

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
EDWARD SIMON DENOMIE
Infantry, Army National Guard, World War I
1979

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DeNomie, Edward Simon, (1895-1980). Oral History Interview, 1979.

User Copy: 2 audio cassettes (ca. 80 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 audio cassettes (ca. 80 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

Edward Simon DeNomie discusses his upbringing in Assinins (Michigan), an early Ojibwe mission, and his service in the 3rd Wisconsin Infantry regiment in the Mexican Expedition and World War I. Born in 1895, DeNomie describes growing up in lumber country, including his father's jobs as timber estimator, shop keep and butcher. He reflects on his childhood entertainments and the logistics of living in a secluded area. DeNomie also mentions the paths of his older siblings as they left Assinins for more populated areas in the early 1900s. He mentions his career as a successful high school athlete in Tomah (Wisconsin), where he attended an Indian school and signed up for the National Guard. DeNomie reflects on being called up for border patrol in 1916 as part of the Mexican Expedition, and shortly after being called for duty in World War I. He outlines his path from Camp Douglas (Wisconsin) to Waco (Texas) where several Wisconsin and Michigan regiments were combined to make the 32nd Infantry Division of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF).

He reflects on the condition of the French countryside and people during and after the war, and describes his return to the United States in 1920 where he settled with relatives in Milwaukee (Wisconsin). DeNomie describes his difficulty finding work due to health problems from being exposed to mustard gas, and his return to Michigan as a young parent. He comments on the deteriorating state of the area due to decline in the local mining, lumber and fishing economies. DeNomie describes in detail his experiences as a Native American in the upper Midwest.

Biographical Sketch:

DeNomie (1895-1980) was born in 1895 in Assinins (Michigan), a small Ojibwe mission in the heart of the logging and mining industry. He attended an Indian school in Tomah (Wisconsin) where he excelled in athletics and joined the National Guard. At 18, he was called to service on the Mexican border as part of the Mexican Expedition, and shortly after was called to duty in World War I, where he served in the 32nd Division, later known as the 128th Regiment in France. He suffered from exposure to mustard gas and after the war settled in Milwaukee and worked a number of jobs that allowed him to be outside.

Interviewed by his daughter, Alice Loew, and grandson, Michael Loew, 1979

Original Transcriber unknown.

Transcription checked and corrected by Linda Weynand, 2012

Abstract written by Mary Kate Kwasnik, 2014.

Interview Transcript:

Loew: **[Introduction]** On the shores of Lake Superior in a little Ojibwe Indian mission called Assinins lived Simon Edward DeNomie and his wife Nancy. He was the son of Jean Baptiste DeNomie and she the daughter of Chief Loon's Foot, the head of the Keweenaw Bay Ojibwes. The center of their little town was the mission church--a log cabin with bell tower. Inside the church even today is hung with beautiful beaded wall-hangings of Indian designs. And the figure of Christ on the crucifix wears many necklaces of intricate Indian beadwork. This area on Lake Superior enjoys those blasts of Canadian winds which bring the temperatures down to 40 below on a typical February day. And here on a typical February day in 1895 to the eleven-children family of Simon and Nancy was born Edward Simon DeNomie, my father. As a twenty-year-old doughboy in France with the AEF [American Expeditionary Forces], he was wounded by shrapnel and as a result was deaf most of his life. Here follows a short conversation with him. A bit stilted at first, but gradually enhanced with a little red wine.

That fish—how did you get the rest of the food that your mother needed to make a meal?

DeNomie: We always had a big cellar full of stuff out of the garden: potatoes, cabbage, carrots, rutabagas, onions, beets, sauerkraut.

Loew: Did you do any trapping?

DeNomie: No—well, I did when I was a kid for rabbits, for rabbit soup.

Loew: Okay, describe the kind of trap you made.

DeNomie: Well, I had three different kinds. We had steel traps and we had snares and we had dead falls.

Loew: What is a dead fall?

DeNomie: A dead fall is a log laid across the rabbit trail. Put another heavy branch across the trail. Another one that you put up and tied with a piece of salted basswood bark right across the trail, so the rabbit would smell it. With a leader from the basswood that was holding another—you'd bend another sapling over like that. Then you'd tie it with that basswood. Then that leader from the trail would come to that piece of basswood that was holding that sapling down. He'd chew on that till he chewed through it and chhhhassshhh! It would go up and hang him.

Loew: [Chuckles] Okay. Did you have a garden?

DeNomie: Oh, a big garden!

Loew: What did you raise for food?

DeNemie: Potatoes, cabbage, celery, onions, cucumbers, tomatoes.

Loew: How long was your growing season?

DeNemie: About three months.

Loew: Three months: ninety days.

DeNemie: Yeah.

Loew: Did you have enough for the winter then?

DeNemie: Oh, yeah. We'd put a lot away.

Loew: Did you collect rice?

DeNemie: No, but we used to get rice from Hayward [Wisconsin] where Gerard was. It didn't grow around our neighborhood.

Loew: Oh, all right. Okay. Did you do a lot of boating?

DeNemie: Bowling?

Loew: Boating.

DeNemie: Boating? Oh, yeah, all the time. We were born and raised right on the shore. Sailing. And we used to go out--

Loew: Was this for fun or was it part of work?

DeNemie: Yeah, fun sometimes. We'd go out still fishing on the lake: bobbing off of the boat. Just like in the wintertime, only this was the summer months. Fish off of a boat.

Loew: When you traveled to other towns and you went for shopping, to buy things, how did you travel?

DeNemie: You either walked or went in a horse and buggy.

Loew: Horse and buggy. Never a train or a bus?

DeNemie: Once in a while a train; no buses in them days.

Loew: Where was your school when you were ten or fifteen years old?

DeNomie: It was about four blocks away.

Loew: Four blocks. Where did the teachers come from?

DeNomie: They were sisters in the convent there.

Loew: Did they live there?

DeNomie: Yeah. They belonged to the Saint Joseph order.

Loew: Oh. How far away did all the students come from, or were they nearby?

DeNomie: Right in town there. The furthest one away was two or three white families--about a mile and a half they had to walk.

Loew: They walked?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: Even in the winter?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: What kind of a stove did your mother cook on?

DeNomie: It was a kitchen range: a stove. It had four lids with a place to put in wood. In the back was like a covered steel warming compartment, kind of a roller that used to come down so you could put the stuff in there to keep warm while you cooking something else.

Loew: Where did you get the fuel? What was it, wood-burning?

DeNomie: Out in the woods. My dad used to hire woodcutters in the late summer, you know; send them out in the woods and cut about 140 cords of wood.

Loew: And that would be your stock for the winter?

DeNomie: Yeah, different lengths. The kitchen stove had--let's see, what was it-- sixteen-inch wood, I guess, only split in real fine pieces for cooking.

Loew: What kind of wood was it?

DeNomie: Bird's eye maple, hard maple, birch.

Loew: Bird's eye maple is a prized wood today and you used it for wood-burning fuel.

DeNomie: When I think of it now, holy man.

Loew: How did you heat the house?

DeNomie: With wood: five stoves.

Loew: One in each room?

DeNomie: One in each room upstairs--bedrooms.

Loew: Describe your house. What did your--?

DeNomie: First, when my parents were first married, they had a log house. It was about twenty by twenty. That's where they first lived. The kids came, you know, four or five of them. Then they put up a wooden house. That was the first new building with what they called a middle room later on. That was the first--

Loew: What year would this be?

DeNomie: Well, that would have to be before 1900. I can't go back. I don't know, probably 1895, when I was born. Maybe before because they had four or five—they had that many before I was born. So it must have been around 1890. Then after more kids come, then they put up a big addition in front: two-story, frame building. It had a parlor down below, a bedroom on this side with a hallway in between. A little further down was another bedroom over there and straight down was what they would call the middle room; it's where we congregated. This other place was called the parlor, piano in there and stuff. The kids used to come, sing in there. Then off of this middle room was the dining room, then further down was the kitchen.

Loew: Where did they get the furniture to put in this house? Where did they buy it?

DeNomie: I guess the furniture store. It had a regular table, regular furniture.

Loew: In what city?

DeNomie: Baraga [Michigan], Houghton [Michigan].

