Interview with Spencer Shunk

Interviewer: Karl Shunk

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KS: The first person from our family to come through the Soo was great-Grandpa Shunk wasn't it?

SS: Yes. William Shunk.

KS: Is he the one who settled on Shunk Rd?

SS: He came across and Shunk Rd. is named after him.

KS: How did they settle the land on Shunk Rd?

SS: The time they settled it, that's when they built the Catholic Church. All these Protestants came from Germany. Most of them were masons and carpenters. They came across on ice that winter. I don't remember what year that was. 18 something or other. The priest had them build a Catholic Church because like I said, they were all masons and so forth. So they built a Catholic Church. The priest came up in the spring. He paid them and brought axes and saws and that kind of stuff. There was no money in those days. There was no mining or circulation.

KS: So he paid them in goods.

SS: Yes. So when they settled Shunk Rd. they had all these teams lined up and they started out in the morning. My grandfather said they had the poorest team in the bunch. All these other teams got ahead of our team and as they dropped off, one team dropped off on this chunk of timber, the next team dropped off at the next chunk of timber. My grandfather's team was the last team. He kept on going and eventually they came to a natural clearing. That's where he pulled off. It was before he even had a decent ax. So he got about a 2 or 3 year jump on these other fellows because he didn't have much timber to clear. So he got his crops in real early and got going before these other fellows really got their land cleared. So he got a jump on it. Being that he was the last team and the last one to settle, that's why Shunk Rd. was named after him.

KS: What did he start farming originally? What did he grow?

SS: All they grew up here was hay and oats. I can remember him talking about raking peas at one time. He put in potatoes and so forth, but most farmers worked the farms in the summer and went to the woods in the winter.

KS: To be…

SS: Lumberjacks. Most of the farmers took the teams to the woods. I remember my Dad had three teams and he took them to the woods. I would have been about 8 or 9 years old. I can remember going up and watching them load the teams on railroad cars and taking them up to Strongs and Germfask and unloading them up there. My Dad did a lot of lumbering around Whitefish Point. That was at the end of the big pine country. A lot of it was cut before his time. But we were still cutting big pine trees then.

KS: What lumber company did he work for? Do you remember?

SS: I don't remember. I can remember the Cadillac Lumber Co. I was always in their camp when I was a young fellow. They had 300 men and I don't know how many teams. Maybe 50 or 60 teams of horses. But they had 300 men in camp. They had teamsters and trimmers and whatever you called them all. They cut all the trees down with cross cut saws.

KS: Let's go back to the farm. When he started farming, when great-Grandpa Shunk settled this land, was the crop that he grew strictly for himself?

SS: No. In those days they shipped a lot of hay out of here. It went out by rail road car to Rudyard and Dafter. ??? had railroad cars of hay shipped out of here. I remember as a kid watching 4 or 5 sleighs of baled hay going out to be shipped out of here. That's why you get the name clover in a lot of things. There's clover in this or that. Clover Electric and clover this. It was great country for clover hay. A lot of that hay was shipped down to the horses in Detroit and the big cities. Chicago…

KS: What were some other ways that great-Grandpa Shunk and your Dad made money?

SS: He used to deal with horses quite a bit. In the spring a lot of these teams from the lumber camps come back out of the woods they were cut up and bruised and lame and so forth. He'd buy a lot of those horses pretty cheap and put them on pasture and he was half veterinarian. He treated the horses and fatten them up. Doctor them up a little and then in the fall when the lumber camps started up again he always had a bunch of nice fat horses to sell back to the lumber camps. That's how he made a good living. They raised a lot of oats and barley too and he sold a lot of grain to the lumber companies. They had to buy hay and oats for the horses up there. Most of the farmers sold a lot of their stuff to the lumber camps in those days too. A lot of their grain. A lot of them raised flax in this country too. Flax was all shipped out of here. They did use flax to feed horses in the winter time too. Give them a handful of flax every time

you gave them their oats and that kept them in good shape. It kept their hair looking slick and oily looking. It kept them healthy.

KS: You also mentioned that great-Grandpa Shunk made moonshine too.

