

Interview with Raymond Henry Lakenen

November 23, 1987

Interviewer (I): Okay could you tell me your full name please?

Raymond Henry Lakenen (RHL): Raymond H. Lakenen.

I: Okay what is your middle name?

RHL: Henry.

I: What is your date of birth?

RHL: 02/10/36

I: And today is November 23, 1987. Can you tell me Ray how long you were in the orphanage?

RHL: Approximately six years.

I: Six years, and remember what age you went in?

RHL Eight and got out probably around fourteen.

I: Fourteen when you got out. Okay. Do you remember how many children were in the orphanage or an approximate amount when you were there?

RHL: A hundred or a hundred and fifty.

I: Can you tell me any feelings or anxieties you had when you were put into the orphanage?

RHL: I hated it.

I: You hated it. Okay can you, okay can you tell me why you hated it, what was behind the idea of why you hated it?

RHL: Mostly just because you knew you were stuck in there, I mean you couldn't go no place you couldn't do nothing, it was like going to jail.

I: So you felt like your freedom was being taken away.

RHL: Right.

I: Did these feelings you felt when you first went in, did that change after a while being there?

RHL: Oh definitely.

I: Can you tell me in what ways?

RHL: I think I got a good, I mean learning experience out of it. I mean it was strict, it was stricter than hell but I think I'm better for it, even preach to my kids now a days I mean damn it it's like service it's tough but it, you come out a better person.

I: Okay. Can you tell me, within the orphanage what kind of facilities, what was necessary to facilitate all the kids that were in there? Like can you tell me the sleeping arrangements, the dining arrangements?

RHL: Well, everybody eat at the same time, but the sleeping was boys, we called them like the big boys and the little boys and then there were big girls and little girls. And we were on the fourth floor, but I don't know it wasn't, probably 30 kids each, roughly 30 kids in each dormitory.

I: Did everybody like, eat at once?

RHL: Yeah.

I: Okay. What about your schooling, can you tell me how that was handled?

RHL: That was all at the orphanage until the seventh and eighth grade then we went to Baraga.

I: Okay. Then they had their classes held right in the orphanage itself?

RHL: Right.

I: Okay. Okay can you tell me what types of recreation were available?

RHL: Actually just about anything anybody wanted to do really. I mean we did our skiing and played basketball there, football, baseball, I think it was all there if you wanted to do it. I'm not really athletic type I would rather hunt, but I mean we did it while we were there. But actually I would have preferred if we just go out hunting you know and, well it was feasible a little bit at the end there because I had a couple guns there in the last couple years they let us take the guns up to the farm and you could hunt up there.

I: Farm, what farm?

RHL: The orphanage farm.

I: Okay. Were you constantly supervised, like if you went outside to play was there always somebody there to supervise the children?

RHL: No, well yeah the younger ones. But we were getting a little bigger than we used to, sneak down across the creek where we could have a cigarette or whatnot.

I: How did you get a hold of cigarettes? [Laughter]

RHL: There was ways and means I mean, I think any kid when he is 13 or 14 could figure out how to buy a pack of cigarettes there's always conniving some way.

I: Okay. Was there a sister in charge of the boys?

RHL: Yeah.

I: There was?

RHL: Yeah.

I: Okay. Alright.

RHL: Yeah Sister Pascal [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and she was,

I: Sister Pascal [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was in charge of the boys?

RHL: Yeah, and she was tough but she was good, I mean dedicated.

I: Alright. Can you tell me about the clothing? Do you know where it came from?

RHL: It's a bad, it's a bad subject.

I: Okay?

RHL: Well it goes back because I ended up with a pair of those knickerbockers it was Sunday dress, one of those plaid knickerbockers, I mean I think they were from probably the '20s but they were issued now and you know I wore them, especially with my beautiful legs,

I: So you had to wear what they had available?

RHL: Right. But the worse part was I had to go visit my brother, on Presque Isle so you had to walk through town with them shit catchers on.

I: And the orphanage would let you go?

RHL: Oh yeah they would give you a day pass but you tried to figure out the back route to get there.
[Laughter]

I: Okay. What kind of restrictions were enforced, like what kind of chores did you have?

RHL: Just everybody had their own duty either sweeping the halls or cleaning the steps or cleaning the drains or whatever you had, everybody had something they had to do every morning and then that was just mandatory we just done it.

I: Okay it was in the mornings?

RHL: Yeah.

I: Was there a certain bedtime?

RHL: Definitely. I think it was right after the rosary every night that was the bumper, every night you had to say the rosary from 7 to 8 o'clock and then it was bedtime. No matter if it was summer or winter, I mean daylight the sun is still shining you got to go to bed at 8 o'clock.