Loew: In Baraga. Everything was available to them there?

DeNomie: Yeah. They had hardware stores, furniture stores.

Loew: In the wintertime, how cold did it get and how did you keep warm?

DeNomie: Thirty, thirty-five, forty below zero. Fire up the five stoves. Only at night we'd let the kitchen fire go out. Close all the doors. We had a great big box stove, what they call a box stove. It was a heater. It took twenty-four inch wood: two feet long. During the day it would be going all the time; nice and warm in there. At night when everybody was getting ready to go to bed, when nobody up yet, my dad used to bank the fire, fill that stove full of wood and just leave a little bit of air so just barely go. Then we go to bed and in morning it would be full of red hot coals in there: nice and cozy. Shake it up a little bit, pull the coals towards the front of the stove and put some more wood in. Then it was all fixed in the morning and then we'd get up. I slept upstairs, no heat up there. Holy--.

Loew: How cold did your room get?

DeNomie: About twenty below. [chuckles] I'd drag out my clothes and boom, boom, boom, downstairs, up alongside the hot stove. [chuckles]

Loew: Can you describe your parents? Describe your mother.

DeNomie: Short, heavysset, black hair, young-looking, agile. Very well-built, bossy. [chuckles]

Loew: What was her favorite thing? What did she enjoy doing?

DeNomie: Taking care of her family, I guess.

Loew: How did you get along with her?

DeNomie: Good.

Loew: Did she have to scold you?

DeNomie: Oh, yeah. Pound the hell out of me sometimes. [laughs]

Loew: What about your dad?

DeNomie: He was rough and gruff, big-hearted. Give you the shirt off his back; but when he said something, you better listen good.

Loew: What were the kind of jobs he had?

DeNomie: Oh, he had a variety of jobs. What I remember good about him, he was a timber estimator. I was about six or seven I guess. He used to get jobs way out in the woods. You see the lumber companies that had sawmills used to buy timber around there. And they'd buy a whole track of land at one time. Somebody'd want to sell their timber to a lumber company. Well, they didn't know how much timber was on that track, so they'd send my dad out there to estimate that. And

there was two of them working on a team. My dad was the guy to keep track of the board feet on the tree and Frank [transcriber's note: is this is my grandfather's half-brother?]
—he was the guy that kept in line. You'd find a corner post, then you'd have to find—if it was a forty acre plot you'd have to find the corner post of the next block and that was always due north and south.

Loew: He was like a surveyor of some sort?

DeNomie: He'd get there at the corner post with a--what do you call those things that shows you directions?

Loew: Sextant or a compass?

DeNomie: Compass. Then he'd look due north for that other post, he'd know where the post was and if there was a tree there, he'd go over there and he'd put a big blaze on it.

Loew: What's a blaze?

DeNomie: A blaze is where you'd take an ax and chop the bark off a tree. So it showed up real white and black, you know, so you could see. Let's see, forty acres would probably be a quarter of a mile away. He'd have to see that blaze 'cause that's his line; he had to go straight. He had to keep in line. You can't go over somebody else's property. Then when he'd get there, he'd stop. Now he's got one line. Well, my dad would start, say, ten paces in from this post. Then they'd go together. Frank'd go due north. My dad would follow him ten paces away, due north. Then he'd count all the trees in between there. Then he'd estimate, now the tree was that big, and the tree was that big—he'd have to look at it and see where he'd get a ten-foot log, twelve-foot, maybe sixteen, or how many of each. He'd have to put that down in his book, how many board feet in that tree.

Loew: How many board feet?

DeNomie: Board feet like if you went through a sawmill.

Loew: Yeah, right.

DeNomie: See, a board foot is a board one inch thick and maybe twelve inches wide, sometimes they were sixteen. In them days they used to have boards that wide, you know. Then you'd have to estimate that.

Loew: How much lumber he'd get out of one area of land.

DeNomie: Yeah, that was the idea of him being out there because the lumber company wanted to know how much lumber they were going to get for the money they were paying for that.

Loew: What other jobs did he have?

DeNomie: He was a commercial fisherman. He fished in the lake there-- [inaudible] nets.

Loew: What lake?

DeNomie: Keweenaw Bay—that's a branch off of Lake Superior. Then he was a highway commissioner. He built a lot of them roads that are still going up there. Cut roads through the woods, you know. Then they had no big earth movers like they got now. It was all horse power, you know, with scrapers and hemp. Guys would have to hold—

Loew: What you call bull work?

DeNomie: Yeah, it was bull work--pound, chop and everything by hand.

Loew: Where did he get his crew from?

DeNomie: Everybody around the mission there.

Loew: All his neighbors?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: Who hired him? Who hired him for this road job?

DeNomie: People that owned the saw mills. See, that's where they got their estimation of the amount of lumber in these plots that they'd buy. They'd buy a whole plot, you know, of timber and maybe it was half a section or maybe a whole section.

Loew: And they had to get the roads to go into the timber?

DeNomie: Well, they used to have to make them roads themselves, see, because they had to get the timber out. But in them days, you used to go for the timber that was close to water, either a river or a lake, because that was the cheapest way to get the timber down there. After a while all the timber around the lakeshore or the rivers was all taken, then they'd had to move out further, out into the woods.

Loew: Maybe build a railroad or--?

DeNomie: That came later after all the timber that was handy to water and everything was all gone. Then they put in railroads.

Loew: You have the same thing in strip mining today--taking off the top layer of soil and then moving on.

DeNomie: Yeah. They used to leave a lot of destruction, too, 'cause it isn't like now. Now you take off a tree, you plant two, if you got room for two.

Loew: Yeah, well, there weren't any laws controlling it.

DeNomie: They thought the lumber would never peter out. Oh, they thought they got timber for years and years!

Loew: Did they ever use terms like "tree topping"?

DeNomie: Oh, yeah.

Loew: Is that what they were trying to do?

DeNomie: They never did it there. The trees never got that big. 'Cause it was always limbs—Take Norway pine: it used to grow like telephone poles for quite a ways, then their limbs would come—whole bunch of them. You'd get three or four logs first before you hit the limbs. Then you'd have to estimate maybe a twelve, two tens, and a fourteen-foot before you come to the limbs. You never saved the tops in them days. Nowadays you save the tops 'cause that's where you get your knotted pine. All them limbs out there, they all show up after its cut into lumber.

Loew: The burls in it.

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: Was there any mining up near where you were?

DeNomie: That was up further north, not around my home. The closest mine was Hancock. That was about thirty miles from home.

Loew: Houghton-Hancock?

DeNomie: Yeah. See, Houghton was right across the Portage Canal. There was a canal running from Portage Lake to the big lake across the point, near Ontonagon—that's where it come out. Well then, Houghton was on one side and a big iron bridge across over to Hancock. And from Hancock there was a big hill, oh, real steep. Were you ever in Duluth?

Loew: No.

DeNomie: Real steep like the roof of a house. You couldn't walk there. You had to go zigzag. Up on the top of the hill was a mine—the mouth of a mine where they sunk a shaft. They used to get a lot of copper out of there--real big chunks, tons, in one piece. You used to have to pound it to get it loose, send it up on the skip,

ready to go to a stamp mill, or just pound it more and get it into small pellets of solid copper. Then they'd put it in barrels and ship it.

Loew: You mentioned something about hominy. Where did you get the hominy that you ate? Did you grow it?

DeNemie: We used to buy hominy in bags. Originally it was meant for cow feed. [chuckles] But my mother used to take the same thing that they used to give to the cows and make hominy out of it: white corn.

Loew: You have to soak that in lye, don't you?

DeNemie: Yeah.

Loew: Where did you get the lye?

DeNemie: Used to make it out of wood ashes.

Loew: Potash?

DeNemie: Yeah.

Loew: You make your own lye, then?

DeNemie: Out of barrels. You used to dump ashes in barrels and leave it there until they'd get maybe better than half a barrel full of ashes. Then you'd fill the barrel up with water. Well, that water would mix with the ashes. You'd go there and stir it up. It got real slippery, you know. Then you pull the plug and you put it in a big kettle that you're going to make hominy with, you know.

Loew: That's the start of soap also. You make soap that way.