SS: My Dad. During the Depression in the 1930s. He was a bootlegger here. He lived on a farm too, but things were tough in those days. He was making moonshine. A lot of the farmers went to town. By the time they left Sheldon with the horses and got here, half the day was over. So they'd stop here for lunch or a meal. They'd stop on the way home and pick up a pint of moon and take it home. A quart or gallon, whatever they bought. I remember when I was a kid my Dad used to sell moon for $1 a pint. I remember a lot of the Frenchmen came here. In those days we had our table in the kitchen and we had an oil cloth for a table cloth. The Frenchmen would see who made the best moon and they would pour a little on the tablecloth and light it. Some wouldn't even light and some had a real yellow flame to it and smoke. My Dad always had a good clear blue flame. That's how they knew he made the best moon of anybody in the country. A lot of guys made moon and couldn't get rid of it. My Dad sold all the moon he could make. In those days I can remember we had a barrel of mash and we'd have 6 or 7 barrels at a time. A two burner kerosene stove and that's what they cooked the mash on. The barrel of mash would run off about 8 gallons of moon. That was corn and rock sugar. I can remember the sugar was a great big chunk, not refined sugar that we use today.

KS: What did he do to get rid of the mash?

SS: He fed it to the pigs. We used to raise a lot of drunken pigs. I remember them getting all folic one time. My Dad or a bunch of men would be in the yard there and he'd show them the pigs sitting there goofy looking. It was really comical to watch. I remember one time some people drove into the yard

with kids from town. My brother and I took these kids to the pig pen and showed them our drunken pigs. Our Dad gave us one heck of a lickin' for that. We never done that again.

KS: Who was the gentleman at Hebert's old place? Who had the car?

SS: That was Andy Hebert. He was in the Coast Guard. When the Coast Guard laid up all their boats, a lot of guys came home for Christmas and took their vacations. They got a lot of time off in the winter time. The Coast Guard base here in town. Andy Hebert bought a new Ford car. My Dad at that time had horses. They were pulling these horses around the yard on a ???. They were in the yard and Hebert drove into the yard with this new Ford sedan that he bought. In those days these Ford cars had wooden wheels. So somebody suggested that they hook a team of horses to this new car and put the brakes on and see if the team could pull it. There weren't very many people that had cars. A lot of people had never rode in a car at that time. Anyway they hooked the team to the car. They thought nothing of pulling the car around the yard. A bunch of guys got in the car to put more weight in it. The team took off. The breaks didn't work on the car with that much weight in it so somebody took a pole and put it in the back wheel. That was going to hold it down. The team took off and the pole went right through the wheel and the whole back end of the car settled on the ground. Hebert was pretty mad. He was going to lick every man out there if he could get at them. They had to pull the car to one side of the barn yard and that car sat there almost all winter before he got new wheels for it. In those days you were lucky to get a car let alone get many parts for it. He didn't get his car home until he got new wheels. He waited almost all winter for those wheels. I can remember that. That would be 70 years ago.

KS: How old were you when you went into the service?

SS: I was about 20 or 21.

KS: Was great-Grandpa Shunk still alive?

SS: Yes. When I was in the service the Red Cross brought me home because in Norfolk, VA just as we were getting ready to go overseas, the Red Cross brought me home for 10 days. That's the only time I got time off in the service. I went to his funeral.

KS: How did great-Grandpa Shunk die?

SS: He had cirrhosis of the liver. He wasn't really a drinking man himself. But he died of cirrhosis of the liver. It was quite painful in those days. I guess it still is painful. You don't hear of many people dying of that anymore, but there probably are a lot of people. Every time you mention somebody dying of cirrhosis of the liver, automatically they think he must have been an alcoholic. Alcohol is supposed to be tough on your liver.

KS: How many years did you spend in the service?

SS: I was at sea for 3 years. It must have been about 3 ½ or 3 ¾ years.

KS: You were married to Grandma at the time right?

SS: Yes. I got married before…

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SS: Who will listen to this?

KS: This will probably go into the archives at Northern Michigan University. It's interesting stuff.

SS: In those days everyone was out of work in this part of the country. Your grandmother's Dad worked at the coal dock. He was a foreman for Consumer's Coal Co. Everybody around here, if they didn't burn wood then they burned coal. He was a foreman at the coal docks, but they never made no money. Things were real tough. He had a big family, 11 kids. Your grandmother and I were going together, I often wondered why she didn't invite me down for Sunday dinner. I knew they had a big family. I wasn't there very often. Only once or twice. So anyway, one Sunday I went down without being invited and went in for dinner, all they had was a bowl of potatoes in the middle of the table and that was about it. Maybe some carrots or something like that, but that's all they had that Sunday. There were a lot of families in that shape. I can remember going to grade school and a couple boys were my age. I asked the teacher how come all those ?? kids have blue teeth all the time? The teacher took me along side and said the reason they had blue teeth was because all they had to eat was blueberry sandwiches all the time. That shows you how tough things were in those days.

