

Interview with Cornelius Sochay
Marquette, MI
September 19, 2008

Subject: Life Story

START OF INTERVIEW

Magnaghi, Russell M. (RMM): Interview with Cornelius Sochay in Marquette, Michigan on September 19th, 2008. Okay, I guess Corny, we can go with that or, you were known as Corny here on campus, or you got that name from your real name, Cornelius, and in the business world you're known as...

Sochay, Cornelius (CS): Conn. C-O-N-N...

(RMM): Okay, so we'll go with... we are at Northern, so we'll go with Corny.

(CS): Alright.

(RMM): First, what is your birthday?

(CS): It is July 19th, 1933.

(RMM): And, could you tell us a little bit about your background, where you are from?

(CS): I was born in Nahma, Michigan, which is a small lumbering community that if you split, talking about the U.P. now, Manistique and Escanaba, it's right about in the center of that distance and it's on the shores to Big Bay. It was a lumbering community called Nahma, Michigan.

(RMM): Now, what is your ethnic background?

(CS): My father was Polish and French, my mother was Native American, she was Chippewa.

(RMM): Now is your father, is he connected with the lumber company then?

(CS): When he came to the United States as a young man, he came from what he used to call the 'Old Country.' He was about sixteen years old, came into the community, or the United States, he had a brother that was in Milwaukee at that time. Came to the United States, was here for probably six to eight months, right after his citizenship, he ended up right in the army. So his first experience of the U.S. wasn't one where he would be involved with our country, but he wasn't away, but it was the standpoint of military, so he didn't have a lot of initial time to being acclimated.

(RMM): Yeah. So this was from World War One?

(CS): That's correct.

(RMM): So he served in World War I?

(CS): That's correct.

(RMM): Sort of, right off the boat? Okay, so how did he get settled in Nahma?

(CS): When he visited his brother, his brother was a tailor in Milwaukee, and that was the trade in the family, making clothes, everything custom made. And he met my mother in Milwaukee, and she was going to school there. She was from the Upper Peninsula, and they met, and the obvious area they were going to settle in was Nahma. That's where her parents were from, Peter Moses, her father's name, he was a lumber man, he had lumber camps where in the Hiawatha National Forest, if you go north of Nahma into the forest, this lumbering town had a number of lumber camps where they cut all the materials of the trees and so forth and they would be shipped down by train to Nahma, there were five huge locomotives that used to run from the forest areas, from the lumbering camps, down to Nahma. That was the principle of the business then, and when he came, after being out of service, and me and my mother, having settled in Nahma, Michigan as a tailor, ended up working for the leadership, making all the clothes, all the suits and shirts, the different things that they wore and slowly this developed where they could bring bulk materials and from there he would certainly sew into that bulk materials into shirts and clothes and so forth. So that's how that got started, he eventually ended up being in charge of what we call the section group, and these were the people that fixed the railroads that went into the forest to bring all these logs down. And it was during that time that he became more and more acquainted with all the population, including the Native Americans as well as the white settlement people.

(RMM): So there was the Native American Community, where was that located compared to the lumber town?

(CS): Nahma, Michigan was divided by the Sturgeon River. On one side of the Sturgeon River were all the Native Americans. On the other side was the community, or what they called the White People. And obviously there was a bridge that went over the river. And they integrated because they all, their income and their occupations were working in a lumber mill, including all the hard cuts that went through the planing mills and there was a number of the employment that was the total employment were the lumbering industry.

(RMM): Kind of connected with that, do you remember, I went on a number of tours with a fellow Rudy Yen, he used to give us wonderful tours in Nahma and I took my classes down there. As we were driving west of town there, the road turns north again at the water's edge. There was a St. Laurence Catholic Church. Do you remember that?

(CS): Yes.

(RMM): When we saw it, trees had grown up it. We think when it was in use, it faced the water; a very picturesque location. Do you remember that?

(CS): Yes.

(RMM): Then I think across the road or behind it was a native cemetery over there.

(CS): The cemeteries were, and that's an interesting point, the Indians, and I'll refer to Native Americans as Indians, had their own cemetery as well, and then those that seemed to integrate, and I guess it depends on where they were on a social level, their burial was going to take place, and I'm going to use the word migrated, from the tribal type of living over to the other side of a little more upgrade scale of living and so that consequently associated themselves with the white side of the river as opposed to the Indian side of the river. And that's true, that was quite an interesting things. I was an altar boy, which was so far out of bounds that it was different. As a youngster, we used to be visited by a traveling missionary on the Indian side. He would come once a month. There was a Catholic Church at Indian Point, which was south of Nahma. When he would come he would ask the little fellows, the young people, "I need somebody to help me with the mass," and so forth. And I became one of those individuals. As I grew, and because I had that experience as a youngster, I became an altar boy over at the church you were describing. It was an interesting experience, a little different. His masses were said in Indian, and things were in English over on this side.

(RMM): Oh, so there was an Indian Catholic Church south of the Nahma Indian community?

(CS): Yes, that's correct.

(RMM): So then the St. Laurence Catholic Church was over on the other side and that was for the Nahma population. That was kind of a ways from town.

(CS): Yes it was, yes it was.

(RMM): Because it's kind of out there, when we went there, there weren't any houses or anything.

(CS): That's correct, it's all leveled off now. Number of years ago it's been that way.

(RMM): Yeah, because we saw the church deteriorate. This would have been in the 80's I guess. I think we went down there four or five times, maybe. The church deteriorated, and I think finally we went and it was beginning to be just a pile of wood. And let's see, there wasn't a catholic church in Nahma itself?

(CS): There was on the white side. It was, I kind of think you referenced it. It was called... I believe it was called St. Andrew's. The Indian Catholic church was called Indian Point. And the people who lived on the reservation in order to go to church, the distance that the church was from the reservation itself, reservation proper, was probably about four miles. And they would walk to church that Sunday when a missionary came. I remember that well because we had to go.

(RMM): Now in the Indian community there, you said they, the people, were in the process of sort of becoming assimilated, sort of becoming Americans, as opposed to Indian and in the community you would get people in different stages of assimilation as they moved into white society?