DeNemie: Yeah, soap same way—out of the same ashes. [chuckles]

Loew: [Chuckles] You either ate it or washed in it.

DeNemie: We never used to eat the hominy unless we washed it about a half a dozen times. We'd rinse it in cold water.

Loew: Because of the lye.

DeNemie: Yeah, get all the lye off and then you didn't taste it. Little bit left and you rinsed it in again.

Loew: How many different ways could your mother fix hominy? How many different ways?

DeNomie: You can do the same thing with hominy that you can with rice after the rice is cooked. You can make rice pudding; you can make hominy pudding. Just take hominy in the bottom of the pan and put cheese on there or butter or meat and roast it and all the juice run down into the hominy like that. Sometimes it would come out nice and brown. It was delicious. Any way you like rice, do the same thing with hominy 'cause hominy is nothing but corn—white corn.

Loew: Yeah. We were talking about how close it was to grits. That if you used hominy that way you used grits--

DeNomie: Same thing, only you crack--before you make hominy, you gotta crack the corn. It comes out like coarse corn meal. That goes to the cook stove for supper.

Loew: Would you say where you lived was near farms, or mines, or lumber, or all of them?

DeNomie: Well, it used to be near lumber mills, never near mines because the mines was always the same place away from us—about 30 or 35 miles away. You never got close to them.

Loew: Were the mines on hills and you were flat land?

DeNomie: Yeah, way up on hills: rock, granite. And we were down--

Loew: And you were in like a valley?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: Yours was more agricultural?

DeNomie: See, Keweenaw point came like this. It went way out into the lake, like Green Bay, on that order.

Loew: Where you were was like Green Bay.

DeNomie: Yeah. The level part started at Chassell—that's this side of Houghton-- and from there on the farms started. Before back up there it was too rough; there were no farms up there. South, sort of on the level part it was farms and it stayed farming country until past L'Anse. Then, it started going up a hill again, really rough again. Back toward the west side it was good farms all over.

Loew: What was the biggest crop that was raised up there?

DeNomie: Potatoes, timothy hay, wheat, cabbage, potatoes. Then they had different things like onions and peppers.

Loew: What about livestock? Was there any livestock up there—cattle?

DeNomie: Not too much. Most of the farmers raised their own beef and their own pork.

Loew: That was for their own table use?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: How did they store it? How did they keep food?

DeNomie: Well, they wouldn't kill the animals until late fall when it was cold. Then they butchered the cows, take off the hide, spread it in two and then hang up the meat to cure for three or four days until it would freeze real hard.

Loew: Would they strip it or dry it in chunks?

DeNomie: No, they'd let it hang like that. Like my dad, he ran a butcher shop then. He'd cut the first half of a carcass, cut it up in steaks and roasts, short ribs, boiling beef, all that stuff and sell it in the butcher shop while the other half was hanging colder than the devil. Freeze hard. Then before the meat was sold out, he'd take it down and he'd make a fire in the house where the meat was hanging so it could thaw out so he could cut the other half. When he sold that it would be the first cow that was sold. Then he'd kill another one.

Loew: In other words, he had to thaw it out in order to sell it.

DeNomie: Oh, yeah, it'd be like a rock. He had to time it. He had to watch it pretty close. It would never spoil as long as it was frozen: keeps six months, anyway.

Loew: There was no refrigeration of any kind other than just cold air?

DeNomie: Just ice in the ice house. You'd get ice during the winter off the lake. You used to put big sheds up, you know. Then you'd cut blocks of ice. Sometimes the blocks would be at least two feet thick like that. Then you'd cut them in squares like that. Then roll them onto a sled, haul 'em over to the ice house, and slide 'em down. First you put a layer of sawdust down. Then pile that ice up there, way up. As you went up you put sawdust. You go down to the sawmill and get ten, twenty, thirty bags—get a load of sawdust. As the ice was piled up you put sawdust around until it was almost level, till it got way up.

Loew: Where did you get the sawdust from?

DeNomie: From the sawmill; they used to throw it away. They had a great big wagon and used to come out and ____ into the wagon and take it over and dump it along the

lakeshore. They were glad to get rid of it, you know; otherwise they had no room for it. Lot of people used to get ice there.

Loew: What did you do in case of fire up there?

DeNomie: Well, in case of fire, the chances are you'd lose your house. No fire department, no nothing. Nobody around to call.

Loew: Like in the winter, all the water was frozen. Did you just let it burn?

DeNomie: You had to 'cause you had no help. A lot of houses burned; I remember lots of them.

Loew: What did they do then? Did the neighbors help them?

DeNomie: Move in with relatives.

Loew: And then the neighbors would help them build another one?

DeNomie: Yeah. Lot of times there was a vacant house there and they'd move in there.

Loew: What about sickness? Let's say diphtheria or small pox or something? What did they do?

DeNomie: It's too bad you got sick. I don't know.

Loew: Did you have a doctor nearby?

DeNomie: Yeah, two and a half miles away.

Loew: Two and a half miles away.

DeNomie: But you'd have to walk down there or go down there on skis or dogsled.

Loew: You had to get to the doctor? He wouldn't come to you?

DeNomie: Yeah, you go down and call him. He'd have a horse and buggy.

Loew: Where would you have to go to call him? How far would you have to go?

DeNomie: Go right down to his office two and a half miles away.

Loew: You'd have to go to his office even after you were sick?

DeNomie: Yeah. Well, say the kids were sick, you know, my dad used to hitch up the horse. Maybe he'd go down and bring him back and then when the call was over he'd take him back home again. So he'd have to make two trips.

Loew: And kids always get sick at night.

DeNomie: Very seldom sick. Only little babies, you know: cold, snotty nose. After three or four years old, they'd never get sick.

Loew: Did you ever have anything like homemade ice cream?

DeNomie: Oh, yeah.

Loew: Or homemade root beer or anything homemade?

DeNomie: We used to make that.

Loew: What were some of the treats that you made? Who made it—your dad or your mother?

DeNomie: My older sister used to make salted taffy.

Loew: Salt water taffy?

DeNomie: Salt water taffy.

Loew: Where did they get the recipes from?

DeNomie: Well, they had cookbooks. Sometimes the recipes would be on wrappers of salt water candy. And they'd make some. Taffy: used to pull taffy. It used to start out real brown and the more you pulled it, the more wax it became--after it became like a taffy blond. [chuckles] Then you take it all out and roll it and roll it. You put some powdered sugar on it and roll it in a roll. Then you let it dry a little bit then you cut it in chunks. Get waxed paper out of corn flake boxes. Used to save all the paper out of the corn flake boxes.

Loew: Out of the corn flake box?

DeNomie: Then cut 'em in strips about the length you want, roll it, twist the end. [chuckles]

Loew: So you'd wrap the candy in corn flake box wax.

DeNomie: Then we had some kind of chocolate that they used to make and different kinds of stick candy.

Loew: Did any one of your brothers and sisters ever go to any one of the World's Fairs?

DeNemie: Never.

Loew: Where was the furthest they went? What did they do for--?

DeNemie: Houghton: up to the tri-county fair on the train.

Loew: Like, if one of them left home to go, how would they know they were going to get a job? How would they know?

DeNemie: They didn't know. They just took a chance, just took off.

Loew: Just left?

DeNemie: Yeah.

Loew: Who was the first one to go?

DeNemie: They could see there was nothing there anymore. Things started getting kinda slow. We used to have a lot of students where we used to go to their home and give them music lessons and Sister Odelia and Nan used to do that.

Loew: Members of your family would give music lessons?

DeNemie: Two of them: Sister Odelia and Nancy. Then Sister Odelia went away to be a nun. Nancy came to Milwaukee, got a job at the Al Hammer [?] Theater. And she led the orchestra there—all-woman orchestra--for six years.

Loew: She led the orchestra?

DeNemie: Yeah: played piano. They had a violin player, a cello player, a drummer—six, six people in the band.

Loew: So who was the next one to leave?

DeNemie: Henry. He became a lumberjack. He used to do a lot of the lumberjacking around close by and when things got quiet, lumbering was kind of thin, he used to go out to Vancouver, British Columbia, State of Washington, Oregon.

Loew: How did he hear about that--from other lumberjacks?