KS: You guys didn't…

SS: Well my Dad was bootlegging then and had a pretty good setup as far as that goes. We had money. He had money to spend so us kids were always well dressed and had lunch pails. In those days most of the kids brought their lunch to school in a bucket. I can remember them being lined up in the school. Some had their names on and some didn't. We had a pretty good sized farm too. We had quite a few cattle and always had our own meat, stuff like that. Always had pigs. We were really lucky because we had a little cash coming in.

KS: So despite the fact that times were tough and people didn't have a lot of money to spend, they always stopped to buy liquor.

SS: Yes. They always had enough to buy a pint of moon on the way home. That's for sure. My Dad always had 3 or 4 teams of horses and at haying time they would hire a bunch of Indians from Sugar Island. The ??? and ??? would come over and help with the hay. One time Dad had two teams on the moore, which was a pretty big operation. We'd cut down 10 acres of hay in a day and rake it up and all these guys would get a fork and coil it. After it sat in the coil for a while they'd pitch it on a wagon by hand and bring it in the barn and put it up in the mow. But that took a lot of labor and it was a slow process. In the winter time when my Dad went away to the camps with his teams, my mother, and we had a hired chore boy, my mother stayed home and took care of us kids to see that we got to school. The old man came home for Christmas and that was about the only time we'd see him all winter.

KS: How many months would he be gone at a time?

SS: He'd leave here in November as soon as the snow came and he took his teams up, 2 or 3 teams in the woods himself. He drove one team and had 2 teamsters working for him to drive the other two teams. So he was a teamster. Skidded logs and hauled logs to the banks of the river where they floated them down, Tahquamenon to the lake there. In the spring the tugs would come pick them up and bring them to the Soo. There was a big mill in Canada at the time over here. A lot of them logs were taken to Canada.

KS: When you were a boy the Soo Locks were already built right?

SS: Oh yes. Built long…I can remember hearing my grandfather talking about Gatesville being settled by Polocks. Finlanders and Frenchmen settled around Rudyard. The Italians settled around Hessel. These guys were families that were brought over from the old country for labor for the locks. After the locks were built all these labor contractors had no place to put these men. So they went out and bought big chunks of land in these areas and put the Polocks in Gatesville. That's why in here you have different communities. Everybody in Gatesville has Polish in them. Around Hessel there were a lot of Italians out

there. Italian cemeteries out there. Then the Finlanders, they all settled around Rudyard. Rudyard was good farming country. Gatesville wasn't very good. Neither was Hessel and Cedarville. Pretty tough digging there.

KS: When you came back from the service, what was the first job you took?

SS: When I went away in the service I was working at the Michigan ???, that electrical plant, working down in the turbines. The water went through the turbines. We'd drain out one turbine and go down there and clean the wheels out. Dig out all the fence posts and all the crap that would plug it up. You could tell when the wheel was getting plugged by the amount of amps the generators were…when it slowed down and got to a certain level, they would lower the gate and drain the water out of it. I and a couple other guys would go down and clean that turbine. I don't know how many turbines they had there. 48 or 50. They kept us going all day up and down. I spent all my time cleaning these turbines.

KS: When did you first start to go into business for yourself?

SS: When I came back out of the service meat was hard to get. Nobody had any meat. A lot of the lumber camps couldn't get any meat and these companies, all their meat was going to the army. So I started in as a butcher. I would go out and buy cattle and butcher them and take it to town and sell it. When I got my money I would go out and buy another one. I'd buy veal and pigs and bring them home and butcher them and take them to town and sell them. That's how I got started in the meat business. Then eventually I built a little slaughter house and I used to butcher pretty heavy then. I would go to the cattle sales. They started around here in Rudyard. There was one by Escanaba and two down below the Straits. I used to buy a lot of cattle from the sale if I couldn't get them from the farmer direct. We'd butcher a couple nights a week and cut meat up and take it to town. I built a big meat cooler out here. The first one in this country to have a big walk in cooler. A lot of the stores in town had little coolers, but

I had a big cooler where I could hang quite a large amount of meat. A lot of times I could kill 20 to 25 cattle a week and anywhere from 15 to 25 hogs a week. Then I would take my hides up to the tannery. I can remember a lot of times I would kill a lot of cattle just for the hides. A cow hide in those days was worth about $25. That was right after the war and they needed leather pretty bad. After a while it got a lot cheaper. I don't know what the price of hides is today. But all the hides today are pretty much shipped out of here. But when the tannery was here, I sold all my hides directly to the tannery. It was a great thing.

