

Interviewed:
Ernie
Malatesta

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By: Carlos Rodriguez
Steve Cambell

Q: Where did you work?

A: I worked at the Knight Foundry, over fifty five years. I started when I was twenty-one.

Q: You retired from there?

A: In those days you retired without a pension, without a retirement. You're dependent on social security.

Q: What was your date of birth?

A: January twenty seventh, nineteen two.

Q: Place of birth?

A: Sutter Creek.

Q: What was your date of marriage?

A: 9-30-1931

Q: Place of marriage?

A: In Reno, at the Cathedral, Mary Catholic.

Q: What is the name of your spouse?

A: Lena Louse.

Q: What was her date of birth?

A: She just turned 89 June 1.

Q: Do you know her place of birth?

A: Makulomne Hill.

Q: What was her occupation?

A: She was a house wife. Then she worked part time in the laundry over there when my daughter started collage. We needed a little more revenue.

Q: What was the name of your mother?

A: Carmelita Malatesta.

Q: Do you Know her place of birth?

A: She was born in Italy, Genoa. She came in nineteen hundred. I had a brother and sister that were born over there. My dad came out, I forget how many years ahead of time, to make enough money to send for the family. So my brother and sister and my grandmother and mother came out. I was born two years after they came. I was born in 1902. They came in 1900.

Q: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

A: One. One brother and one sister, all gone, deceased.

Q: Do you have any children?

A: Yes, one, Marciall. She teaches school in Sacramento.

Q: What was your primary and secondary education?

A: Grammar school, that's it. Six weeks of high school.

Q: Junior high?

A: I went to 8th grade in grammar school. They just built the high school, in 1914. It was the first high school here in town. I went for a while, I could have finished. My parents wanted me to go, but I wanted to go to work. In them days they didn't stress it like they do now. I'm sorry I didn't go. If I would have gone on and taken mechanical drawing and algebra and all that stuff, it would have helped me a lot in my line of work.

Q: Have you had any military service?

A: No, I was too young for the first one and too old for the second.

Q: Do you have any community or civic activities?

A: I've got over 60 years in the Native Sons and over 60 years in the Italian Society. At our church down there we have a men's club. It does quite a bit of charity work.

Q: Did you have any friends that worked in the mines?

A: Oh yes, I had a lot of friends that worked in the mine. Al Solori, everybody around here worked in the mines, that's all there was. I didn't want to work in the mines. I got that opening up here and I got into there. But there was very little employment outside of the mine, very, very little. Of course there were a lot of top jobs in the mines in them days too. You worked on top. Each town had a ball club. Every Sunday there was a ball game, Amador, Plymouth, Jackson, Ione. In the summer time some of these college guys would come up here and get a job at the mine up here and play ball. If he was a good ball player he had no trouble finding a job, a summer job. If he was any kind of a ball player they would find him a job.

Q: What kind of jobs did they have?

A: The mines? See in those days they used a lot of timber in the mine. The timber was used to build the shaft. They had a big log pile out there and they would come in with the logs and you had to pile them and go out and bring the logs in the timber shed. They had timber framers there that framed the timber. Run the ore cars to the mill, run the rock crushers and stuff like that on top. They were quite a few top jobs.

Q: Do you know about how many hours a day they worked?

A: The miners, they worked eight hours. But they worked around the clock. The mine never shut down, 365 days a year. Had three shifts, there was no holidays in the mine.

Q: Do you now about how many days a week the miners were expected to work?

A: They worked their shift. The only time they had time off was when they went from night shift to after noon shift to day shift. On that change there you might get half a day or a day off. Out side of that you never get a day off unless you were sick. That's the way they worked the mines. My dad worked at the

keystone mine, over by Amador. He walked to work two miles every day. Walk over there and back. We lived up by the old grammar school. In the winter time I hardly saw him. He'd leave in the dark and come home in the dark.

Q: What was it like to live in a mining town?

A: It was lively I want to tell you somthin'. This little town here had five grocery stores, two meat markets, two drug stores and seventeen bars, I can name them all, and three Batche allies. There were a lot of Italians working in the mine in those days, Italians and Slovenians. There were two sections of town, where the Slovenians lived. Most of them were on this street up here, they had Mill street up here too. They were all good citizens. Nothing rough, we never had any trouble. A lot of boarding houses. A lot of young fellows come here to work, working in the mines. They stayed in the boarding houses and in the night time when they were off they would come to town.

Q: Could you describe what a typical day would be like for a child, teenager, adult during a work week? Could you smell the minds? Could you hear...

A: You didn't pay much attention...but you could here them, the pounding of those stamps you know. And then the whistles, they would be blowing and blowing in the morning so the fellows new what time to go to work. We had a mine right here where the post office is. It was a twenty stamp mill right there. I remember that when I was a youngster. The mine was right across from the post office, the hole to the shaft is still there yet. And the pounding... I guess they got used to it. Complaint didn't mean anything. As long as they were doing what they were supposed to do.

Q: Could you smell...?

