

Interview with Brynhild Mitchell

7/07/2009

Munising, MI

IN: To start off can you tell us your birthdate please?

BM: November the 24<sup>th</sup>, 1903.

IN: November 4<sup>th</sup>, 19...

BM: 24<sup>th</sup>!

IN: 24<sup>th</sup>, I'm...

BM: Oh yes!

IN: Okay. Well, can you tell me where you grew up?

BM: I was born in Ishpeming.

IN: Oh you were! So was I.

BM: Yes.

BM: And when I was a baby in arms, my father and mother and the four oldest children went to Lansing where he was employed in the state capital. And we lived there, and we came back to Munising when I was about six to the tannery. The East Munising tannery, because it was the biggest tannery in the world at that time.

IN: Can you explain what a tannery is?

BM: Oh, tanning hides. They got a lot of fresh, folded up hides and there was a certain part of the tannery where they had handles and knives and they went like that and got the hair off the hides.

IN: Oh, okay.

BM: Yes.

IN: So you came to Munising when you were six-years-old and you've been here ever since?

BM: Yes.

IN: Okay. What jobs have you held?

BM: I was a telephone operator for six-months and then I went west.

IN: Like West Munising?

BM: To Yellowstone National Park. Three of us girls got together and we hitchhiked. You don't want to know all of that.

IN: (Laughs)

IN: Okay, but you haven't held any other jobs?

BM: But let me say this, we were all safe in those days.

IN: Yeah, back when you could do that there wouldn't be a problem.

BM: No, I didn't think so. Accepting to hike or hitch rides.

IN: Now, do you remember the Great Depression?

BM: Oh yes, yes I do remember it.

IN: Did you come back to Munising after Montana? Were you in Munising at that time?

BM: Yes we came home and I became the... now wait a minute... the Munising High School, I'm trying to think of the name.

IN: Yeah, take your time.

BM: Munising Township School librarian. So, I was librarian for 18 months.

IN: At the high school?

BM: Yes.

IN: And that was during the depression?

BM: It was in the 20's and the 30's, for 18 months.

IN: 18 months, okay.

BM: Then I got married; I had a daughter Beverly Eleanor Mitchell.

IN: Okay.

BM: So that was mostly my big life.

IN: Right. Can you explain what like was like here in the depression, just here in Munising? Did it hit hard?

BM: Yes.

IN: How?

BM: You don't want a before that?

IN: Well yeah, sure you can...

BM: Well, I was going to say we had the Spanish Influenza around 1916 and that was terrible. People died right and left. When they went down to the stores they put on masks so they could protect themselves. I had that for a while. One of my neighbors was expecting a baby and she and the baby both died, and we went to a funeral after I got recovered and we saw a lady laid out with influenza. I mean

she was dead in the living room, we all walked through the house... well anyhow, she had a dead baby on her breast.

IN: Oh no.

BM: Yes, so it was a terrible time, and we had a pest house back in the hill for people that couldn't be taken care of at home. Well, that was the Spanish Influenza.

IN: Now that was in 1916?

BM: Yeah, World War One.

IN: Did that effect Munising?

BM: What?

IN: Did World War One affect Munising?

BM: Oh, of course it did! We have an American Legion called Roderick Prato Post, he was the first one who died over in Europe.

IN: Okay, well post World War One, what was the 1920's era like?

BM: Oh, it was kind of a lull. I suppose soldiers came back, and found jobs, and married; things like that. And then of course you know what happened in 1929.

IN: The depression.

BM: No, well the collapse of stocks and bonds. There were people who lost a lot of money at that time and some committed suicide. I don't remember any around here, but it was in the city.

IN: Okay. How did the stock market crash affect Munising? Did people lose jobs?

BM: Well, it brought on the depression. That's what it did.

IN: Okay.

BM: Yes, and in the depression families bundled up together. We had a mattress in the attic where my father and mother's grandchildren slept with us and ate all the time. And we were helping to support another family at the same time. That's why I worked.

IN: And you worked as the librarian at this time?

BM: Yes, yes.

IN: Now you said you only worked as a librarian for less than two years.

BM: 18 years!

IN: Oh for 18 years, I thought you said only 18 months, I apologize.

BM: No, for 18 years. I was part of the support of the family.

IN: And you were married at that time.

BM: No! I didn't get married until 1941.

IN: Okay, so you were 38 when you got married?

BM: Yes, I married Edmond... French spelling... Edmond James Mitchell.

IN: Alrighty, so...