(CS): They didn't really assimilate or become part of the white society. They were looked upon as the people who did all the heavy and hard work. And one of the things that bothered me, I don't remember the wages or payment they received for their services or employment, but it wasn't the best jobs in the mill, they did the cutting of logs, making sure it fit into the big saw mills and such; generally all the hard, really menial work. And the relationships between both sides were not probably the best that they would be because of their differences and lifestyles. But they were a part of that community, a necessary part of that community to make this whole function work, as far as to make this industry.

(RMM): And then your dad what, didn't have a lot of work as a tailor and then became a section worker?

(CS): Yeah, that was really quite a change for him. There were a few people that he made, that were in a leadership role in the lumber company, that he made clothes and so forth. And they gave him, or offered him a job of becoming a section leader as he had some skills of detecting problems with railroad tracks. I don't know where that came from, but he would know where to take a crew out on these lines, these railroad lines, and fix certain areas. It was almost a Band-Aid sort of function to keep these trains running. So that was a two-fold circumstance for him. It was basically because he had some leadership skills that would generate people to work and how to work.

(RMM): Now when you lived down there, what was the connection, did you live in White Nahma or Indian Nahma and what was the interaction with, say, your family and the Indian and the White community?

(CS): That's an interesting question. We lived on the reservation side because my mother, grandfather and grandmother all lived on that side. And he was the one who had the lumber camps, so he was probably a little as far as the level of economics a little higher level than the rest of the people that were in the reservation. So one of the things that you find in that era, people, but I don't want to sue the word despise, but maybe envy would be a good word, of someone that was a different status than the other one. That was basically because of the type of jobs found within in the community and someone that was above that, it was a little out of the norm so to speak. It was fascinating. Now for me, I had a white father. There were no other white people over on that side, in the reservation; my dad and mom, and at that time my grandfather and grandmother, and of course, our clan uncles and aunts. So he was part of the family, but it wasn't an easy thing for him. I can't imagine what kind of adjustments he had to make when he got there.

(RMM): Now, he was coming from a European ethnic background? So he didn't even have the opportunity to even Americanize. That could be a good or bad thing. I see. So you grew up in the two cultures.

(CS): That's exactly right.

(RMM): Now did you have any problems?

(CS): Yes. Number one, I had a white father, so I was a half breed or quarter breed or whatever they would call you at that time. Even though I had the characteristics of a Native American, I was looked upon as somewhat different. One of the things that, Russ, if I may call you that, is the level of education

that was in the tribe itself. And of course the level of education that was on the other side of the river. Now, in the community, the Indian community, very few if any got to an eighth grade education. None of them, if you want to label it as graduation, none of them would have graduated, or did graduate from the eighth grade from the Indian standpoint. Fourth grade, fifth grade, they were out working in the lumber as young people and education wasn't the thing because their future was already patterned as to where they would end up as far as employment. There were frictions. I witnessed personally a lot of friction because of having a white father. Now the biggest and hardest experience I had was the fact that I graduated from eighth grade, the first step; kind of stepping out of the norm of the Indian reservation. And when I graduated from high school, I was very obvious then. That I was more associated with the white side of the community than the Indian side of the community. Because all the friends I went to school with, never went to school to that level and didn't really want that much to do with me. And it was a form of levels of ostracism and there was a basketball coach, Harold Anderson, and I think he is in the hall of fame here at Northern, was very instrumental in my education. Without him, I don't think I would have ever gone to high school. And he took me under his wing for a very obvious reason, and that was a change in our family status. Going into my sophomore year in high school, my father drowned, and my mother was born cripple, with her arms and fingers, they were certainly deformed. And so what really happened there, I got into a different level of education and there was a lot of resentment that I had to face and then of course going from high school, walking home, over the bridge of the Sturgeon River, over into the reservation, at times, I was fearful. Those were some fearful times for me because the atmosphere wasn't friendly. And when Mr. Anderson, my coach, I worked with, I was very fortunate to be a basketball player under his leadership, made all-state and made some headway that, his biggest contribution to me, was not the athletics, it was the fact that he had tutored and got me going to school to the point of where graduation came. And because of his teachings of athletics to me, I got recruited by a number of schools but I ended up at Northern basically by convenience. Number one, it was closer to home. I had Michigan Tech, Mt. Pleasant which was Central Michigan at that time, and another engineering school in Indiana that was after me. And the part there was that it was easier for me to be closer to my mom. I used to hitchhike from Northern on the weekends to see how she was. That was always an experience. I had a huge sign, one that when I went home would say Nahma and the one when I came back it would say Northern so people would see that sign and they would know, well am I going to pick him up or not pick him up. That was my mode of transportation, it was different but it happened.

(RMM): Now did you go home every weekend?

(CS): My freshman year in the fall, I did, and after basketball season started, that was little more difficult. There were some breaks, for example, Thanksgiving and Christmas, those were the major breaks going home.

(RMM): Now, when you talk about the school down in Nahma, was there a school for the Indian students, or did everybody go to the school in the town of Nahma?

(CS): It was mixed, yes. There was only one school, the elementary and high school.

(RMM): Because if I remember the tour down there, I think the school, yeah, they had quite an elaborate school down there on the south side.

(CS): Yeah, it was a large structure to hold everything from kindergarten to high school.

(RMM): Now how did you, you made it through high school, so what was the role of Red Money getting you to come to Northern?

(CS): You know, I think it was really the influence of Coach Anderson informing Coach Money as well as Al Bobard from Michigan Tech and of course, I had some publicity as a basketball player, but never dreamed I would be going to college. That was the career... And so that summer of my senior year that was 1951, and I graduated in the spring of '52. I worked all summer, and I lied about my age in order to work at Mackinac Island. There were a number of jobs for younger people, of course, like washing dishes all the different things. There wasn't anything in Nahma like that you could get a job at and get paid. The Grand Hotel, there was a number of people who used to go to the Grand Hotel from Nahma so I had a little bit of a direction, and they had a promontory there for the young employees, most of them were college kids. So we had room and board taken care of while we worked there. It was very instrumental in continuing the livelihood of my mother and I from a standpoint of, I think I'm going to say from the standpoint of our integrity, one of the things that my mother taught we don't take relief and different things like that, the welfare programs and that, she said, "We will earn like your father taught us to make a living." And she became a nanny then for the people in the community, and of course I worked summers. Then of course the Grant and Aid program here at Northern was also another method of income because there were jobs we had to perform and we got paid for our work besides participating in athletics.