I: Alright, did they have a specific time for dinner also?

RHL: Yeah it must have been right at noon, yeah. Or dinner are you supper now?

I: Yeah well lunch,

RHL: I mean 8 o'clock, 12 o'clock and 5 o'clock that was the three meals. And there was no snack in between them or after.

I: No snacks whatsoever?

RHL: No.

I: So you ate what they gave you?

RHL: Right.

I: Okay you say first, in the mornings did you have to go to mass? Was that the first thing?

RHL: Right.

I: Okay then following mass, how did the day go, could you give me a typical day?

RHL: I think we went to mass in the morning, and then we went to breakfast and then we did our chores and then whatever, you either went to school or if you are going outside to play or something, except for Saturday morning you had to darn the socks before you left, you know Saturday morning you sit there for about four hours and darn.

I: The boys did?

RHL: Yeah, boys, girls, everybody did.

I: Did you feel there were any separations in the chores as that girls did this boys did that?

RHL: No, no they did their end and we did our end.

I: Did you have to help in the kitchen at all?

RHL: Oh yeah, everybody had kitchen duty, doing dishes. Well later on, and right at the start we did we, as we got bigger maybe we just tried to get in there because that's where the food was. [Laughter] I don't know I don't really remember I just know I was in the kitchen a lot.

I: Okay now can you tell me, under what circumstances were you allowed to leave the grounds of the orphanage?

RHL: Well if you had a lease to get some free tickets to go see a show at the theater and if they signed a pass and admit so many you could go down there and see the movie and come back. And like I said the last few years we were allowed to go campout on the bluff in South Marquette there and that was fun and you know we would get away from the place and then we would come back in the middle of the night and rob it, sneak in, break into the storerooms and get food.

I: In the orphanage?

RHL: Oh yeah.

I: Well who took you camping?

RHL: Oh they let us on our own.

I: On your own?

RHL: Yeah, oh yeah. 3 or 4 boys we would walk there and the nuns knew we were breaking into their storeroom so they would sit right there and try to catch us but I mean they never caught us. Heck I think I can go there today and show you a rope ladder and an old ___ that is hanging over the freezer if it is underneath the steps it is probably still there, we could probably still get in. [Laughter]

I: Were the girls allowed to do this or that's just a privilege for the boys?

RHL: I think it was just for the boys. I don't think any girls were into camping, I mean we would have loved to have them come along [Laughter].

I: Alright, can you tell me about discipline?

RHL: It was strict, but that's that. Real strict, but I don't want to elaborate on it.

I: Is it something you would rather not comment on?

RHL: Well, in which aspect are you talking about? As far as,

I: Well like when you got into trouble, I mean you got caught?

RHL: Well there was whippings, there were actually kids that actually got the belt if they were, I don't know I guess I lucked out enough or I, I mean hey this is the Sister Pascal [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] she was just like a, she was a good person but she was, she and the kids, she could have been their father as much as their mother.

I: Okay, alright. Can you tell me how the children related to each other in the orphanage?

RHL: Well it was all kind of groups I mean, just like in society there is so many buddies and actually little kids you helped them out I mean it was like little brothers.

I: Like a big family?

RHL: Yeah oh yeah really, yeah.

I: Did you think there was a lot fighting? Did you find that at all?

RHL: No, no.

I: How did you view children outside the orphanage?

RHL: Lucky, I don't know.

I: Did you think they were lucky?

RHL: Oh yeah I mean it wasn't, we didn't feel like we were in our glory or anything there but I mean it wasn't, it was whatever you made it.

I: Okay, do you remember anybody being invited into the orphanage? Like for entertainment and things like that?

RHL: Oh, you mean just outside friends or something?

I: Sure, anybody, anybody that is from the Marquette County that is coming in.

RHL: They used to come over when we're going to have little skit there or a play or something and we would invite brother and aunt, and there was different kids there from South Marquette that used to come by now and then just play around here but,

I: Oh ok, did you,

RHL: I mean it wasn't strictly just orphans or whatever it was, it was outside people here too.

I: Alright, are there any stories you want to tell me about it, trouble, fun times?

RHL: Well I, it was, like I said it was a good experience. For a bad situation it was a good experience. I don't think it hurt anybody I think it made a better person out of them. For as tough as it was,

I: Did you have a hard time leaving there?

RHL: No, no.

I: Did you adjust really well after you left?

RHL: Oh yeah yeah I couldn't wait to get out. I mean there was instances you know where someone ___ the shoes but the shoes weren't red but you still wore them you know like I said some of that crap they had, was ancient. I can remember one Easter when they had a bunch of people there, and it was for some kind of a _____ so they set an orange on everybody's table but you weren't allow to eat it and I think someone donated it just for the show you know.