DeNemie: Yeah, grapevine. Newspapers too would tell where the lumbering was heavy; used to follow that. He always was a lumberjack.

Loew: How deep did the snow get in the winter?

DeNomie: Well, it all depended on if it drifted or not. Sometimes it'd be four feet of snow and it'd drift maybe three feet on the level. When that happened everything was stopped dead because they didn't have snowplows.

Loew: No school or anything then?

DeNomie: Well, if you could plow through the snow—as long as you could get through they had school.

Loew: Who supplied the books for the school? Where did they get their books?

DeNomie: Well, we never had to buy books. I don't know who paid for them. I imagine the federal government because it was a federal government school. But the teachers were Sisters. Now, that's the funny thing, see; it was a combination of religion—

Loew: Church and state.

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: The nuns taught in a government school.

DeNomie: There was never any trouble about that. And I never knew who bought the books. We never had to buy books. At least I never heard about it. Nobody bothered me about paying for books.

Loew: How important was money when you were small? Nobody had any, right?

DeNomie: We never missed it because we never had any. [chuckles]

Loew: No, but you had everything you needed.

DeNomie: Everything we needed. We never wanted for anything.

Loew: You always had warm clothes, good food?

DeNomie: Oh, yeah: big socks, big heavy woolen pants, big mackinaws.

Loew: Just no money.

DeNomie: Well, if—like if there was a social given by the women in honor [?] for the church and they sold different things like popcorn and pop and crackerjack in a box, you know, well then the kids used to ask for money so they could buy it [laughs]--an orange or something. Apples we didn't have to buy because we had mobs of them in the basement.

Loew: When your mother had to keep control of the family—like there was a big family and they were all young together--how did she handle the discipline? Did she take care of it herself or did she give it to your dad?

DeNomie: No. It was understood. **[End of Tape 1, Side A]** She made you understand that when she told you something she wasn't fooling. She wanted you to do it. And we learned the lesson quick.

Loew: If you didn't do it, would she take care of the discipline or would she tell your dad?

DeNomie: She'd take care of it herself.

Loew: She'd take care of it herself.

DeNomie: If dad wasn't home, she do the whaling herself. Boy, she used to give it to you good.

Loew: She used to just handle it herself? She didn't just say—

DeNomie: She ran the place. She ran the store and the household when my dad was out in the woods looking at land. He'd be gone half the time. A lot of time some mining company wanted mining timber. That's when they'd get way down in the ground. Let's say that the main shaft was going down maybe sixty, eighty feet. Well then, you figured they'd have to make a tunnel from this shaft in there like that. And as they tunneled in, in order to prevent the rock from falling on the men, as when they went in they used to have to put timbers up there, you know. Otherwise--

Loew: Like shoring it.

DeNomie: Yeah, shoring it up. That's what they call mining timber. Well, you had to use a lot of that. And they used to buy timber that they could use for that. You know the great big logs would sell to the lumber company. But timber, say, six, eight inch tops—something that would fit across like that, that's what they'd want. My dad had to estimate how many—

Loew: When you were at home, you were real close to the house and to your mother and to your brothers and sisters. When you left to go to Tomah, you were how old, fifteen?

DeNomie: Fifteen.

Loew: Wasn't that kind of a shock?

DeNomie: It was. But I wanted to leave because I realized that there was nothing there. There was no place for me to go because I finished school up there when I was

eleven. I finished the sixth grade. Well, that's all the farther they went. They didn't go to seven or eight.

Loew: When you went to Tomah, what grade did you go into then?

DeNomie: They put me in the fourth grade because I lost four years.

Loew: In the fourth grade. And how long did you stay there?

DeNomie: Two years till I finished. Let's see, the fourth and the fifth the first year and the sixth and the seventh the second year. I stayed there two years and I finished four grades.

Loew: And then what after that?

DeNomie: Then I asked if I could go to high school. I asked Mr. Conlan [?]; he was superintendent. And he said "Go and talk to Mr. Bray [?];" he was the superintendent of the high school. Our football team and basketball team used to play Tomah High, you know, and we used to pummel 'em. [chuckles]

Loew: What team did you have that you played Tomah High?

DeNomie: Indian school.

Loew: Oh, you're talking about the Indian school at Tomah—

DeNomie: Before I went to high school.

Loew: City School at Tomah.

DeNomie: We played 'em every year and they knew what we could do. So Mr. Bray was tickled to death. "Sure, sure," he said. I said, "I can't pay tuition." "Well, we'll see about that," he says. "I'll talk to the educational council and see what they say." So he must have talked to those county board and I guess they figured it was okay. George Wolf and I—he was a center and I was a forward on our team—both of us was going there and, boy, that would fix up their team pretty good.

Loew: He was a good player?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: And you were, too?

DeNomie: Yeah, a center, doggone right. Used to play Sparta, Tomah used play Sparta. You know it was like cats and dogs because twin brothers were each principal of one of the schools.

Loew: Were twin brothers?

DeNomie: Yeah, looked just alike, same size like two peas in a pod. We got along there pretty good. In the second year he came to me and says, "I think DeNomie you'll have to pay tuition." Well I said, "Mr. Bray, I can't do that. I have no way to make any money. I have no money. If that's the case," I says, "I'll have to go to Sparta." "Oh, wait a minute now, wait, wait, take it easy. I'll see what I can do for you." [chuckles]

Loew: Go to the enemy school.

DeNomie: Because he knew if I went to Sparta I'd play against him, so I didn't hear any more. I don't know whether he went to the school board or what, I don't know, but I didn't pay any tuition. Well then it didn't make much difference anyway because that spring I was called out, it was 1916. I had to go down to the Mexican border: Border Service.

Loew: How old were you then?

DeNomie: Let's see, 1910 I was fifteen. I was eighteen.

Loew: You were still in high school?

DeNomie: Yeah, I had put in two years because I lost six years.

Loew: And you were called out to go in the Army against Pancho Villa?

DeNomie: Yeah, in 1916 I went to the Mexican border.

Loew: Against Pancho Villa?

DeNomie: Yeah, because he was making raids across the Rio Grande.

Loew: Why did they draft you?

DeNomie: I belonged to the National Guard. We were the first ones to get the call.

Loew: When did you join that?

DeNomie: 1914. Because they paid us a dollar a month to go down and drill.

Loew: When you were in high school?

DeNomie: No, I was in the Indian school then. Dollar a month, boy, give me a dollar spending money—any way to make a nickel. [laughs]

Loew: And because of that you went down to the Mexican border. And how long was that?

DeNemie: We left in 1916 and we came back in February of 1917. We were home about a month and we were called out for World War I. So we had to go down to Camp Douglas again. Six regiments of infantry from the National Guard plus two regiments from Michigan: put them all together down at Waco, Texas, and made the 32nd Division.

Loew: And then where did you go from there?

DeNemie: We stayed at Waco until February 19--, 19—. Went across in February—16th of February we were on the North Sea, going over.

Loew: Toward France?

DeNemie: Yeah, we landed at Brest.

Loew: Now your outfit was not AEF, was it?

DeNemie: What?

Loew: The AEF.

DeNemie: Yeah, American Expeditionary Force: AEF.

Loew: You were in the AEF?

DeNemie: We were the fourth outfit over there.

Loew: And how long were you over there?

DeNemie: Until 19--, 19--. In March we left there.

Loew: So you were there in three years.

DeNemie: About two and a half.

Loew: Was it rougher over there than it was—

DeNemie: Oh, yeah. Cripes, we was in a war; we couldn't get any worse. After the war was over, the 11th of November we were right up at the front line. Right across no man's land you could see the Germans up ahead. Then everything quieted down. After the war was over a couple of days, they had us drilling between the lines.

You know, short order drills: squads west and squads east, you know, halt and forward march. The Germans were sitting over there in their trenches.

Loew: You were drilling no man's land?

DeNemie: Yeah. And the guys were all swearing: "The war's over, why do this?" Because they're all pooped out, you know. Jesus cripes, we were all skinny and all run down.

Loew: How was the food in the Army at that time?

DeNemie: Well, it was alright when we got it, but we didn't get it at regular times. It was hit and miss. Sometimes we'd go all day without a meal. Water was hard because they poisoned the wells so you couldn't drink the water out of the wells. You had to spread ponchos to get rainwater.