BM: So then I had Beverly Eleanor Mitchell.

IN: Do you remember The Beach Inn?

BM: Oh yes! I used to go down there sometimes for parties, but the whole town had parties down there. It was an important... the best hotel in the whole area.

IN: Okay, do you remember what types of food and drink were served there?

BM: Oh no, I never served anything, but I'm sure the food was good. I remember there was Meinholz... that's what they called him. He was the manager. I'm trying to remember the name of the original one. All I can remember is Hackethorne; he and his wife took care of the place, but the original one was very important. It must be somewhere at the historical society. See, I gave my life to them too.

IN: To the historical society?

BM: Oh yes, they have it all down.

IN: Okay, I do have one question, do you know of... there was a bowl company; they specialized in making wooden bowls.

BM: Oh yes!

IN: Okay, could you tell me about them?

BM: The woodenware.

IN: The woodenware?

BM: The woodenware. In fact, people collected them. And also spoons and forks, all wooden. They even put out a little thing for butter to put on your plate that came down and made an impression.

IN: Oh wow.

BM: Oh yes, they did a lot of things. Then they hired an artist from Chicago to come up and teach some of the woodenware people how to paint those bowls, and those are very special today. They painted flowers and things on them.

IN: Can you recollect the years that was in operation?

BM: Well it'd be in the 20's, because my brother was in the service in World War One, and he came back and he worked in the woodenware, he and his wife. So it would have been in the 20's.

IN: Okay, really those were all the questions that I had for you, but you don't remember much about the food and drink at The Beach Inn?

BM: The what?

IN: The food and drink at The Beach Inn?

BM: No, but I'm sure they had the regular hotel things. I'm sure of that. They must have had good food, because they were all good cooks. Whenever businessmen came to sell their business, tried to get their things bought in the stores, they all stayed there. And a lot of the teachers used to stay there; they had rooms upstairs for that. It was a big building and it was very well known and well liked.

IN: Do you know anybody who worked there?

BM: What?

IN: Do you know anybody who worked at The Beach House Inn?

BM: Well, I knew a woman, but she's dead. That's a long time ago, you know?

IN: Yes (laughs).

BM: I do remember that my father was a volunteer weatherman, and they had a big tower outside of The Beach Inn, and he used to have put up flags and turn on lights all shipping season. Boats used to come in with coal, and even at the tannery dock in Munising, big ships used to come in with coal and even hides. There's one thing about the hides, most of them were from South America and from the United States, but one year they got some from China and that's the only year that there was a death from anthrax. Anthrax is a deadly, deadly disease and it will...

IN: What year was this? Do you remember?

BM: Where were we about?

IN: I think we were in the 1920's?

BM: No, we were in the teens, before World War One.

IN: Oh, okay.

BM: Yes, because I was only a child. And they really brushed them, brushed the hides, and sent them out by engine and boxcars, and brought them in that way... even a boat.

IN: Alright, yeah we just wanted to capture a little bit of early history here in Munising. Can you explain what...? Let's talk a little bit about... Well, World War Two brought America out of the Great Depression. Can you explain what the end of the depression was, and the era of the 40's with World War Two?

BM: Yeah

IN: Okay. Can you explain how World War Two affected Munising, and the end of the Great Depression in Munising?

BM: Well, I do remember... oh yes, potatoes were gathered. There was a great big farm south of Wetmore that now is the airfield. That was put out all by a commune... was potatoes. So, down by the railroad track, the Soo Line, there was a great big stone bin. It was the length of the track, it was so large, and they'd put potatoes in there for World War One. And we all had gardens for World War One.

We all had gardens, and the school had a garden, and everybody used their own gardens, and especially the potato bin; that was shipped out to the Army.

IN: Okay.

BM: Yes.

IN: Alright, well that looks like all the questions he had for you... well, I should ask you one more just to be safe. Do you remember, there was a special drink that came out of Munising called the Anaconda?

BM: The what?

IN: The Anaconda, and I believe it's made with whiskey.

BM: Never heard of it, the Anaconda?

IN: Mhmm, I'm told it was a popular favorite.

BM: A whiskey?

IN: Yes, I believe whiskey went into it, a smooth whiskey.

BM: A drink?

IN: Yeah.

BM: Never heard of it. Of course, I was young.

IN: So you probably wouldn't have been drinking at that time.

IN & BM: (Laughs)

BM: I wasn't any time, so there.

IN: Okay.

[INTERVIEW ENDS]