(RMM): So the grant and aid then went both ways. You participated in athletics and then you did jobs as volunteers, or you were paid for all the jobs you did?

(CS): We were paid for all the work we did. For example, I worked in the cafeteria and it's the first time I saw this contraption called a dish washing machine; worked at that. The Grant and Aid program was our tuition, our place to stay, and our books and things that we needed, because we were the first class of 1952 of the Grant and Aid program, and this is how the Barracks Boys were historically formed and were all brought together, the sixteen of us and lived in a Veteran's Quonset hut that has a tremendous amount of memories for all of us who lived there. It's amazing it stood up for all four years I was here because it was pretty battered, not because we were trying to destroy it, it was just the way we lived. I really treasure those people that came together that had a chance to get together here today and yesterday.

(RMM): Now, did the, has this barracks building survived? Some of those buildings are now out in Harvey and people are still using them.

(CS): Oh, I don't know that, I don't know what happened to them.

(RMM): Yeah, the kind of family dwellings, they were all moved.

(CS): It was really called vet build. We had one.

(RMM): So you had one?

(CS): One large barracks like building.

(RMM): I see. Could you describe the structure of the building? Was it rooms, and you had to go from one room to another room if you lived at the end of it? Was it a hallway?

(CS): Yes. The barracks building itself was metal. We had a metal roof and metal siding and we had a couple of entrances and yes, there was a main hall that went through. Actually, the shower rooms and restrooms were in the center and normally what you saw were the freshmen and young people were over on this side, because we incorporated when the barracks started. Coach Money had some sophomores and juniors that he integrated into that program. The seniors and juniors had their own section and the fresh meat was over on this side. I will say this for the juniors and the seniors, and John Bomir and Axle Anderson, those were youngsters that were a couple of grades in front of us, integrated us very well because we were quite a family from the standpoint of what we had achieved in our goals as far as athletics. I always said that the birth of the athletic programs shifted into a different level as we got more people in because it wasn't that way prior to that. It was the basis, the base, started that year, in 1952.

(RMM): Wasn't that also, pretty much the time that Northern went from the earlier years, the pre-war years kind of playing high schools and local town teams and playing, then, college teams?

(CS): We had a schedule that was probably, not the norm, and I use that word norm as to what was prior, but I'm not going to degrade the athletic programs and teams during the era before us, but it was a concentrated effort now where we were beginning to go to Lake Superior and St. Norbert's, getting out of this area. And Michigan Tech was always part of the rivalry and Northern would always get their pants kicked off of them all the time because they were an all boy school and there weren't that many over on this side. We had all kinds of problems because of Michigan Tech. Fellows would come down, and we had girls and girl dorms, and they infiltrated into our domain and that wasn't the best thing for us. And this recruiting season, we wanted to make sure there was a separation between Northern and Michigan Tech. And it was fun times, now it was teams traveling some place to play as opposed to, gosh, we'd go to Farris, we played schools downstate, went to Ohio. Coach Money spread out the program for a couple of reasons. It was a method of showing that when we get an athlete coming to Northern, he'd get something and went some place. And our facilities, as far as our gymnasium, were awful. There were high school gymnasiums so much better than what Northern had to offer, but that wasn't really the point. The barracks atmosphere really created a family type of bonding. Honestly Russ, you can see 56 years later, how this has still continued. It has been a great experience to see the fellows...

[END SIDE A]

[START SIDE B]

(RMM): Most of the barracks boys are still around. There are only two that passed on, I think, maybe the original, they were talking about the original group, and maybe you could identify that.

(CS): The original 16. And we had 9 of the 16 there for the program last night as well as what's going to take place today. There are two that I know of that have passed on. We hadn't been in communication

that much other than the time we met in 2003 for the first time, and then of course when we had our banquet and concluded it, we set a date for five years later that we'd get together again and that's of course 2008. And we had 9 of the 16 here for the program yesterday and today. The others were with health issues could not attend, but we have lost two.

(RMM): Then were there others added to the group? Or were there just the core group of 16, the Barracks Boys, or did...?

(CS): What Coach Money did after our initial integration into athletics here at Northern is that there was a number of others that came behind us. Not a lot, there maybe would have been six or seven, which would have been my sophomore year, because it replaced the slots that the seniors had left. This was our building and this was our capacity, so there was a replenishing of the athletes. And that's how it continued to grow and as the dormitory structures became part of the university and the barracks structure itself began to disappear, then it was a different program completely.

(RMM): Then were you here when they built Spooner Hall and that change took place?

(CS): Oh yes. That was, well, Spooner was, I think a year after I graduated. But the change of the college, I got to call it college, it's university now, began to get some growth pains and as they used the, it was called the John D. Pierce, it was a high school that was attached for the students who were going into teaching, that was diminishing in population because it was a class D school. And Northern used some of the classroom buildings to expand. And that was a transition because there was about seven hundred, six hundred students when I came, somewhere in that area. When I went into service after graduation, my gosh, Northern had twelve hundred students, or eleven hundred students. It had doubled. And then the building program had started. It was a very tight-knit school.

(RMM): In the beginning?

(CS): In the beginning, when I came. It was a tight-knit school. Athletics brought everybody together. They didn't go and witness losing seasons all the time, there were some successes.

(RMM): Now, speaking of that sense of community and so on, how did that express itself in the building of the atrium of Kay Hall? Could you comment on that?

(CS): That area, because you had that area to go up the stairways to different classrooms, was a gathering point of students prior to going to class, it was a bigger area. If you were going to meet somebody, you were going to meet them there. I guess if you were going to talk about acoustics, it was pretty loud, because it didn't absorb all the conversations and so forth because it was a marble kind of floor, and the steps and so forth. It didn't absorb noise well, but that was our collecting area, everybody, when you went to class that's where you went there first and then you went off into the different hallways and floors.

(RMM): You could almost use it as a meeting area, a gathering area.

(CS): Yeah, it wasn't a big sit-down area, but you would be there mingling and all that.