Loew: What were some of the places that you were in over there?

DeNemie: Chateau-Thierry, Belleau Wood, Marne. (Inaudible) is where we were when the war was over.

Loew: Meuse, Argonne?

DeNemie: Soissons.

Loew: Did you get to meet any of the French people?

DeNemie: Oh, yeah. Up on the line, nobody was living there. Some towns were flattened out completely. One town, the only thing that was left was where the streets used to be because it was all flattened down, there were stone houses there. The engineers came along; they made roads out of that flattened stone. Just obliterated, just nothing there, just where the streets used to be. Some towns back further were shelled, you know.

Loew: Did any French people give you a meal?

DeNemie: No, they had nothing themselves. Used eat horses.

Loew: The French people were eating horses?

DeNemie: Sure. We used to go to restaurants and eat horsemeat. [laughs] It was good, too, I'll tell.

Loew: [Laughs] Then when you came back, what did you do? How did you support yourself when you came back from the--

DeNomie: When we came back they took us to Camp Grant, discharged us and I came to Milwaukee. Aunt Bunny was living in Milwaukee with Uncle Art then up on Cambridge Avenue, right near the end of East North Avenue Bridge.

Loew: What year was this?

DeNomie: That was 1920 then. I didn't have any job. I didn't have too much money and I didn't have much health, so I went to Milwaukee Motor School. I figured I got to have some kind of a trade in order to get a job, so I went there. Bunny says, "You can go to school--eight-weeks course--and you can stay with us until you get a job." So I did that. But my lungs weren't good because I was gassed over there.

Loew: Was that mustard gas that affected your lungs?

DeNomie: Mustard, chlorine, puking. So I went to motor school and I finished the course and I got a job in a garage on 24th and State. Them days there was no parking lots outside. People used to park their cars inside of the garage. In the winter months, you go in and warm 'em up and start them, you know--probably half a dozen cars going at one time.

Loew: Some more bad air for your lungs.

DeNomie: I had to get out. I couldn't stand it. I'd choke, almost died until I could get out on the street and inhale some fresh air. And I was down to about 145 pounds.

Loew: And how tall are you, how tall were you?

DeNomie: Same as now: 5'8" and a half. And I went to a doctor and he examined me. He says, "I can't find anything wrong. Only your tonsils are buried." Well, that's the way they're supposed to be; if there's nothing wrong with them then they're covered over with flesh. I thought to myself—that guy wants to make a couple of nickels on me or something. Even though it was under the auspices of the federal government, they're supposed to pay for it. He says, "Maybe we better take your tonsils out." So that was on a Saturday. I says, "Okay." So he froze them, took them out. Stayed there Sunday, went home Monday, Tuesday I went to work. And he says, "Now, in about a month, you come back and see me and we'll see how they are." And I had terrible backaches. Before I went to the doctor I'd reach down in the morning to put on my shoes, I couldn't come up again. I'd have to fall over on the bed and roll over and sit up. After a month, I said, "Well, Doctor, you have to take something else out because I still got pains." He looked in my mouth and said, "I don't know what it can be. You wait a couple more weeks and then come back. Let me know how things are." The pain went away, never had it anymore. I went back and told him, you know, I was working.

Loew: You think your tonsils caused a backache?

DeNomie: Looked like way, but I doubted his word, but I went along anyways—anything to cure the back.

Loew: Then where did you go after that?

DeNomie: He told me to get out of that garage. “Don’t go back,” he says, “get out of there now.”

Loew: For your health.

DeNomie: Yeah. He says, “Get out in the open. Get a job where there’s a lot of fresh air.” So I got a job down at the end of 12th Street at Fabricated Ship Corporation. They were building ships for the United States Navy, you know, like destroyers, small boats, lighthouse tenders, Coast Guard tenders, stuff like that, and I worked there. I guess it was March—no, I it was May.

Loew: Was this outdoors? Was this outside??

DeNomie: Outside in the open, oh.

Loew: In March, near the lake? Cold?

DeNomie: Zero, boy, I’ll tell you it was really cold. But you got used to it. You had to put on big mittens.

Loew: Did your health get better?

DeNomie: Oh, yeah. My appetite came back; boy, I’d eat like a horse. I used to make Mom mad. I’d come back-- They’d give me a job reaming. You see, they’d fabricate the pieces of steel that went around to make the backing [?]. You know, it all come in patches—in different sizes, different bends. They had a crane with a couple of guys on there and they’d hook onto a piece and they’d put it up there where it belonged. They’d put it in. Then they’d put bolts in there, see, to hold it in place. Then it was up to me to come by— **[Three minutes of blank recording. Recording resumes with discussion of Edward’s days with Railroad express]**

Loew: Express Company. What was the strangest animal?

DeNomie: I think a crocodile one time.

Loew: Crocodile? What kind of a box did they put him in?

DeNomie: Big long box with bars with chicken wire inside.

Loew: Where did he come from, how long was he in the train?

DeNomie: Florida, I think, if I remember right.

Loew: About how long was that train trip for him?

DeNomie: Oh, day and a half. They had stuff in there for food.

Loew: Oh, food?

DeNomie: Yeah. That was for every animal we handled, dogs and --

Loew: What if one animal came with a broken cage, what would you do?

DeNomie: We very seldom had that because the people that accepted the shipments all made sure that the cages would hold them. One time, a lion got out—

Loew: A lion? [chuckles]

DeNomie: --in the express car. We knew that he was alive in there. He was walking around in there. So we called the guy from the zoo. We didn't know what to do. We never had a lion in an express car. So we went to the end door and we opened it up and we peeked in there and down on the opposite end was Mr. Lion sitting in there, with his tail going like that, watching. [laughs] So we went inside.

Loew: You went in the box car with the lion?

DeNomie: Yeah, and he never moved so we got the cage and the freight was piled so there was just an aisle from one end of the car—piled way up high, up to the ceiling. So he couldn't go around us; he had to come to us.

Loew: He could only walk one way.

DeNomie: Yeah. So we took that cage and we shoved it right in the alleyway and then piled stuff on top so he wouldn't jump over it. We waited for him and we baited him with some fresh meat, you know. He could smell that. Pretty soon he gets up. He comes over--didn't growl or anything. And he goes right in the cage and we pulled the trap and down went the door and we had him [laughs].

Loew: [Laughs]

Loew, M.: You got a lot of hobos riding the rails?

DeNomie: Well, we never paid much attention because a hobo you don't see because if a guy sneak on, you know-- In the first place we don't have time to look for hobos. There was a lot of them. Freight trains used to carry a lot of 'em. Boxcar--nice night, open boxcars. We could see 'em looking there. We could see them. It didn't bother us; we didn't care.

Loew: That was during the Depression years when a lot of people were looking for work.

DeNomie: Yeah, sure. And some guys used to ride head in—it's the blind baggage. In them days all the cars had doors on the end. And they had a little addition, like an accordion, you know, when they come together and hook up together and clash. They wouldn't smash or anything. Well, when the engine was hooked on there's only one side, next to the car, where you could stand in there, you know. But you'd get a lot of black soot and steam. You rode a hundred miles and you'd look like a coal miner when you got out.

Loew: When Orrin, your oldest son, was born he was sickly and you had to take him back up north to the farm, on doctor's orders.

DeNomie: Yeah, he was eighteen months old when we moved to Michigan.

Loew: Okay. When you came back from there, how did you get back? Did you come by train or did you drive--?

DeNomie: Well, it was Mom and Orrin and you and Mary Jane—yeah, the three of you came down with Mom on the train. But Orrin stayed and came down with Aunt Alice and myself in the car—the old Ford.

Loew: What year was that?

DeNomie: That was 1922—no, 1926. Yeah, 1926.

Loew: Did you drive down?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: What were the roads like coming down?

DeNomie: Dirt roads, most of them.

Loew: Did you have any problems?

DeNomie: No cement roads them days. I went up first on the train with Mom. Then later on, Uncle Alan and Bess Johner [?] brought the stuff up in the pickup truck.

Loew: This was when you were going to make your home again up there?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: And you were coming back with a sick son. Orrin was a year and a half old, and he was sick.