KS: Do you remember what you sold per pound?

SS: I can remember selling hamburger for 39 cents a pound. That was a pretty good price too at that time. It varied. It all depends on different times of the year. Winter time meat was pretty hard to get up here because most of the farmers sold their cattle in the late fall when they come off the grass kind of fat and so forth. There were quite a few cattle for sale. Then winter would come on and toward spring, most of the farmers sold what they wanted to sell and meat was a little harder to get then. After the meat business, I remember the supermarkets started coming in here then, Piggly Wiggly, they wouldn't buy any local meat, they bought the meat from their own distributor. When the different stores came in, A&P, a lot of my customers and little stores started going out of business. The same thing with the restaurants. I used to do a lot of restaurant business. The little ma and pop restaurants started to fold up when chain restaurants started to come in. So there again, I lost a lot of my customers. So I had to do something else. I had the slaughterhouse. I started selling freezers. I could sell a freezer and a side of beef to the guy who bought the freezer. That worked out pretty good for quite a while. I used to work all day in the meat house and be on the road all night selling freezers. Then I'd go into somebody's house and they'd say I'd like to buy a freezer from you but the lady needs a washing machine and there's a baby in the hospital and I have to have a washing machine before I buy a freezer. I thought if I was selling washing machines I

could sell that fellow a washing machine. So them I took on appliances in general. I took on refrigerators and dryers and washers. That's how I got into the appliance business. That worked pretty good.

KS: What brought you into furniture?

SS: I was doing so much business down here on the farm I thought if I had a store in town I'd do twice as much business. So I moved to town and started a store in town. I hired a couple salesmen and a girl to run the office. I was on the road selling appliances. That worked out pretty good. I was on the side street and I thought if I was on main street I would do more business yet. The Soo Hardware was a great big business and had a big building and they went out of business. So I rented the store from the Soo Hardware Co. I only needed the one floor on the street level. It had a big basement and big 2nd and 3rd floor up on top. I never used the top floor and one day a fellow came in and wondered why I didn't put some furniture up there. I said I didn't have any money to put furniture up there. That was the main reason. He said he'd help me get started. He was looking for a job, so he sent me in some couches and chairs and that's how I got started. I ran a few ads and sold a few. Paid that load of furniture off. Ordered another load and eventually got some credit built up in the furniture dealers. Then I got two or three more salesmen calling on me. I got going pretty good in the furniture business. At that time carpet was starting to come in. You'd see a few carpet ads around and a few stores handled a few samples of carpet. I walked in a store one day…

END TAPE 1

SS: How I got started in the cattle business? Well I was butchering and I was going around, buying a few cattle here and there and butchering them. Taking then to town, and selling them to the stores. Every once in a while when I was buying maybe three or four cows from a farmer, maybe I'd be able to get a nice young heifer so I'd buy her and bring her home, put her in the pasture, and then later as time went

buy, I'd pick up a bull, and turn this bull with these heifers. I kept the calves, and the only calves I sold were the bull calves, but I always kept the heifer calves. Four or five years went by, and I had quite a herd of young cows and calves coming along. That's mainly how I got into the cattle business. I'd have fifty or sixty head, and of course half of them would be bull calves. The other half would be heifers. So I would sell the bulls. Land was cheap in those days so every time I sold my bull calves, I'd buy the farm next door because all these farms were going vacant. The old people were dying, and the young people couldn't make a living on them so they went to Detroit and Chicago for jobs so that left old farms here vacant. I was picking up these farms here pretty fast. Pretty much I owned this whole valley eventually, and the more land I got, the more cattle I could handle, and I raised three boys. That was a great asset too. I had quite a bit of help. They always had a bunch of friends hanging around here, and I used to put them all to work. Those were the good old days. Free labor. All I had to worry about was buying fuel and parts for the machinery. It'd break every so often. But we used to put up an awful lot of hay. The most cows I ever had was 135 cows. I sold them to someone in Munising. He came down, look them over, and bought them all. Those were the last cows I ever had. But then I went into raising feeder cattle. In the spring of the year, I'd buy a bunch of feeder cattle, and in the fall when they'd got up to weigh, I'd sell them and take it easy in winter. It was an easy way to make a living. I did pretty good in the cattle business working it that way, and I'm still doing it.

KS: When did uncle Spence start to get into the cattle business?