(RMM): But you would be standing at the railing and whatnot, and look down and check out what's going on.

(CS): Yeah.

(RMM): You said at one point, you encountered President Kay? He had an office right off of that front of the building, the atrium there. Could you tell us anything about him?

(CS): He was a very fascinating man, I think. There were two of us that were minorities here, it was gal, and I can't think of her name right now, I know she was from Hawaii. And there was myself. And he would call us in. After he called us in, I thought we were going to get thrown out of school for some reason. But what he wanted to know was how things were going with us, as minorities. We really didn't have, I can honestly say we were embraced by the students because we were kind of different. We didn't have problems at all in mixing; I can't say anybody would make sly remarks or anything like that. We were very well accepted and he was very instrumental in asking us how we felt and what we thought and were there any situations that he should know about. Kind of a father to us, the two of us, really, and made us really comfortable. He followed up with us our freshman year just to make sure, here I am on the athletic side, and my Hawaiian friend was working in a cafeteria and of course she had to integrate into the Upper Peninsula girls and a little different culture to that she brought.

(RMM): Do you remember how she got here?

(CS): No, that's one thing I can't remember. I don't remember how she got here. It was fascinating when we had orientation. I looked around, and I thought she was a Native American at first, and I went over and chatted with her and of course I was wandering, I asked, "What tribe?" That didn't work out too well. She said I'm not in tribe, I'm from Hawaii. I got to know her from just that type of relationship. When we were called into President Kay's office, we were close together. It was really just a method, I think, to get tuned in on what some of the things he was seeing for the future; his little test market here.

(RMM): And what kind of personality did he have? Friendly? Aloof?

(CS): When I first met him, of course, he addressed at orientation, the barrack boys, in welcoming us in our status that we were involved in. He was, I'm just going to say this from a personal standpoint, my father drowned when I was a sophomore in high school so there was only mom and I, he was really a person that, and he left his door open, "Have any questions, want to visit, make sure you come and see me." And his image for me at the beginning was not so much the President of Northern, but a friend that gave me some assurances about having a man, which would be a symbol like my father, in which I can talk to. He was a wonderful man from that stand point. Because he was a stabilizer I guess is the best way to...

(RMM): For you?

(CS): For me.

(RMM): So then he would engage you in conversation?

(CS): Yes, oh yes.

(RMM): So it wasn't, you just saw him at convocation; you could visit with him and interact with him in his office?

(CS): In his office. And occasionally, if we were going to school and he happened to be walking in the hallways or something, he would always stop and ask, "How are things going?" Very interested.

(RMM): Then, four years, and graduated from Northern.

(CS): Well, I graduated from Northern and one semester. The reason was because every year my load was not as great because I worked. I had to put some space in here to work because it was very important to have that particular thing going on. I graduated, I got a deferment first of all to go to school, because they had a draft going on to go into service. So I got a deferment, I graduated on February 2, of 1957. '56 spring would have been my normal graduation, in June, but I had to go one more Semester. So I graduated on February 2, and on February 6, I was standing in the rain at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, that's how quickly that deferment expired.

(RMM): So this was what, you graduated 1957, the fall term. And you were in the army four days later?

(CS): It was really a shocker for me. I had just enough time to pack up what I had, get it home, head to Escanaba to the recruiting center, and get on the bus. We had a bus ride to Milwaukee for our physicals; we stopped in Chicago and all the way to Fort Leonard Wood in that stupid bus. Another interesting experience in that, everybody on that bus were college graduates. We were all deferred people. They had deferment to go to school.

(RMM): So what'd they do? Go down 41 and pick up all the deferred?

(CS): Everybody in the Upper Peninsula that was involved in this had to be in Escanaba because that was the location of where we going to get on the bus. Grumbling was all there was. Go to school, get a degree, and get on a bus going into the service. But it was, the army was a great experience for me, I can only say that I grew up and the exposures that I got were very unusual. I got into service, took my first basic eight weeks, come home for a little way, and then go in for another 8 weeks. And then you have assignments where you are going to go because your basic training is now over. You got an MOS or a military designation on which you are. I was in a clerk's school that I was assigned to; in other words, in administration. So when I graduated, they call that after your sixteen weeks are over, I was the only one, Russ, who didn't have any orders. Everybody left. And then my company, the Second Battalion, Fourth Training Regiment in Fort Leonard Wood, there was no, the mess hall closed, the office where everybody was, that was empty, and here I was, in four buildings, by myself. And, it dawned on me that this isn't working. So I went to battalion headquarters and said, "I didn't get any orders." They said, "We know we haven't got any orders. Just go back to your barracks and wait until we get in touch with you." Four weeks later, I'm going back, I'm eating now in Company A and Company B; I'm going cross battalion where I can get my meals. And finally, I saw in the newspaper, they had the Fort Leonard Wood newspaper, they were having tryouts for baseball, and I had played baseball and I had really loved that sport. I got to back up now. 1956, in August, my senior year, I got married, I met a girl here on

campus who was going to St. Luke's school of nursing, of course, they were taking classes here at Northern. We got married.

(RMM): What was her name?