DeNemie: Well, that's before we lived up there. You see we lived there and in '26 that's when Orrin was sick, eighteen months old, [inaudible].

Loew: And how did he do?

DeNemie: Oh, beautiful after Frank got through with him with that milk, you know. A month!

Loew: Where did he get the milk?

DeNemie: He lived right across the field. He had a cow that just had a calf. A big bag of milk. He'd bring it over before it cooled off. He brought it right over to warm you. Orrin used to drink that milk and that'd fix him up.

Loew: And he got well?

DeNemie: Yeah. No doctor since, up to this day! [laughs]

Loew: [Laughs] Good fresh milk. How did life change up there from the time that you left when you were fifteen and you went to school at Tomah? And when you came back in 1926 had it improved? Was it better?

DeNemie: It was gradually deteriorating.

Loew: Getting worse.

DeNemie: Yeah, worse. The mines weren't going, the lumbering was petering out, the fishing wasn't good—all means of livelihood for the Indians.

Loew: There was no way to earn a living? Even if you raised your own food you still couldn't make it?

DeNemie: There's always something that you gotta have: clothes or stuff [inaudible], shoes.

Loew: Well, what help did they get then? In 1926—

DeNemie: Had to go on relief.

Loew: I mean what did they do for food and things like that? How did they get things? It's a remote place.

DeNemie: Well, we had gardens, raised potatoes and cabbage and ____.

Loew: But up on Lake Superior it's easy to be forgotten. So when the Indian families up there needed clothes, how did they get them?

DeNemie: Through the government.

Loew: Where did they have to go?

DeNemie: Maybe the diocese, through the Marquette diocese, you had [inaudible].

Loew: Would someone bring clothes to them or would they have to go and get them?

DeNemie: Yeah. They'd bring them to the whatever, the station where they'd collect [inaudible]--church, bar [?], house, someplace where people brought [inaudible].

Loew: Was the BIA working then--the Bureau of Indian Affairs? Was that in existence?

DeNemie: No, they had no jurisdiction over there. Because that was (inaudible). Marquette diocese [inaudible]--Indians living on the land. See they lost that through fraud. All the contracts between the lumber companies and the Indians were all in English. The Indians, the old timers, had no chance to go to school to learn the English language. So a lot of them put a thumb on there; they couldn't read. They didn't know what they—

Loew: They put a thumb on the lumbering contract? Because of that did they lose land?

DeNemie: They were buying the timber, but hidden in there was a contract for the land [inaudible] and the Indians couldn't read that. They didn't know.

Loew: But I thought there was some agency of the government in Washington to protect them against that.

DeNemie: There was, but a lot of agencies were crooked. The lumber companies used to give payola. Okay, here's your contract.

Loew: And because of that a lot of land was turned over?

DeNemie: A lot of Indians were living on a plot of ground that they thought they owned and it belonged to the lumber company. Lot of times the lumber company used to say, "Sell that plot." And the Indians would get a notice to move off. We were living on government land and we never knew it. We used to own it. No money was paid for it.

Loew: Would you say the land was sold over because the Indians had no other way to earn money?

DeNemie: Right.

Loew: They did it just for money?

DeNomie: They had no way, they had no home, they had no land, they had no income.

Loew: The only way they could raise any money was to sell that timber off their land?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: And you think because of these contracts that they lost the land also, besides the timber?

DeNomie: A lot of them did. A lot of them did.

Loew: But don't they have recourse now? Couldn't they go back and claim fraud?

DeNomie: Well, the federal government turned that land over to the Indians. No taxes. It belongs to the Indians. [inaudible] —no taxes. [inaudible]

Loew: You mean it's been reclaimed by the government?

DeNomie: It was turned over by the government to the Indians. The Indians originally owned the land; they own it again now.

Loew: What about the lumber companies?

DeNomie: The lumber companies stopped paying taxes. It went back to the state for tax title and they're out of it.

Loew: So it's back to what it originally was—

DeNomie: Right.

Loew: --but now there's no timber on the land. Did you ever travel to any other cities from where you were when you were a child?

DeNomie: Any other city?

Loew: Like Houghton-Hancock?

DeNomie: Oh, yeah. I'd go up there for a fair or a hockey game.

Loew: Did you play ice hockey?

DeNomie: Yeah, when we were kids. I played hockey until I was fifteen.

Loew: Did you play against any high schools?

DeNomie: No. No high schools around there.

Loew: No organized team at all?

DeNomie: No. I guess Baraga had a high school: fifteen students. [laughs] They had no basketball. I didn't know what a basketball or a football looked like till I was fifteen. We played hockey in the winter and baseball in the summer and that was it. [laughs] Looked like marks [?]. [laughs]

Loew: How would you describe this game that you talked about with the two sticks? What was the name of that?

DeNomie: Cha Cha? Cha Ha.

Loew: How do you pronounce that?

DeNomie: Chah-hah. Chah-hah.

Loew: What was that? Two balls and a string?

DeNomie: Yeah, two thick pieces of stick like that, about that long. We had something like one of these hard salami sausages you see in the store, you know--about that long, and hard. Two of them like that, only out of wood. You'd make a ring around there where you could tie a string. You tie two of them together with a string about that long so they'd be loose—about that far apart. You had to be good enough with the stick to run and catch that on a dead run. You had a hook on the end of the stick. Pretty strong

Loew: When you had the stick in your hand and you were going to catch it, where was the cha ha? Where was it? Was it hanging somewhere?

DeNomie: It was on the ground. It was like a soccer game. Did you ever watch a soccer game?

Loew: Soccer or polo, except you were trying to hook something?

Loew, M.: You had to scoop it up?

DeNomie: Polo you hit, but this you had to catch on the fly, you know, this way or that way. If you could catch it in the air, okay.

Loew: You'd lift it up off the ground and you'd whack it in the air and you had to catch it and hook--.

DeNomie: Yeah. You had it and you hooked it. You had to keep turning; every time you took a step you had to keep on turning otherwise the thing would fall off. You had

to keep doing like that until someone comes behind you and whack your sticks. Oh, it was a rough on your hands [?].

Loew: Was this a home-made game?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: You made your own equipment?

DeNomie: It was an old style game like, ah—Well, they had a lacrosse game too. The colleges in the east took it up later on. You had a net; it was flat on the end--use it to catch a wooden ball. Now they I guess they got rubber. [inaudible]

Loew: It was like a hockey stick with a little basket on the end, wasn't it?

DeNomie: Well, that's a different game. [inaudible] It was a long stick with a little round neck.

Loew: You mean the lacrosse that you played was not the lacrosse that everybody knows?

DeNomie: Yeah. Little variations. I don't know if they're exactly the same.

Loew: Did you have just a plain stick?

DeNomie: No, you had a stick—like a “Y” it came out: flat on the end and it was all laced in the _____. Like a _____.

Loew: Like half a snowshoe?

DeNomie: Something like that, yeah.

Loew, M.: What would a typical meal be?

DeNomie: A typical meal would be potatoes, venison, rabbit, partridge, coot, ah—

Loew: Hominy?

DeNomie: Pumpkin, hominy—

Loew, M.: Fry bread?

DeNomie: La galade [?].

Loew: What is it called, la galade?

DeNomie: La galade.

Loew: La galade is fry bread?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: How did your mother make that?

DeNomie: Just like biscuit dough. You had a pan that big; she'd make the dough just so to fit in the pan. Cut it in the middle, like a doughnut except a doughnut has a hole. You put a slit in it. You bake it. It gets stiff and it would be bigger and then it would raise up like that. Get nice and brown.

Loew: Did you use that for bread or was it dessert?

DeNomie: It was bread.

Loew: Did you use it for a snack in between meals?

DeNomie: Use it for anything, just like biscuit dough--like hot biscuits. You get it out of the oven when it was really hot and take some homemade butter on there and slap that on there.

Loew, M.: Women did all the cooking? Did the women do all the cooking?

DeNomie: At that time when I was home we had a stove in the house. Different kinds. Some were just (inaudible) on top. We had a stove with a heating oven in the back, you know, it came up real high like that with a roller that used to come down over the oven. You know when you're cooking and you want to keep something warm until everything was ready to go you'd put it up here and turn that down. It would almost bake up there.

Loew: Did your dad ever do cooking?