SS: Well, he got of high school, he was working at the store with me all the time. He got married, and he bought a farm up there of his own, and he put in a few cattle, and gradually worked into them. Now today he's got quite a good bunch of cattle. He raised some good calves this year. He's got 175 or 200 down there in St. Louis in the feed lot. They'll be going to market in February. Some of them are already weighing about 1400 pounds. If the price stays up, the future will be about 75 cents in February market. You can get 75 cents a pound for them, he'll do really good this year. I got 115 down there in the feed lot

in St. Louis also. We're going down tomorrow to check them out. My cattle should be ready to sell 15th of January.

KS: You're going down to St. Louis tomorrow?

SS: Yeah. Look see how they're doing. I understand they're doing real good. I was down there a month ago so.

KS: When did you first start sending your cattle to feed lots?

SS: Well, this is the first time I've ever sent cattle down to a feed lot. I'd of sold mine direct off the grass in the fall, but this year I thought I'd try putting some in the feed lot and see how it'd work out. The price of corn was very cheap this year, and I thought I could get a pretty good gain on weight, and it wouldn't cost me too much. The last time I talked to him, he figured that it was costing 50 cents to out a pound of gain on them so if I can put 300 pounds on these steers at 50 cents a pound, and sell it for 75 cents, I'll be making 325 cents a pound on every 300 pounds. That should come out pretty good. Unless the prices drop, but that's something you don't have much control over, but generally in February cattle prices go up pretty good. Now they're predicting that it'll be right around 75 cents. Today, cattle is 72 cents on the market. Some are predicting it'll go up to 80, which would be great, but I don't depend on that. I'll be pretty happy with 75.

I can remember when I was selling toasters and irons. The first time I found out that stuff broke down. This woman bought a toaster, and suddenly she came back. "Mr. Shunk, this toaster doesn't work. I bought this toaster from you two weeks ago. Can you fix it for me?" "I don't know why not." So I took the toaster, and I had a little room in the back. I put the toaster on the bench, and I set there looking at it, and I went and got a screwdriver. Flipped that toaster over. Somebody will come in and about an hour

later in comes some kid from high school. I knew him a little bit, and I say, "Ever fixed a toaster?" "No," he says, "but I know how they work." "Well, come here and see if you can fix this toaster." So he plugged it in, and there was no juice in so he turned it upside down and took the bottom off as I waiting on a customer. About 20 minutes later he come out and says "It's all fixed. Just like new. Your wire was off". He put it all back together and I went out there and tried it. The toaster worked good. The woman came in a couple days later, and I gave her back the toaster. So that's what I did then. If anything would go wrong. I'd either go get it and bring it back or have them bring it in, and then I'd get a hold of someone to see if they'd fix it for me. Phil Romano was still down here cutting meat for me so we were still selling freezers. So then I'd say, "See if you can get that washer working." He'd fool with the darn thing. Anyone could fix it if you took your time. I had books on all of them, what to do. Phil got pretty good so when I quit the meat business, Phil kept on working for me. He worked for me for 30 yeas. He was my service man for a good many years. Only thing about Phil is you'd send him out to fix something, he'd never talk to anyone. He'd say, "What's wrong with your washer". "I don't know. You'll have to look at it. It's down there in the kitchen." Phil would work on it, fix it, pick up his tools, and go. They'd call up later. "Mr. Shunk. Did your service man fix my washer? Can I use it?" "Well, isn't he there?" "No. He went home." "Well, it must be fixed then. I don't know." Phil would never tell her you're washer's fixed. He'd just walk out. Sometimes people would walk into the store with a tool, asking if it was mine, and I'd say, "I believe it is." And they'd tell me that my service man left it behind.

KS: When your dad passed away, his pastor was put out in front of the house?

SS: Yeah because a lot of people were afraid of getting the disease. They figured that he had pneumonia. No one wanted to catch pneumonia. That's why they put him by the window, and people could look through the window and see him in his casket without being in the room. But the family was in the room. There was a porch in front of the house, and the neighbors would come up on the porch and stand and look at him.

KS: How long were those people lined up for?

SS: With all those cars, they were from here over to the cemetery. About a mile.

KS: A lot of people.

SS: It was in them days. Today you don't have big funerals anymore. People don't go to funerals anymore like they used to. If they have a funeral in the church, very few people go to the cemetery. The last three funerals I went to, nobody went to the cemetery. Four people will go with the body to make sure it gets buried. Another thing. People don't go to cemeteries like they used to. When I used to go into town everyday with the meat route, sometimes I'd have to make two trips. Go in in the afternoon around 2, and I'd have to slow down by the cemetery because there were cars going in and cars coming out. Now I go by the cemetery, and I'm lucky to see two cars. Nobody visits cemeteries like they used to. Saturday and Sunday are the big days for visiting cemeteries.