(CS): Jacqueline, her last name was Strand; she was from Hancock, the copper country. I called her, and I said, "Send down my glove and my spikes. I'm in the army, it's not that I have to wear these things, but I don't have anything to do. And there's going to be a tryout for the regimental baseball team." You had these companies, battalions, and then you had regimental which takes care of quite a group of men. So I got to do something. So here, when they had this open practice, I want you to picture this. There are forty thousand men plus at Fort Leonard, and there were eight or ten diamonds where there were guys with gloves and spikes, just like I was. Of that, there was a core group of people who were playing in the minor leagues at different levels, a number of them had played college baseball at different levels, and I'm from Northern. I played basketball, football, and ran track. Didn't have any baseball here. When I saw those numbers, I said my god is this a waste of time. Well, you got the glove, you got the spikes, give it a shot cause all you're going to do is go back to the barracks and sit down, or go to the PX. And I did. So I went through a process of elimination and doggone it if I didn't make the regimental team. The one thing that I did possess as a trait of mine, I had an excellent throwing arm. I could throw the ball fairly well, but I wasn't a pitcher. At this status, there were guys that were in the minor leagues that were pitchers; they had experience and so forth. So they had me in the outfield throwing from right field to second base and third base and so forth. And that ball would zip along pretty good, it would go down and dip up and skip. That kid, I'll never forget the man's name, Sergeant Wakeness, I'll never forget that name. He hollered out there and called me in and said, "Don't walk, I want you to run. If you don't run, I'll give you some pushups, but I want to talk to you." He said we are whittling this thing down and wanted to know where I played baseball. I said the only thing that I really did in baseball, in Nahma there was what they called a city team. Because there was a league of little communities and they had their baseball that they played on Sundays. Every Sunday was a baseball game in the summertime in the small communities. And there was a gentlemen there by the name of Victor Teebull who was managing this team and I had gone out there two or three times because I didn't have anything to do in the summer, I didn't work at Mackinac Island then, I just wanted to be a ball boy and have something to do, and he said we don't have that many ball players, in fact, I only got eleven or twelve, would you like to, I'd be glad to give you a uniform. And of course, I was in another world after he said that. And that was that my experience in baseball. And he taught me so much that I retained it and having coordination really helped a lot while I was going through these trials at Fort Leonard Wood. And fortunately, I was successful. I made the team. Now they took me out of this clerk school and I was transferred to a new MOS, which was a Military Occupation designation which was called AnR which was Athletics and Recreation. So now I'm not a ground pounder anymore, I'm over here, and if I can use the term, being a jockstrap. Fascinating thing happened, they put me in a job and said, "Now you are going to be the one going to all battalions and companies and do their scheduling for all of their softball and basketball programs and games and so forth, and that's your job. I thought holy Toledo, this okay. It's better than sitting in a barracks by myself, I wanted to go to Germany because there was a the Munich World Fair in Germany and I was trying to figure out a way to get over there and when I got into baseball, I met a couple of the ball players, and one was Lowell Johnson, he was here from Negaunee Michigan, he had signed a minor league contract with the Pittsburgh Pirates, he was a Yooper. He was at post headquarters where they put people on orders to ship out. And I asked Lowell, I said, "Whatever you do, if there is a levy for Germany, put me on it." He said, "Alright, I'll do that." Good old Yooper

friend from Negaunee. I see this levy come down, my name is on it, and the company commander, the regimental commander at that time, called me up and said, "I didn't put you on these levies, so all I'm going to do is scratch you off, we need you here." I went back to Lowell, and I said, when is the next levy for Europe. And he said next month. I said put me on it. And he did. Four times we went through that cycle and finally I got called in by the regimental commander and he says, "Corny, I don't know how the hell you are getting on these levies, but you aren't going anywhere to Europe. I do get the feeling that you want to go overseas. And I said yes. And he said there is a levy opening and all you have to do is say ok. And I'll pull you off Athletics and Recreation. I said, "Where is it?" He said, "Greenland, Tuli, Greenland." I said, "Sir, I'm not interested in Tuli, Greenland." He said, "I'll tell you what you do now, whoever is putting you on those levies, this is the last time I want to see your name on a levy, or I'm going to ship you to the North Pole." So that was the end of it. I never left Fort Leonard Wood.

(RMM): Because you played baseball?

(CS): I played baseball, and I ended getting into coaching, and they shifted me into entertainment because it all kind of goes together. And Russ, that was the best job I ever had. I had a car, and a driver, and what I had to do was to drive to Lambert Field, and pick up our entertainment at Lambert Field, bring them to Fort Leonard Wood for the Friday night concert, Saturday, and Sunday, and get them back to Lambert Field, St. Louis. I was absolutely stunned, here these were Eddie Fisher, these were Peggy Lee, Patty Pitch, all the people of that era that were big stars. Bob Hope, Bob Hope came several times. I got to meet all these people and get them to where they had to be. And what a job that was, and that's what I ended my whole career, and that's what I was doing. I never had an inspection of my room that was taken care of for me. And here I was a specialist three, I wasn't even a sergeant. I went from a bunk private, private first class, and then I went into the specialist area which of course the kind of work I was doing. It was divorced from the actual military duties as a soldier.

(RMM): Whoa, it's 10:35, were you going to go on that tour at 10:30?

(CS): Ah, I don't even know where they were meeting. Let's finish this.

(RMM): So then, that was your career in the military. So then what did you do when you left?

(CS): Two things happened, one because of baseball, one because of family. Houston was a minor league team in the minors, it's what I would say classy, equivalent to our Lansing affiliate with the Toronto Blue Jays because we have minor league baseball in Lansing, professional baseball. They had some interest, because I did play some baseball, I was on the post team and we traveled. And there was some interest in my getting involved with the Houston ball club which was part of the St. Louis Cardinals because the Cardinals would come down and play our post team in spring training and they'd batter the dickens out of us, but it was an experience.

(RMM): So you played against the Cardinals?

(CS): Oh yes, we'd scrimmage. The teams that we played in the service because we would travel to Fort Willis, Washington, Fort Sill, Fort Benning. We traveled all over the United States because that was a post team traveling team. And the second thing upon leaving service, on my wife side, her uncle was involved with IBM, and he said, well, when you get out of service let's talk. So now I have a

circumstance where this is kind of Okay, and over here I got a job. I wanted to play baseball, well; it didn't work out that way. I ended up going to work for IBM, and he was in the typewriter division. And in the typewriter division, they were introducing across the country and selected typewriter; it had the little ball that jumped up and down and so forth. He said there were a lot of openings in that; I can get you in over there. You'll probably end up in sales, you'll go to school for IBM, you do what you gotta do; you're on your own. So that's what I ended up for. I ended up carrying an office typewriter from office to office, floor to floor, building to building, community to community with this typewriter. I did that for about three years.

(RMM): So you were then introducing the selected typewriter.

(CS): The electric typewriter. There was a big sales force for this. It was the hardest thing to sell because nobody believed that the thing would work very well and that the ball wouldn't last half an hour. It might pop out of there, well what would you have to do? We sold more dog-gone balls of the alphabet that used to dance around on that pivot. It was really, that was my first introduction to sales, because I had never done anything like that. But their training at IBM was outstanding. And I did that for a while, and, still having the Yooper in me, I didn't care for Chicago and Cleveland and they really moved you around, almost every six months. It wasn't anything I wanted to do.

