

Interview with Allan Chapman
Ishpeming, MI
November 7, 2001
Interviewer:
Transcribed: April 11, 2002

INT: Please tell us your birthdate.

AC: I was born July 18, 1936.

INT: Can I call you Allen?

AC: Yes.

INT: Allan, please tell us how you got started with the ski program.

AC: My father worked in the mine and he got transferred up to Ishpeming in 1941. It was just about the start of World War II. Not having any vehicles, he moved to Ishpeming and got a job in the mine. He had transferred. Right along side my house was some ski jumping hills. I was 6 years old. Right across was Joe Perrault. He kind of took an interest in us. I hung around with his younger brother. Joe really gave us a lot of help. He worked for the junior ski club. I had two uncles that skied. In the war years they were gone and we more or less skied on our own. I didn't belong to any club or anything. We had probably 6 or 7 hills in the one location. We would have some on the other side of the Bluff...I lived on Bluff Street. When the sun came up we couldn't ski then because the sun was shining on it all the time. It was too slow. So we'd move back to the hill that was facing north where it was shaded all the time. We had hills like Killer, Springer, Windy. Then we had Short Stop. When Joe Perrault came out of the Service he naturally was a big hero and we all looked up to him. I wanted to be a skier. I was short and Joe Perrault was short. He was just a super athlete. Then I got to know Ralph Bietela. He used to cut our hair and that. These were the heroes. They really made an impression on you. You didn't have to be big. Like when you try to play basketball they're all big guys. I couldn't make it. I wanted to play football and didn't weigh 100 pounds. A person wants to be good at something. I don't care if you're a good drummer or whatever you want to be. It seems I had a talent to be a ski jumper. I could play baseball, but what do you do in the winter? I was really short and there wasn't the opportunities to be a basketball player in those days if you were short. You only had two basketball teams. There was the JV team which was the B team and the Varsity team. There would be 40 people trying out for both teams. There was no wrestling or swimming or anything else in those days. I wanted to be a hero when I got into high school so my Mom and Dad got me a pair of jumping skis. Joe Perrault picked them out for me. I found out I could be as good as the next guy if I put my line to it and practiced. That's probably the reason I really wanted to ski and wasn't afraid. That's a criteria you have to have. Especially the bigger hills. There's a little bit of a fear problem, which is good because it makes you more cautious. Like riding a motorcycle. If you don't have any fear you get hurt. But to conquer it, to say this is what I want to do and that's it. It

was just so much fun flying in the air. I even got a nickname ski jumping. My nickname is Collundee???. Everybody to this day, whenever I go to the sports in Ishpeming call me Collundee. I got that from Ralph Bietela's brother Roy. He first called me Ally Reynolds. There was another cousin Jack that ski jumped. Then he turned around and called me Ally Collundee after Collundee ??? a small stature for any ski jumper who was any good. That's where the name is from. That's about it as far as how I started skiing. In those days we didn't have television. You went out and skied. You didn't stay in the house unless you were scolded or grounded, or whatever for some reason or another. I don't care if it was 25 below, you wanted to go outside. If it was 25 below you built snow forts and stayed in out of the wind. When I grew up we had a hill, we called it the tank hill. There was two Standard Oil tanks and there was a light at the top of the hill. So we would jump. We had long jumps of 15-20 feet. When you're 6 or 7, 8 or 9 years old, 20 feet was a long jump. By the time we were 10 we were jumping 20 feet. When we were 6 we probably jumped 7 or 8 feet. We got to know a little bit more about it. As I got into high school, I had to find new friends for the winter for ski jumping. Through various reasons, we didn't have junior programs like they do now. You graduate from one hill to another hill. You had to make that big step to go from that ski hill in the winter sports to go to the one in Negaunee to go to Suicide. I actually started serious ski jumping at 14. At 15 I was riding Suicide. I found out, I rode in a tournament as an exhibition rider and I was a sophomore in high school. All the girls were hanging around with all the jocks. I found out when I went to school the day after that ski tournament, I never had so many girls come up and talk to me. I was really bashful and shy. This really feels good. Now other people can see me. Hey shorty or peewee. Now it was hey Allan, nice job. That was important to a boy growing up. Then getting into the Ishpeming Ski Club, we went on trips from the week after New Years right to the middle of March. We'd be gone every weekend. Come home from school Friday night and my mother would say where are you going this weekend? I'm going to Duluth. So and so is picking me up. They'd bring me back late Sunday night or early Monday morning and then go back to school during the week and go again the following week. I just loved ski jumping, I really did. It's a shame that more people don't realize what a clean sport it is. You have to be drug free. You can't drink and you have to be drug free. You can get your highs without drugs or alcohol. I'm not saying ski jumpers don't drink. Don't get me wrong. But they don't do it...they're usually sober when they ski. Is there anything more you'd like to know?