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SS: My grandfather gave me this farm when he come up during the war, and I come home. He made me promise that I would never sell it. So I never did, and I've lived here all my life. This house was built in 1896, the year my dad was born and my grandfather said that was one of the worst years of his life. He was living across the road at the time in a log cabin and they had a dug well, and he said that year one of the horses fell in the well. He lost his best horse. My dad was born, and they were building this house. He said it took him five years to get out of debt. It's a pretty big house. I've remodeled it inside, made it pretty modern. Last year I put all new siding on it, insulated it, put a new roof on it, put all new windows in it. It's pretty fancy in my opinion. I'm 80 years old, and it's where I've lived all my life. I've never

lived anywhere else. I travel all over the world, but I always come home. I took a lot of vacations and a lot of trips. The deer run right out to the back field here. Sometimes I just sit here and count deer all day. I get tired of counting cars.

KS: When was Aunt Penny Shunk born?

SS: She was my first daughter. She was born during the war. It was the same week that I came home because my grandfather died. I don't remember the date, but it was 1945 or '44. Something like that. Then after I came home I had a boy, Spencer. Then after Spencer, all of my kids were two and a half years apart. A girl and a boy and a girl and a boy. After Brenda was your dad Karl, named after my dad. Then after Karl was Karen, then Stanley, and Grace was the last one. There were 7, all big eaters. I was very lucky that they all lived around here close. I always felt sorry for people that raised a family and I talk to them and say where's so and so and they say he's out in California. When did you see him last? I saw him last Christmas but they're coming home one of these days. So and so is in New York. All their kids are spread out and the old people are darn lonesome. I was lucky that all my kids settled here and there's not a day that goes by when I don't see 3 or 4 family members. They all live within a few miles except for Karl up in Marquette. He's the farthest away. The rest are here in the Soo. The Soo is not a very big town so I get around to see them quite often.

KS: What are they doing for careers?

SS: Your dad has two stores in Marquette. Penny teaches school in Munising. Spencer has the furniture store in the Soo. Grace has a rent-to-own store in town. She rents furniture and appliances and computers and stuff like that. Stanley had run the store in Manistique but he didn't like it so he's back here now, a repair man for a different appliance company. He does the guarantee work for Whirlpool and General Electric and appliances for the factory. He goes to Drummond Island for service calls and all over.

That's what he likes to do is be on the road. Karen works for the School Board. The Secretary for the School Board. Brenda drives a school bus and her husband is a guard at the prison. So they're all living right here plus the grandchildren. Most of them are going to college now.

KS: Quite a family.

SS: It is quite a family when you think about it. 7 kids and 26 grandkids and 8 great-grandkids now. It's quite a bunch.

KS: When did you first meet Grandma Shunk?

SS: I guess I met her brothers first and started going around with them. Then I found out they had a sister and went over to their house one time and that's where I met her. She used to have a riding horse and she used to ride from Shunk Road to this farm. She'd come down on Sundays and I had a horse and we'd go riding. We didn't have no car then. That's how I first met her. That was a long time ago. She was only about 15 and I was 17. As time went by we got married and then I got drafted. That was a long time.

KS: Where were you at when you asked her to marry you?

SS: It couldn't have been very far from here. I think we went to her Dad's. There was a Grange Hall about half a mile up the road here and all the young people went there for dances. I had a couple cousins that played the guitar and violin. One played the piano. So we had dances almost every Saturday night. The old Granger was a pretty strict hall. There was no drinking around there. We used to go over there and square dance. I must have asked her one night on the way home or something. I remember that's where we had the wedding dances there too.

KS: What ever happened to the old Grange Hall?

SS: It's still sitting there. There's a guy that sells golf carts there. He repairs golf carts in it.

KS: Oh that's just right up the road here. What's the name of that?

SS: ???

KS: That was the old Grange Hall then.

SS: That was the good old days I guess. Like they say, the good old days. My father-in-law was a good caller. Man could he ever call square dances. He used to be the caller.

KS: What was his name?

SS: Haran Ellis. H-A-R-A-N.

KS: Is that where you guys mostly hung out?