A: Well yes. There's a gassy smell to it, especially in the winter time. When that water starts to come up, they have an over flow on it you know. But it wasn't... you can still smell it from the Wallowmen mine, over on Spanish. It goes through that little creek and it comes up through the culvers. That mine fills up and then they got an over flow. But these other mines here didn't have that trouble. A mine that throws that odor is after it's closed down. Then it starts filling up and all that wood and all that stuff down there starts to ferment. That's what throws the gas off. These mines here had trouble with the slimes from the mill. They used to run it down the creek, until they had restrictions on it and they had to build holding dams. Then when they put restrictions on it, that's when they put the sand wheels in. The mill was lower than the property that they had over there and they couldn't get the sand over the hump. Those wheels picked it up and got it up to the right elevation so it would go over to their ponds. That's the only reason they had to put those big wheels in.

Q: If you wanted to travel from here to Jackson, How long would that take and how would you get there.?

A: Well I'll tell you transportation was scarce, if you didn't have a car you would have to hitch it. If someone was going over there maybe you could hitch it with them but I'll tell you there were very few cars. I can remember years ago at the Italian picnic, when they had the picnic up there, Rube Walker, he was a trucker up in town and he had one of those trucks with big rubber tires and he would put benches on there and for twenty five cents a ride you could get a ride up to the picnics with him. There was horse and buggy too in them days. Yeah by neighbor back here (pointing behind him) she had a horse and buggy. They had rubber tires on them things and on Sunday's they would hitch it up and go on rides. Yeah they were the horse day's, things were even horse delivered. Stores all delivered, They would deliver with horse and wagon and each store would have there own horse and wagon and they would all deliver.

Q: What years are we talking about?

A: Well about ...let's see, I was still home so...It was maybe 19...14...15... even in the twenties.

Q: Did you ever travel to Sacramento or Stockton?

A: Well I bought a model T Ford in 1926 and we used to go down to the (vargo?) shows. I loved those shows. We would take down my Model T Ford and drive down there on the dirt roads and the windshield wipers, you had to crank them, they were hand operated and we used to go down there not to often but you know they had those hard rubber tires, they were high pressured tires, then we the stage. The stage used to come in with a four horse stage with the mail and people would wait in front of the Nixon Hotel and the mail would come in at four o'clock or a half past four and it would come up on the Amador central. The stage would come in and unload the mail bags to the passengers if they had any, and people would go down and get there mail and there would always have a crown out there.

Q: What kind of entertainment was there in Amador county during the mines. Any specific events.

A: Dancing was the biggest thing I would say. Every Saturday night there was a dance somewhere. The Jackson Fireman, they reserved New Year's for there big time. The Catholics ladies had Christmas, the Ione Cattleman Association they had one every year and it was a big affair. A lot of different people would give them. Then we had a movie house, that was ten cents. Then we had three poolhalls. We don't have any now. You had to be eighteen years old to get into the poolhalls. Then there was a curfew, in the winter time you had to be off the streets by 8:00 and in the simmer time 9:00. There was a nightwatchman so you had to be in your house. They had the firebell down there and when they rang that firebell you had to be in your house

Q: Do you know any of the other main industries besides mining?

A: Well we had the shop, The Knights foundry. That was a big operation. Taking care of these mines was a big operation because there was a lot of wear and tear on these mines with all of the drilling going on and all. But in the 1900's we had a quite a crew up there with two blacksmiths and a machinists that worked in the motors and we had a big crew. Then there was the crew that worked outside that cut lawns and did all that stuff. All the stuff was done by hand and horse and wagon. And later on in the years the sawmill came in and that helped a little bit but there was a little bit of wear and tear on the sawmill. And I 1944 is when the government said that there was no more gold and they closed the gold mines and they started the copper mines, like this one down on the Ione road.

Q: Where there many types of ethnic groups?

A: Yes there was Italians and Slovenians. That was about it. Oh and then there were quite a few English too.

Q: Did they all kind of live together and stick together?

A: Yeah, mostly , but they all got along together and on there Christmas, the Slovenians would give a big party and shoot off fireworks . Every one got along and there were no friction.

Q: Do you remember the gambling halls and other businesses that were around town.

A: Oh yeah, we had Belotties and gambling halls but Jackson had the Rex and the Bank Club and the Luber(?). They had quite the place and my cousin was the bartender at the Luber , Henry Malateste but he is deceased now.

Q: Did the mines keep the gambling halls in business.

A: Oh yeah, sure they did. You bet they did. They had a lot of sporty women over there. I guess you heard about them too. But they weren't allowed in town until about midnight. Saloons kept open until about two in the morning.

Q: Where did you buy your groceries?

A: At my uncles, he had a store here in town. Malateste groceries on main street across from Belotties where the old pizza place used to be. There were three brothers and they all ended up in sutter creek. My father got the short end of the stick because he worked in the mines and the other one had the baker store then the grocery store and the other one was a shoe maker.

Q: Where did you buy your gasoline?

A: At Socalls, it was where we got our gas and you paid by the month in those day's.

Stores were the same way. If you were a local you had a little book and you never went and got your products, you would give them a list and they would get them for you. He would bring it up to you and at the end of the month you would pay for it and if you had more than you could carry home, at two o'clock they would deliver it to you by horse and wagon and deliver it right to your house. Your bread was brought right to your house every morning. Ten cents a loaf. And you paid that by the month. People all trusted each other.

Q; Who was your doctor and where was he located?

A: The first doctor we had was Dr. Goodman and he was located where the palace was at. The doctors got paid one dollar for help for a family for one month. So you take 250 people in one month and that's 250\$. That was pretty good money.

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