the sincerity and a few things else together, why don't we go back to the chore part.  
Me: Ok.  
Pete: I remember one of the chores we had was to go out and get wood for the stove, where we lived there was a hill and we were able to get the dead wood off of there so, being there was a bill behind the house, he built a toboggan slide coming down into the yard, and my next oldest brother and I used to bring the wood down on a piece of sheet metal that we used as a toboggan. My dad instructed us only to take 3 or 4 pieces of wood down, but being like hekel and jekel, we always were mischeviouse, we put about 8 or 9 logs on the toboggan there was a curve in the slide, we shot over the top and there was an open pit that was about 5 thousand feet from the house, we went through about 3 barb wire fences, and we could only think of saving the wood. My dad was yelling Jump off, boys, jump off. By the time we stopped the toboggan we were about 30 or 40 feet from the edge of the pit. He was mad at us for almost losing our lives, trying to save the wood, I still can't sit down today.  
Me: Um, do you have kids  
Pet: Yes, I have 3 children, a boy and a girl.  
Me: Do you remember when they were born and when?  
Pete: My son was born in 1960, and my daughter was born in 1961.  
Me: What do you find to be the hardest thing about raising children?  
Pete: I think, setting values, some of us old values don't always coincide with the present day values. You don't have to beat up a child, usually a stern talk takes care of it. Once in a while I'd get angry, but I'd always walk away. You can't straighten things up when your mad.

Me: What do you think to be the easiest thing about raising children?  
Pete: well, set down the rules of the house, and make sure that everyone follows that respecting your elders.  
Me: Do you think you spoiled your children?  
Pete: I may have because growing up in the depression was hard, so when I had two children of my own, I gave them everything they wanted. I didn't want them to have the tough life that I had. They turned out ok, though, they both had jobs.  
Me: Were you a strict or leniant parent.  
pete: I thought I was strict, but I think I was more lenient.  
Me: What are your children's children's names?  
Pete: Son has a girl named Atlanta and my daughter didn't have a child.  
Me: What did you want to be when you were a child?  
Pete: I wanted to be a printer, I got that idea when I was peddling papers in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. In the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I was in charge of all the paper routes. In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade I swept the floor and did odds and ends. I respected the old gentlemen in the print shops and they taught me very much. Later on in life I taught printing for several years.  
Me: Are you retired?  
Pete: Yes. I've been retired for nine years and am enjoying it very much. I always have plenty to do. I don't know how I did my regular work. I belong to the service org and serve the funeral masses at the church. I like to hunt and fish.  
Me: Who was the person who had the most positive influence on your life?  
Pete: I think my oldest brother and all my of them had something to do with my life. We were a very close nit family and it was one for all and all for one.  
Me: Have you ever had a big influence on someone's life that you know about?  
Pete: Yes. A couple of incidents. When I taught grade school back in '59 and '60. I found this out about 30 yrs. later when one of the unruly boys brought up his son to meet me at a school function and said that I had straightened him out. One other thing about my life, was that I taught printing in 1968 in Nepal through a government agency for 6 months We printed educational things for the school I like, 1<sup>st</sup> grade readers that were teaching the english language.  
Me: For how long did you live in Nepal?  
Pete: For 6 months.  
Me: Do you go to church?  
Pete: Yes I go to church pretty faithfully.  
Me: What church do you attend?  
Pete: I go to the catholic church in Ishpeming.  
Me: Do you have any musical talent.  
Pete: I have a deaf ear for music. I tried playing guitar, violin, piano, but I don't have an ear for it. I tried guitar because my older brothers played it, but I never could master it.  
Me: So, you said that when there was younger there wasn't television.  
Pete: Nope. All we had was the radio. We used to listen to the shadow and spider man. phantom. We had to imagine things. We played a lot of cards. My house was the hangout then.  
Me: What kind of cars were there?

Pete: We had the model t's and A's. MY first car was a model a toupee that cost \$75.

Me: Wow. I bet a lot of younger people would love to find a car for that cheap.

Pete: Well, it was second hand.

Me: Was there anything else in your life that had a big significance?

Pete: The close nit family. We always see each other pretty often. I only have 3 brothers and one sister. Pious, Patrick, Phillip and Elaine.

Me: Thank you for letting me interview you.

Pete: Your welcome and I hope that it's beneficial for everyone.