(RMM): So then what did you get into?

(CS): Well, I came back to Marquette, because this is our home, here at Northern and St. Luke's, and interviewed with 3M Company. What was helpful was having IBM previous employer because it had some status to it. And here's another pioneering expedition that I got into. They had developed the first dry process copying machine. Everything was by Eastman Kodak by that time, you had liquids in order to make copies, to go through this process to make copies. They had a dry one, this was fantastic in the administrative business world because there were no liquids to get involved with, they used thermal paper, and they had thermal type bulb and it would copy the original and put it on the thermal fax paper. I don't know if you remember that. The problem with that is, it had really limited your customers because it didn't copy everything. If it wasn't a lead based type of type writer ink or ballpoint ink, or ink, it didn't copy it. And the paper was brittle, but boy was it fast. And I did that for about five years. And from that, we had saved our money and I ended up buying a little small office and school supply business in Hancock by Michigan Tech. We worked our heads off in that building, it kept us going quite a bit. And that little business led me to an opportunity in Lansing that I was totally unaware of. I called all the high schools in the U.P., I sold, I had the Friedan; that was the first electronic type of calculator that came out on the market. I had American Seating, a place in Grand Rapids of school furniture, it had quite a good name in that industry. So I called on high schools. Now what was good for me was generally most principles, business administrators, superintendents graduated from Northern. So now when I had come in, "Corny, oh god how I haven't seen you since 1950 something." I said, I'm here to sell you some products, that's what I'm doing. And before I leave here we are going to get together on a few things. And I had developed this little small store into my clientele across the U.P. and high schools. Now, created a monster. People in Lansing, the big organization called Michigan School Service, they had, I don't know, forty some sales people, and four in the Upper Peninsula, and I didn't know who they were, I didn't even know I was even bumping heads with them. All I know was my business was increasing, and theirs was decreasing. One day, in my little store, I'm sitting back in my little office, getting my route ready to go for where I'm going to go for the week. I hear this gruff young

voice, I can hear because I can hear it out in the store. "Where the hell is this guy, Sochay, I want to see him." Just the way he talked. Scared the heck out of my girls who were working out in the store, they reluctantly directed him to where I was. And this fellow was here from Lansing. His name was Cole Gronseth. Never forget that name. When he came into the doorway into my office, he ducked his head...

[END TAPE 1 SIDE B]

[START OF TAPE 2 SIDE A]

(RMM): Sochay tape, number 2, September 19th, 2008. Okay, continue.

(CS): So this gentleman comes into my little office in the back, fills my doorway up. Just was staring at me. And he said, "So you are, Cornelius Sochay, is that right?" I said, "Yes." "So you are the guy that has forced me to lay off three of the four salesmen I had here in the Upper Peninsula. You also are the guy who has taken a lot of my business. I gotta talk to you about that." Scared the dickens out of me, Russ.

(RMM): I guess so.

(CS): He then said, "What I'd like to do, I see your operation here, I got a couple other things I gotta do at Tech (because this was in Hancock), and I want you to have dinner with me tonight. I want to talk to you. Will you be available?" Of course with that very direct voice and size of this guy, I said, "Yes, I'll be available." And we went to that dinner, I met with him, and he was very blunt. He said, "You've been fairly successful in your operation, this is quite obvious to me. I need a sales manager in Lansing. I've got forty some salesmen who need some direction. And what you have done in a very short period of time is what I need to stimulate these people. I don't know how you do it, or what you are doing, but I would like to offer you a position in Lansing, as my sales manager and there are some other opportunities that can come along with that. You have any interest?" I didn't really know what to say. He said, "Well, let me kind of fill you in on what it would be. The sales people that you'll be involved with are generally 58 up in age. Seasoned veterans, hardcore, (and he used a few expletives) who are very set in their ways and probably a challenge for you, but, I'm willing to do this. I'll furnish your car, I'll put a down payment on a house. I'll move you there. Get you set up, and I'll protect you from the beatings that you are going to get. I'll give you a salary, and I'll give you a residual from what they sell to the point where you come in and sales are today, where they go, because I think you can do something." I went home and told my wife that and she said, "Are you crazy? You don't have any idea of what we'll be getting into." I was to call him back and let him know if I have some interest because he left. And I didn't have a chance to call him back because the next day, he called. He said, "I got a better idea, why don't I invite you and your wife to Lansing, I'll send out the tickets, and I want you to come down here and first look at what we are, who we are, and see our operation because I think that would be fair, enabling you to make a decision to come to Lansing." That went on of course, history went on, I went on to be general sales manager, then I was in charge of Michigan as Vice President of Operations, we were owned by EM Hail publishing company who had five of these types of operations in the Great Lakes area. So from that little store, I ended up in a complete different environment. Was really a nightmare at some times, and very rewarding. But I had no idea at my first sales meeting with all these people, and I got introduced and there was one fellow I'll never forget. We are very close friends to this day. His name is John Beech from Saginaw; he had the Saginaw school district in that area. He was a

redheaded, red faced guy, stern face, and the first question he asked, "How the hell can a guy like you from the Upper Peninsula help us down here where we are living among the civilized people." I said, "Mr. Beech, apparently you folks need some help." It kind of ended a lot of questions they had perked up. "And I'm here to evaluate you, to see what kind of help you need." It was so quiet in there Russ, it was incredible. There was this Mr. Gronseth who said, "Fellas, this is your new sales manager. You're going to have a challenge." And that was the end of the meeting. Just the way he dropped it. That was it.

(RMM): Now let's go back, how do you spell Gronseth?

(CS): Gronseth, I believe is G-R-O-N-S-E-T-H. Cole, C-O-L-E.

(RMM): So then, that was your...

(CS): Introduction coming to the Lansing area.

(RMM): And you stayed there how long?

(CS): We were there about eleven years.

(RMM): What year would that have been?