I: Did you see, or were there any children that had to go without anything like shoes or clothing of any type?

RHL: No, no no. They had something. It might not have fit right but they, in fact [TAPE CUTS OUT MULTIPLE TIMES]

I: Alright can you think of anything else you would like to tell me?

RHL: I think it was really good, I think it was an all-around good experience I mean I've told my kids many a time I think I learned a lot from it, and when I got out of there I just I was definitely in my mind after I got out I want to have a family I want boys I just want to settle down, but it was positive thinking when I got out of there, except for the religion, I just don't, it was pushed on my so God darn, you know I mean, little mass in the morning like I said rosary every night and serve mass maybe two or three times a day, so I just don't push it on my kids you know, it's there but I don't, someday you might need it but I'm not going to force it on you. I was just over forced you know the nuns and the priests and you know the nuns are definitely an enforcer you know that is their belief. I believe in God but I don't believe in 5 days a week 6 days a week 7 days a week.

I: Okay. [INTERVIEW ENDS BUT THEN STARTS AGAIN]

I: After listening to this tape Ray I wanted to ask you about the orphanage farm could you tell me what that was about?

RHL: Well it was just a farm where they raised all their cattle. I mean they had all their milk right there and all the potatoes. We went out there and we picked the potatoes.

I: Is that where the orphanage go a lot of the food?

RHL: Yeah I would surmise, yeah, most of, all the dairy products came from there I mean all the milk and whatever, I don't know if they were into cheese but I mean,

I: Okay when you went there to pick potatoes for instance, did you stay right there at the farm or did you travel back,

RHL: No no, we traveled back and forth, yeah.

I: Oh I see okay. I also noticed that you had a lot of freedom to come and go unsupervised, did you notice a difference in between the boys and the girls were treated as far as their freedoms were concerned?

RHL: Yeah definitely, I think the boys were definitely a priority. You know I mean as far as, I don't remember the girls might have had passes to go to the shows but I don't remember, or else we had them on different nights or something maybe they were trying to keep us apart. But I mean anything else we did, like I said they weren't ever allowed to go camping or anything, maybe this was, but they were held a little tighter rein than we were.

I: I believe you mentioned something about hunting as you got older, you were allowed to leave the orphanage to go hunting unsupervised with the other boys?

RHL: Right, right, right this was just the last year I think it was probably, maybe two years, but I mean we'd take the 22 and the 4-10 because these were our own personal guns, these were my dad's guns and Father Meyers [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] had had them locked up for all those years, so my brother Bill and I were allowed to take them out and a couple buddies and they did let us go hunting.

I: Did you at the time realize that you had more freedom than the girls?

RHL: Yeah definitely, like I said we were ready to leave and I think we kind of knew we were top dog in the place, you know just for a kid but I mean you are still top dog, and we did have the extra freedoms.

I: Were these freedoms for all the boys or just certain?

RHL: It was more or less for certain ones.

I: And why was it for certain ones, it had something to do with your schooling?

RHL: Definitely yeah, I mean if you had the top marks once you left the orphanage and went to Baraga High School, I mean we had to be in the best top ones, if you had A's and B's there was a lot of extra privileges I mean like we seen like the top three could go to the Packer football games. And I've seen more Packer football games when I was in the orphanage, I've never seen one since I left the orphanage, in fact I should probably go back so I could see a game [laughter].

I: Who would take you to these Packer football games?

RHL: Father Meyers yeah I mean he made it in our ruling he said if you outstand, I mean the top three, there was like seven of us going now, he says I'll take the top three if you can get A's and B's anybody if you get below a B you don't go but if you stay above a B he'd take us to the football games.

I: You're talking about 3 just 3 boys.

RHL: Right, yeah.

I: And that was the limit?

RHL: Well no there would have been more if there had been more in the A and B bracket.

I: I see and it is just only, even up to three of you went. How did you get, okay that would have been to Green Bay right, how did you get there?

RHL: In his car, he'd drive us down there and we'd stop and have a meal in the restaurant and come back home, it was, like I said the kids around Marquette weren't doing that good, I mean actually we were more privileged than kids in town, I figured when we hit those locations.

I: Yeah that was pretty special.

RHL: Oh yeah right, right.

I: Okay you were telling me earlier, can you remember who the Sister was who was in charge of the little girls?

RHL: No.

I: You can't recall?

RHL: No.

I: Okay.

RHL: But Sister Keven [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was in charge of the big girls and she was definitely double strict.

I: Okay. And Sister Pascal [TAPE SKIPS]

RHL: Right.

I: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]