DeNomie: Not at home. Never washed dishes, never cooked.

Loew: At home it was a man's world, right?

[End of Tape 2, Side A]

DeNomie: Well-- [laughs] Yeah. [laughs]

Loew: [Laughs]

Loew, M.: [Laughs]

DeNomie: Well, he didn't-- Because I had two sisters that were probably eighteen and twenty, they used to do a lot of the housework. Like Sister Odelia used to make the cake, bread. Nan used to make the cakes, and cookies, and doughnuts and stuff like that. My dad never had no bother with that. My mother used to cook whether it was necessary. But he was gone most of the time. He had a road commissioner's job putting in new roads. He'd be gone for a month at a time.

Loew: Well, where did you learn how to cook?

DeNomie: At home, at our home. [inaudible] When you had to cook--you know, when you have to do something, you can do it. [laughs]

Loew, M.: [Laughs] What did you do for a social life, Friday or Saturday nights?

DeNomie: Well, Saturday night we took a bath and had to go to bed early.

Loew, M.: How about when you were older: nineteen, twenty years old.

DeNomie: In the winter time we used to go play hockey. If there was a snowstorm we get a few guys and we would shovel off the ice and chop a hole in the ice. When you chop a hole in the ice the water would come up level with the top and you get a pail and you swish it around and you get that ice for skating. Big pile of snow; we used to shovel it. When we get the first ice on the bay, we'd wait until it was the thickness of this table, maybe a little thicker. We would walk on it and the thing used to go like that, you know. But it didn't break; it was rubber ice, you know.

Loew: Rubber ice?

DeNomie: Yeah, we called it rubber ice because it used to bend, you know. But we didn't get together, we used to spread out, you know. Get too close together, you're liable to break through and we never broke through. And it was clear as glass. And we knew where all the sand bottoms were in the lake and we'd watch. You could see a dark spot underneath the ice quite a ways out. Maybe the water would be four or six feet deep there under the ice. We'd watch that and you'd see it coming there and somebody would holler, "There's a bunch of herring coming."

Loew: Herring?

DeNomie: Herring. They call them chubs too. Smoked fish, you know, what they make smoked fish out of? So you'd get the big board ready--wide as that door sometimes.

Loew: About three feet wide. A board.

DeNomie: Yeah. Ten feet wide, you know. The wider you got, the better it was because if you got a narrow one you were liable to crack the ice, you know. Big wide one like that. And one guy would be the—

Loew: Chairman of the board [laughs]?

DeNomie: Pick the board up on end and hold it there like that and everybody would get around and chase all the fish, you know. You could see 'em through the ice, you know. Gather them all around towards the guy with the board.

Loew: You mean the people who were on top of the ice would chase the fish?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: Skating around?

DeNomie: Yeah. Some would be on skates; some would be walking.

Loew: They'd chase them in a circle?

DeNomie: Chase all the fish together toward the guy with the board. And he'd wait until there a whole flock of fish was down there. Then he'd take that board and WHACK! There was an awful crash, you know, and stun the fish. It wouldn't kill 'em. It's like an electric shock, you know. Turn 'em over and they'd float up and some guys--about six or eight of them with axes--would chop a hole in the ice and put down nets and shovel the ice and fish and everything before they'd come to again. [laughs]

Loew: The fish underneath the ice could see the skaters on top of the ice?

DeNomie: Yeah, and they'd get scared and try to get away from them. They all congregated under that board. [laughs] And then we used to fish in the river for suckers and brook trout. We used to get jugs, you know, just common jugs, you know, regular jugs?

Loew: Yeah, a crock, a crock jug.

DeNomie: Yeah. Fill it up with lime, just common lime like what they make plaster out of, you know: unslaked lime. Break it all up and put it in that jug and then fill it about three-quarters with water and put a cork in it real tight, and then wait a little while and throw it out in the river. We had one spot below a falls: big deep hole down there, you know. And wait a little while. The jug would be generating power and that lime would be working and when it got strong enough—BAROOM! [laughs]

Loew: Like a bomb.

DeNomie: Yeah, a bomb and blow the fish—kill them, stun a lot of them, and blow them out of the river.

Loew: Was that legal?

DeNomie: No [laughs].

Loew: No? And you did it anyway?

DeNomie: [Laughs] We made a deal that on Saturday afternoons that would happen.

[Break in conversation]

Loew: Say that again.

DeNomie: I think the kids in them days had more fun than the kids nowadays.

Loew: Because they had to use their imagination, right?

DeNomie: No. I don't know. Maybe it was easier for us to get satisfied because we didn't have hardly anything. We never missed anything 'cause we never had anything. [laughs] If you had some toys, you had to make them yourself: like bobsleds. We had nice hills where we used to go sledding, you know. We had to make our own bobsleds. I had a pretty nice one. My dad had a blacksmith shop and he was a blacksmith himself, too. We used to cut out the runners and we used to get a nice piece of timber, you know--pine: easy cutting it. You use a drawknife, you know, make nice runners and everything and get them all in shape. Then, for the iron parts, my dad used to take—sometimes they'd get bolts, start from the bottom, put them up. We used to have little stands from the runner to the bolt—used to call that a bolt that ran across it. He used to make iron braces that would fit in there for legs, you know, with bolts that fit in there. Then he used to make shoes for the runners, in the same shape as the runner. He used to do all that.

Loew: Like a little metal band that went around the runner?

DeNomie: Yeah, real thin. The best runners was round rods. They had two kinds. Flat ones: we didn't like them 'cause they used to skid when you went around a turn. Get them long rods, they were round. You'd cut in and go straight then. We used to make them sleds for ourselves. Put a big long board, wide board: just enough to where you could sit on it.

Loew: What about steering? How did you make it--?

DeNomie: You put a cross brace on the front end, stuck out about that far on each side. That's where the pilot used to sit. He had a rope that went down to the front end of the bob, you know. Well, he was the steer man. He used to steer with his legs

as you go around the bend. Boy, did we used to go with that! Holy-- Four, five guys on that big board. [laughs] Moonlight night: the whole town would be out there.

Loew: Bobsledding?

DeNomie: Yeah. The hill was just as shiny as this ice, real shiny. Boy, did we used to sail! We had to go down a little pitch like that where you got a good start and we came to a curve and you had to turn. Then it was straight again for about the length of a football field. Then you had another turn where there was a big fence; the railroad went by and they put a big fence in there. Before, there was no fence there and they were afraid somebody's gonna get killed going sliding across there when there was a train coming, you know. So they put a big fence there. So we had to cut away a lot of little brush down at the end there so we could make that turn so we could go along the fence before we'd stop. [laughs] Not a guy got hurt. Nope, we never had anybody get hurt.

Loew: How large a town was it?

DeNomie: Oh, about fifty houses.

Loew: Fifty houses.

Loew, M.: How did people get around in a big snowstorm?

DeNomie: They didn't. They stayed home.

Loew, M.: Yeah.

DeNomie: But if you had to go it was either snowshoes or dogsled.

Loew: What kind of dogs?

DeNomie: Well, mixed breed--any kind of a dog that would pull. [laughs] They weren't fancy.

Loew: Not horses?

DeNomie: Yeah, some had horses.

Loew, M.: How was the government run, Ed? Was that tribal council or just regular, ah, elections?

Loew: Government. What was your city government? Was it run by the--?

DeNomie: There wasn't any. They had no police, no firemen.

Loew: Well, who was in charge of the people in the town?

DeNomie: Nobody. Everybody was boss. [laughs]

Loew: Was there a tribe?

DeNomie: Yeah, Chippewas—Ojibwes.

Loew: Well, who was in charge of it?

DeNomie: Well, there was nobody after old Chief Loon's Foot died.

Loew: That was your mother's father--your grandfather?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: When he died that was the end of the government?

DeNomie: Yeah. That was the end. He took the law with him. [laughs]

Loew: How did things get along after that?

DeNomie: Well, all right. Somebody had to get arrested they had to go downtown to get the sheriff. [laughs]

Loew: But who decided he ought to get arrested. Was it a citizen's arrest?

DeNomie: Never had any.

Loew: Well, then you had no need for the sheriff.

DeNomie: No!