(CS): I moved to Lansing in 1969, and this business was sold in 1980 or so. Fascinating organization, owned by E.M. Hail Publishing Co. Large publishing company, they published books like "See Dick Run," and all things that was related to the educational market and elementary schools. And had five of these things, I ended up on their board of directors, ended going and talking to the other organizations. It was a sad experience too. He was a great a boss, a great man. I know not to say his name at this point, but he was an alcoholic, terribly strong alcoholic. When he came to visit me in Lansing, we had to have the tomato juice and vodka in the cooler. That's how we do it, he'd come into my office, sit down at the conference table, but before we had any discussion, he had to have his... whatever it was, his boiler maker they called it. It was really a tragedy of how that business ended up deteriorating over in Wisconsin.

(RMM): So this was the?

(CS): The owner, the corporate owner of Michigan School Services. And his son didn't want anything to do with it, but I think that might have been because of the relationship they had.

(RMM): So how did that end up?

(CS): That ended up being sold to a national organization, and they asked me if I wanted to move to Chicago and join them, and at that point, I made a lot of friends in the market place because of the different supplies we had purchased, I said no, I wasn't going to go into a metropolitan environment, this wasn't working for me. And so what I ended up doing is I got involved with a manufacturer, as a manufacturer's rep, and it was in the cabinetry business because we had sold a lot of cabinetry,

furniture, home economics, that part. And coming from the Upper Peninsula I really enjoyed woodwork and different things like that. I had chopped a lot of wood so I knew what woodwork was.

(RMM): So that was a sort of continuation of your origins, the lumber company?

(CS): Just going right back to that. And that was really a changing point in my career, going into the manufacture standpoint, and then I ended up going to school to get my CKD, and that's a Certified Kitchen Designer. I have been doing that for a home Ec. Rooms, I did that with my office. Give me a room and I can put something in there; teaching stations, and that is where I ended up, still am, actually; a custom kitchen and bath designer and graduated from working with a small kitchen shop that sold cabinetry. I would go out and measure and design something for a kitchen. As that experience grew in that area, I went to a number of different schools for design. And what really took place is I formed my own, independent office, me, and I solicited builders who were having clientele who were needing designs of kitchens in their new homes. And that developed into a lot of work but it was very rewarding as well. Builders are notorious for not paying everything on time, because everything they have is on a time payment program with their services. So that's what I did, five years ago; I retired, my wife had passed away, in April of 1996. I had a hard time with that, about a year and a half, had a family of six boys and six gals; six Spartans, one Michigan Tech. I gotta say that. Nobody went to Northern. And the other twin went to Notre Dame, so they kind of spread out. Michigan State was convenient for the family at that time. They could jump in their cars and go to their class on campus. Although everyone stayed in a dorm their senior year, they wanted to have that experience, and that was fine. So we had quite an interesting thing. Now, after Jackie had passed away in '96, I decided that kids now are out of school, I don't think there is a reason for me to continue to be under a stressful type circumstance. And what happened was I just kind of played it by ear and a good friend of mine who was a designer like I was, that I had known for years, was working at Home Depot. He called me on a phone one time and he said, "Why don't you come over and have coffee with me, I got a couple of things that came on the emails that I'd like to talk to you about. Maybe you are interested in it, maybe not." And Home Depot was opening up in the Great Lakes area, a program that they call kitchen cabinet refacing. Which was taking existing cabinetry that was already in the home, instead of tearing everything out, you put on new drawers, new drawer fronts, cover the exterior of the box with the same veneer that the old doors, maple, oak, or hickory, were made out of. And it would cut down on installation costs because you didn't have to get into plumbing, electrical and so forth because the box was there, if it was doable. I said I don't know, it kind of sounds like something that isn't going to last too long. He said go, and I did. Had a meeting with a fellow, and gave him my resume and I had my degrees of kitchen design involved, gave that to him and got a response about two weeks later. And the response was, "You're overqualified for what we do. You're a creator, our job is transformation. However, if you still have some interest, we'd love to talk to you."

(RMM): Usually with a situation like that, you're over skilled and that's the end of the conversation. That was nice.

(CS): They said, "You're retired, but if you still have some interest, we'd like to talk to you." Here I am, widower, living in an apartment. What am I going to do? Sit around here all the time? That was quite some years ago and I said yeah, I'll visit with them. I did. I was hired immediately on the spot just by expressing some interest. However, they really tested me. There are 34 Home Depot stores. Bay City, Grand Rapids south. So what we'd like you to do is teach all the seminars to all the kitchen designers

about this program, this system. Holy Toledo, Russ, in Detroit it was a nightmare. In the Detroit area trying to find these Home Depot stores. And at the conclusion of making that introduction, it was of course, "We need someone in marketing, to market this stuff. You're it." Me. One guy. Because then from there, we'll go on to a training program for the marketing sales people. But you got to give us some feedback on what we have to do. So I did that. And basically, now, I have reduced that number of stores to two. And they are both in the Lansing area. Because my proposal to them a year ago last Christmas, was, "I got two proposals for you, Mr. Buchanan. Number one, I only want the two stores in Lansing. My second proposal is if that isn't possible, I'm going to retire." Silence. Said, "I'll call you tomorrow." You can have the two stores, he called back. And that's what I'm doing now, it's a fun job, fell right into my background of this, and it's a lot easier. I don't have the stress and strain.

(RMM): What did you have to do, fly around?

(CS): Oh yes, at the beginning when I had to do some national work. It was a headache. I hated it. Airports, large airports, like O'Hare, and Dallas Fort Worth, and out of Lambert Field in St. Louis, that wasn't for me. Those days are over. You need a young guy to do that.

(RMM): Well that's quite a story you have from beginning to end. It's very interesting and inspiring for people.