SS: Yes. It wasn't far from here and it only cost 25 cents to get in. They even had a lunch. The old women at the hall would make sandwiches and coffee. When you paid 25 cents to get in they stamped you on the hand and then when they had lunch at 12:00 you got a sandwich and a cup of coffee. You could drink as much coffee as you wanted.

KS: So it wasn't like a night club.

SS: Oh no.

KS: All day long?

SS: They'd go over at 6:00 to make sandwiches up for the party. If someone had cake they'd bring it.

KS: It was Saturday night?

SS: Yes.

KS: Did most of the people from the Soo go?

SS: Just people around here. Well from all over really. There were always lots of people there. They came from all over actually. Most of the songs they played over and over. They didn't have a big list of songs they could play. They could play them pretty good. Then every once in a while somebody would get up and sing a song.

KS: How old were you when this was going on?

SS: I was about 17 or 18. Right before I got married. Those were fun days.

KS: Did you steal any of great-grandpa's moonshine before you headed for the dance?

SS: No. My Dad was dead then. He died when I was about 11 years old. I had a step-dad in those days. He worked at the tannery about 3 days a week. The tannery used to work according to how they got

contracts. Sometimes they'd work 3 days a week, sometimes they worked a full week. It all depends on how much hides they sold I guess.

KS: Your dad died of cirrhosis of the liver.

SS: No, my grandfather died of that.

KS: How did your dad die?

SS: My dad died, he took a team of horses to the Pickford Fair and he was coming home after the fair. He had a lantern on the wagon. Somebody came up behind him with a car and didn't see him apparently and hit the wagon. He got knocked off the wagon and broke his jaw. In those days when you had a broken jaw the only thing the doctors did is sew it up tight. They knocked out a couple teeth so they could give him a straw so he could eat. In the meantime we had a 10 acre field of potatoes and it was a wet fall. After he came back from the hospital and got his jaw fixed up he was out picking potatoes and that's when he got pneumonia and that's when he died. He strangled to death.

KS: They didn't have much for medication back in those days, huh?

SS: No. Not really. Not a great deal.

KS: When you were born, did the doctor used to come to the house?

SS: Oh yeah. They used to make house calls, but I was born in the hospital. I was born in the old Soo hospital. My mother used to be a nurse. That's where my father met my mother. She was nursing in the hospital, and he got hurt and he went in for something when he was a young man. That's when he met

her, and that's where they got married. Then they came here on the farm, and the grandparents that were living here moved to town, and they took the farm over. So they farmed it and he died in 1932. He was only 31 years old. Just a young man when he died, but I can remember him. Matter of fact, they took that front window out and we had a porch on the front of the house, and all the people came

END of TAPE 2

SS: We had great big banks up the side. Every time it would blow full of snow, horses would get out there, especially here because we have trees all the way around here. It made a hell of a drift. Had to shovel horses out of the snow drifts. It used to be exciting, too.

KS: Watching the horses come through?

SS: Yeah. Right up between our place and McDonald's place, this house wasn't there then, we had a big mud hole in the spring. My dad used to pick up quite a few dollars. People would get there and get stuck. Then they'd get his king, and he'd charge them three or our dollars to pull them out.

KS: First ever towing service.

SS: This one guy came there one afternoon, all dressed up with a fancy car. And dad had to get his horses and pull him out. He said he'd have to charge him three dollars, and the guy agreed to it, but after my dad pulled him out, off he went. He never paid him. That made him mad. My dad was quite a fighter too. He said I'll get that son of a bitch one of these days. So about two weeks later, at about 9 at night, a knock came at the door, and it was the same guy. "Mr. Shunk, I'm stuck out here again, will you pull me out if I pay you the three dollars from the last time?" My dad said he'd pull him out so he got the horses. It was getting dark. Hooked on to the guys car, and he pulled him across the ditch and down the field.