Loew: Everybody behaved or everybody tolerated a lot. Did you tolerate more than anything else?

DeNomie: Boy, they used to drunk and fight and everything was okay. [laughs] Nobody got arrested. Take lumberjacks, boy. When they'd finish up a camp in the spring, say when everything was melting in April, they'd close the camp down and close all operations and pay off the lumberjacks. They used to come into town then. Sometimes in a week their whole winter's check was gone. Then they'd wait to go on a drive. That's when the rivers were high and the water was melting and the rivers were overflowing their banks, you know--lots of water. That's when the mills used to send the drivers out there to roll all them logs in the water and get

them down to the mill. That'd take about three weeks, maybe a month, and when that was done, same thing again: go downtown and--

Loew: They'd come into town and spend all their money?

DeNomie: Yeah and when that was all done then they used to go rafting. That's all these big piles along the lakeshore and along the water. Used to get a tug and big long strings of logs called boomsticks, great big ones, you know. The tug would be anchored way out and then you'd spread them two lines of boomsticks. Anchor them on the ground, anchor them about a quarter of a mile apart and then they'd roll all them logs in there.

Loew: It'd be like a large water trap for the logs.

DeNomie: Yeah, like a raft. We used to call them a raft. Then when all the logs were in the water, you used to take a team of horses and close them ends up.

Loew: Like a wrapper [?].

DeNomie: Yup. Toot-Toot! Away goes the tug. Tow it to whatever mill owned them: Pepin [?], Laona, Baraga.

Loew: What river was this?

DeNomie: Oh, there were several. There was the State River, the Huron River, the Sturgeon River and then there were some beyond way up there in the copper country. Whoever owned the logs.

Loew: Where did the town get their news?

DeNomie: Well, our news was the *Long Sentinel Weekly* once a week. But I used to be a newsboy up there; I used to peddle the *Chicago Examiner*.

Loew, M.: All the way up there?

DeNomie: Yeah. Twenty-five Sunday papers and I guess I had eighteen daily. I made a couple of nickels that way. Sometimes I'd have, oh, eighteen and make two cents a piece, that's thirty-six cents a day. Boy, that was good; I made money, I'll tell you. Another cash crop was arbutus flowers. Just as soon as the snow would melt, you know it was still kinda cold, arbutus would bloom.

Loew: Beautiful.

DeNomie: Beautiful. Down in what you'd call the pinery, down across the railroad track about half a mile. Sandy soil, that's where these arbutuses used to come up, oh. So the train going to Baraga about 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon, so we'd go down

there about one. Pick up about ten or fifteen bouquets. We'd make bouquets, bunches like, that in a basket. We'd pay seven cents to get on the train and to go down to Baraga and sell all these bouquets just faster than—people used to just love them, you know. Oh, sometimes they wouldn't want to buy. "Just take a smell once." "Mmmm, oh, alright, I'll take one." "Ten cents." [laughs]

Loew: It cost you seven cents to ride on the train?

DeNomie: Yeah. Say you had ten bunches at ten cents a piece—that's a dollar. And boy then, I tell you, you were in--

Loew: Was that the normal fare? Seven cents was the fare?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: And it was a train?

DeNomie: Yeah. Then we had to wait till the train coming back—7:00 o'clock, another seven cents.

Loew: To get on and go home.

DeNomie: By that time we had _____ rubbers [?] and a lot of stuff—

Loew: You'd spent all your money?

DeNomie: No, no. [laughs]

Loew: When you were gone all day, what did you eat? Did you pack a lunch along to eat or did you buy food?

DeNomie: I was never gone all day.

Loew: Well, you said 7 o'clock.

DeNomie: In the evening. By the time the train got down there probably, about quarter after four, and then all our flowers were gone. Maybe if we were smart and we had time we probably picked twenty-five bunches, you know. Sometimes we'd have some left so we'd get off the train down there and go to the women, knock on the door, "I don't know if you wanted—." "Sure." "Ten cents a piece." We usually got rid of them because, oh, they were beautiful flowers: nice aroma. Holy man.

Loew: Your mother's grandfather was Jean Baptiste? Your mother's grandfather.

DeNomie: Jean Baptiste DeNomie? No, that's my dad's father.

Loew: Your dad's father?

DeNomie: I don't know anything about my mother's mother. I don't know what her name was or where she came from or where she died.

Loew: But the man who came from Montreal—

DeNomie: That's Jean Baptiste DeNomie. That's my father's father.

Loew: What did your father ever tell you about him?

DeNomie: Never, never discussed him, that's the trouble. That's why I don't know anything.

Loew: They never talked about any of the family?

DeNomie: No. Once in a while they would talk about La Pointe. That's where my father was born, on Madeline Island, the town of La Pointe.

Loew: And your mother's father was a chief?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: And when he died the law went with him?

DeNomie: Yeah.

Loew: He was the last of the government.

DeNomie: They tried to have a couple of deputy sheriffs installed there but it wouldn't do any good. They wouldn't arrest anybody. [laughs] So it just died out. They forgot about it.

Loew: But you were able to get along without any law?

DeNomie: We were law abiding citizens. [laughs] Yeah. They had a couple of guys that was kind of suspected of being thieves and would steal. But no real criminals or anything: no killing, no shooting. Well, once or twice a couple of people got shot. One guy drowned; he was skating and he was on new ice and he was way out at night. He was carrying a lantern and he skated into a warm hole.

[Break in conversation]

Loew: Now we're checking an area map of Bayfield, Ashland, and the place where his father was born: La Pointe. That's on Madeline Island.

DeNomie: [Inaudible] a powder factory there—they made powder.

Loew: At Barksdale?

DeNemie: And it blew up a couple of times and so they abolished it. Right near the big creek, Fish Creek. Ashland—that's where the agency is. And over here—Odanah--at the mouth of the White River runs the (inaudible) of Odanah.

Loew: And you have land at Odanah?

DeNemie: Yeah.

Loew: How many acres?

DeNemie: Eighty.

Loew: Eighty acres at Odanah?

DeNemie: Yeah. It'd be right about there: pretty close to the White River and pretty close to the Bad River--about in the middle there.

Loew: What other land is there that belongs to you?

DeNemie: Well, I've got a twenty-acre and a sixty-acre plot—two plots, that's eighty acres.

Loew: Where's that?

DeNemie: Right in there.

Loew: In the same place?

DeNemie: The agent up there told me that I have probably twenty-five to thirty small parcels that I inherited from relatives deceased for a number of years. I have my share—some half-acre, some two acres.

Loew, M.: When was the last time you were up there?

DeNemie: About four years ago.

Loew, M.: Oh.

Loew: Who was Mahngoset [Mongozid, Maangozid?]

DeNemie: Mahngoset? That's the old chief Edward Loon's Foot. Mahngoset.

Loew: That was your grandfather?

DeNemie: Yeah, my mother's father. That's the chief.

Loew: Oh, I never knew who Mahngoset was.

DeNemie: Mahngoset: that means loon's foot. Mahng is a loon. O-set is a foot. So mahngoset is loon's foot. Yeah, see, what he went by.

Loew: And who is Manitou?

DeNemie: Manitou? That's a mythical character.

Loew: No, in one of your father's ledgers from the general store there was someone who had a bill.

DeNemie: Manitou? No, that was an Indian woman that they called Manitou. I don't know why. [laughs]

Loew: But that had the same meaning?

DeNemie: That's the Spirit.

Loew: Great Spirit.

DeNemie: Yeah.

Loew: Okay.

DeNemie: Yeah, a lot of them old timers—There's only one person up there that I know is almost as old as I am. That's my cousin Ebba [?] Loon's Foot. Her name is St. Arnold [?] now.

Loew: These older people, do they speak English?

DeNemie: Yeah. Well, the real old ones—I don't think there's anybody up there that speaks Indian now because they're all dead. My generation are all speaking English.

Loew: But the ones who spoke only Indian—did they speak Chippewa, Ojibwe?

DeNemie: Ojibwe, yeah!

Loew: And who helped them when they were dealing with English-speaking people, who helped them?

DeNemie: Well, they came to the store. My dad and mother and older sister: they could speak it. Frank could speak it, too.

Loew: There was always someone who could help them?

DeNomie: Yeah.

[End of Interview]