(CS): I think the biggest circumstance for me was that what we had a chance to achieve, both when my wife was living and myself without youngsters, is that we knew how hard it was to get a good education because she didn't come from a silver spoon. She had to work in the hospital as a part of tuition and so forth. And when we had planned on having a large family, she had a brother, I was a single. We thought one of the things that we would have enjoyed was having brothers and sisters, as we got older. So we committed ourselves to having a large family. Of course, having six boys and two gals, we had twins to start with. And now, the most important thing was to expose them to all the opportunities of education and the way we were going to do that was through academics. And since I was in that school business before, in the home we have in Lansing, I was able to find the old school desks, I don't know if you remember the old desks they had in high schools, but they had a desk top here that opened up and a box here, that's for your staff, and a chair attached to the bottom that was one unit. When the kids were small, I found we had a bunch of those at the old warehouse where they were just dusted and sitting there. Unclaimed really. So I didn't know who to call, and finally I called the guy who had the building and he said, yeah, you can take them all if you want. And down in the basement, I made one room and I had all these, eight of these things, and when they came home from school they had their snack and then they had study hall. We had to figure out how to get these kids educated. They got that out, it was routine after awhile. They fooled around a little bit at the beginning. But it turned out that all of them were able to get academic scholarships to go to school, somewhere sprinkled with some athletics in there, because the twins were baseball all-state. That was how we got the kids to school, because we would have never been able to afford eight. And now they are all professional people. They have all built brand new homes and they have professional lives, and I have nineteen grandchildren. It's a joy to see what is accomplished, walking across the bridge from the tribal side over to the white man's side in Nahma, Michigan.

(RMM): Well, it's incredible. Great, thank you.

(CS): I will say this, Russ. There isn't, I believe, sincerely, anything that's so far out there that you can't accomplish it, without at least taking some initiative and giving it a try. I don't care what ethnic background you have, I have faced a number of different circumstances where I was ostracized out of the tribe because I was aspiring to graduate from eighth grade, but, there's desire will always lead you to opportunity and initiative will help you succeed. That's what you need to do, it doesn't make a difference how poor you might be or for what area you come from. There's nothing like opening a bouquet, understanding what it is that's in that bouquet, and being able to either express it or learn from that process so that you can get into a career area. You'll find a way to get into school if you really want to do it. That's the lesson I learned, and that's the lesson that my youngsters learned when we started with those elementary dog-gone desks.

(RMM): That is quite a story. Oh, you might have mentioned it, what was your major when you were going?

(CS): Oh, it was, I didn't really know what to do, my initial interest was I think I'll go into coaching because I had athletics and that's how I got to Northern. After I took all my core courses, your freshman year, your algebra and all the different things those courses were, I got to talking to some of the guys who I had known who were coaches, and at that time, what I was interested in, and you cannot answer if you don't, what kind of money are you making in coaching. You went into this profession, where do you see yourself improving, what kind of odds do you got. What do you have to do to be successful in coaching, other than winning? You gotta win. And coming from, most of them interested in the Upper Peninsula, and the scale was a little different. Well, my thoughts were, gee, I loved athletics, maybe I should try something else. I met with an advisor; I think his name was Don Zwemer, here on campus. And he was head of the business administration department; I believe that was the title. I asked him what is it that I should do, and the direction, because he was an advisor, where I should go. Don Bottom had suggested that, when I met with him, asking his advice, he said talk to Don Zwemer. And I did, he said there's a couple of areas, accounting and auditing, those areas, or another area is accounting and marketing because those two things have a relationship. Try it and see if you like it. Well, I hated accounting. But what fascinated me was how market tied into accounting, profit, and balance sheets, and supply and demand. I hated economics. They, all three items, tied into themselves, so I majored in accounting, I minored in economics and psychology. One of the things I had heard along the marketing standpoint, was to get an idea in psychology because you will be evaluating people and people will be evaluating you. Look for body language and different things that are going to come into play. The best thing that can happen is being able to read people, that'll lead you down a road. So that's what I majored in, and then of course I got drafted.

(RMM): So you went into business.

(CS): Yeah, I went into business.

(RMM): With a marketing...

(CS): With an accounting major, never did use it. Was amazing, went into service and looked at what that all led into, athletics and recreation. All of a sudden, it stemmed into going into IBM and 3M Company and sales.

(RMM): Now, just to tie this up, you were asking in the beginning, doing the interview and kind of what values are there and what are you going to be talking about, well, your story there then becomes, serves a purpose on several levels; the story of Nahma, that whole end, the story of Northern, and then your career of what you made of yourself and so on. So you have this wonderful multipart story that a person can listen to and young people could be inspired by or also be given direction. I try to tell students that when they come to a university, you want to learn, and what are you going to learn. And you really don't know because you don't know what the future is going to hold. Did I ever think I would be doing oral interviews and be the head of a department and so on back when I started? I wanted to teach history and that was it. Over the years, not so much even from the university stand point, but more from experience and what not, dealing with people, working in my dad's store/factory, with the sales people and so on, you just by osmosis and experience you learn these things. And that's something that people would be extremely valuable for. For students to hear these stories and in today's world, it might be changing now, things always went well for everybody. The economy was relatively good and a lot of young people fell into a lull of not being particularly concerned with getting ahead. And, I think now, and on into the future, and all the time, students should hear these students to know what a person can do coming from very humble origins and then going on and right to the top. And having something to do when you are retired. Standing around and saying now what. So even in terms of the full circle, that becomes important. It's a wonderful story.

(CS): I appreciate you inviting me over. I came to the barracks program. I think the big thing was meeting John, John Bomir. I hadn't seen him for a while because he was part of the original barracks group, and he was from Escanaba, he and Paul Voglen and Tom St. Martin and here I was a freshman, and he was a couple classes or so ahead of me, and I was the individual kind of introduced to me, and always had a conversation. Here we are checking in at the Holiday Inn, yesterday, and I'm putting down and she's asking, "How do you pronounce your name?" And there's this gentleman standing next to me, I looked at him a couple times and god there were some features there, something there, but I didn't say anything. And then I spelled my name, S-O-C-H-A-Y, and all of a sudden John said, "Corny!" I didn't recognize him at all and I said, "Yes, and you?" "I'm John, John Bomir." Oh for crying out loud. I haven't seen him in fifty years. And he's checking in next to me. And ever since then, we went to the ball game together, we had breakfast together this morning at the Eerie room, and here he is with a building that is on campus, I guess that he's involved in, the Bomir something, Heritage. I knew that he was a successful surgeon, but it was just amazing to see him in that circumstance. Well, thank you, I enjoyed having the visit.

(RMM): The other thing we are trying to do and working on is developing a sense of community and so people from the past and have something to tell our students today and the students can see this...

END OF INTERVIEW