Then he unhooked them and went home. The guy was pissed off. The guy was all dressed up, he had to get out and walk in the mud. I don't know where he walked. The car set there for two, three days. The old man didn't go get it. The sheriff came by to see if he was going to get the car and he said hell no I'm not going to get his car. Get somebody else to do it. The next farm was Eagle's Town Ragel's, another farm up where the hill is. They didn't want to do that. They were old anyway. The other farm was back here. There weren't many people living here back then. A guy came from some place with a team of horses and that team barely pulled it back on the road. My Dad was something like your dad. He wasn't a very tall man and probably 200 pounds. Short and stocky. Years ago there were wrestling matches at Fort Brady. I remember 7 or 8 years old and Dad taking me to wrestling matches. There was one guy named Strangler Louis. He was from Chicago and a big wrestler in the country. In those days there were a lot of wrestling matches. That was the only entertainment there was. Friday night there would be a big wrestling match at the armory. The next Friday or Saturday there would be a big wrestling match some place else. Up at Goul's Hall or any big dance hall. There was a wrestler on Sugar Island. I just had his name on the tip of my tongue. He was training to wrestle Strangler Louis. His wife was a doctor and he learned a certain neck hold that just strangled you. Any time he'd get a wrestling match he would strangle him and win. Amo ??? was a great Finnlander and he would come over here when my Dad made moon and wrestle. ??? and the whole bunch would come down and wrestle Strangler Louis to train him up. He always said my Dad gave him the best wrestle of any of them. He was the hardest to pin. I didn't get to see that fight. Another one was Kit Parker. He had a bar on Ashmun Street on this side of the bridge. He'd hang himself every night. At 9:00 everybody would go to the bar to see Parker. He would be on a chair with a rope around his neck and they'd kick the chair out from underneath him. He'd hang there by his neck. I seen him. My Dad used to sell him a lot of moon in that bar. My dad sold to bars not just to people here.

KS: Were they bars or like speakeasies?

SS: Speakeasy. There was prohibition in those days. They knew they were there but let them go most of the time. I can remember that. Kit Parker. His son was the principle of the high school in Newberry for many years. I can remember when I was selling stuff around Newberry I saw him one time. I told him about the time I went to the bar and saw his dad hang himself. He said he was crazy. When he died he had a neck on him like that. The muscles in it and where the rope had strained his neck. Hung himself many times.

KS: Did he do it just to gather a crowd in?

SS: Yes. Just a trick. He had a certain way he could hold his neck so that the rope didn't cut off his air. They make a hangman's knot so that when you fall that knot hits you in the side of the head and breaks your neck. That's what kill you. I don't know how he got around that knot. But they kicked the chair out from underneath him and he would hang by his neck there and they would all be in a circle. Then the soldiers at Fort Brady were in. We'd go see the fights there. Some of the fights would be bare knuckled. They eventually stopped that and put on boxing gloves. There wasn't much padding in them then. There were some tough son of a guns there.

KS: There were fights up at Fort Brady every night?

SS: Yes. There were fights going on all the time. That was a big thing in those days. They had the street car lines all over town. In the wintertime the streetcar would make a track in the snow. A lot of the farmers go to town and their sleigh would get in those streetcar tracks and they couldn't get them out of it. They would be that deep. So ??? ran one of the streetcars and if there was a sleigh ahead of him he would bump the sleigh with the car and push them out and make the horses pull it out. A man was coming down there one night, he was the last team, there were about 3 teams ahead of him. They must have hauled hay to town or something. Anyway they were all up in the front and along comes this streetcar, get off the

tracks. Those teams ahead, some tried to get off and the couldn't get out. The old man's team was coming down, his sleigh was in the track too. The railroad guy bumped the sleigh and drove it back to the horses and the guy jumped off the sleigh and grabbed that guy by the neck and beat the tar right out of him. They never saw somebody get such a beating. He never ran into anybody's sleigh after that. Some of these old guys used to tell me stories about my Dad. They would get so excited. Those were the old days. He had a lot of friends. He knew everybody and everybody liked him. He gave a lot of guys free drinks too. Guys come around and want a pint. I'll pay you next week. The old man would give them a pint and never get his money.

KS: This has been an interview with my grandfather, Spencer Shunk Sr. at 11:30 in the year 2000.

SS: That's going to be a long ride down there tomorrow, three of us in that truck. 70 miles an hour with that trailer full of cattle. You can't even stop to pee. He never stops. It's crazy.

KS: Do you haul all the cattle down?

SS: He's going to come pick me up around 7:00 with the trailer. He'll have the cattle fed by then. Go down and pick up the cattle at Denis'. He lives right across from Stanley. We'll take off. It's 250 miles down there.

KS: You guys going down and staying the night and coming back the next day?

SS: No, we'll come right back. The sale starts at 1:00. I want to go look at my cattle and he want's to look at his cattle.

SS: So you go downstate right to Ohio?

KS: No, it's in the middle of Michigan. By Alma and Breckenridge. Three towns are together.

SS: Oh, alright. I was thinking St. Louis, Missouri. 250 miles…

KS: That will be a 500 mile trip tomorrow. We'll probably get back around 1:00 at night. The sale will get over around 5 or 6:00 and then we will load up our cattle and…

END OF INTERVIEW