INT: Tell us some more about the trips you took.

AC: The trips...It's funny...I can't remember all of them. The first 4 trips I took were different. The first trip was a small hill called Mesick Michigan. My mother had made me a homemade sweater. It was just...she really worked hard on it. The only pattern she had for a skier was a downhill skier. But to me that sweater was just great. If you fell and got wet, the arms would sag. I went to Mesick Michigan and got second place. It was the first tournament I went to with the ski club and I won a Norwegian ski sweater. I didn't know how much it hurt my mother but I really wanted that Norwegian ski sweater. Now I could ski all day and my arms wouldn't sag. It was right from Norway. At that time you would go up and pick up your prize. I didn't know it at the time, but Coy Hill's

brother Earl Hill was in charge of the prizes. They kept telling people don't take that sweater, that's for Allan. It was a small. Actually I was the only guy that could fit into it anyway. There would be no use of anybody taking it. I got that ski sweater and then went to Milwaukee the next weekend and got first place and then the following weekend....this was C class, juniors. Then after that they sent me to a hill, I had the longest ride on the hill, but I fell. Of all riders, in Duluth...just the idea, I can remember Coy Hill had a big sheep skin parka. If you jumped good you could wear it up the hill. Little things meant a lot to you in those days. I remember going to Westby and having a great first jump. I actually beat a lot of the guys in the first round that were more well known than I was. I was just a write in. Coy gave me that jacket to wear and Ralph Bietela put his arms around me, and Joe Perrault...There's not a feeling like that in the world. Your hear is ready to burst. Just to think that hey right now I just out jumped ??? Olsen who is a great ski jumper. I'm only 16 years old. In the second round they out jumped me. It was just the idea that at least for one round...then I knew I could do it. Ski trips were so much fun. As I got older and started driving and taking the car, I remember going to Steamboat Springs, CO in 1960. I was on the national team, and I got hurt so I didn't make the Olympic team so we went out there to jump in a tournament, then we were going to be forerunners in Squaw Valley. They stuck us in a court room in bunk beds, and we had gone to this hotel because we weren't allowed in this court room until after 5:00 because court was in session and you couldn't disturb anybody. The man that owned it said, "Oh you're from Ishpeming. I'm glad to see you. Where are you staying?". We told him, "We're staying in the courthouse." "Oh, you don't have to stay in the courthouse. This room is yours free. He gave us a double room for all four of us. I mean that's unheard of in that time. We didn't have to pay anything for it. Just being in the town , coming up, we didn't have to buy a meal. We were getting invited to this house and that house because the name Ishpeming was really well known in those days. There was no politics like there is now in skiing. Everybody just hung for everybody. We never ate one meal at night in a hotel because we were invited out. Guys would invite us out to their ranches, and we'd pick out our steaks, etc. People were just so friendly. And I thought with all the money I've lost through not doing certain things, and giving up jobs, this is all worth it. These are stories that live with you forever. In fact, one guy told me I was the richest guy I knew of all the friends I had. It's true when you stop to think of it. I've made friends all over the place. It's all been worth it. I've had a good life as far as friends I have. I don't' have much money, but I'm rich.

INT: You skied for how many years?

AC: I skied. Then I got a job in the mine, and I went ship work so I missed two years. I skied from the time I was 15, and I missed two years. Then I got a day shift job. I started skiing again, and I quit when I was 40. I had to quit more or less. I lost my teeth in Iron Mountain. I said, that's enough.

INT: How did you do that?

AC: I hit a trucker up at the bottom. At Iron Mountain, they had a drag that they pull up and down. They have an A frame up at the top, and a cable. They had a big truck, and

they backed it up to the thing and pulled. It lets the packer come down. Pulls it up, packer goes up. Well, I used to always jump to the right anyway, and it was windy and they had no track in it. I was the first rider, and I went off to the right, and as I came down the light was bad. I hit a truck rut, and my skis flew up and I hit my face right on the flat, doing about 60 miles an hour. It loosened four up on top, and on the bottom I broke them beneath the gum line. I didn't know until a month later when they started getting abscessed that they broke beneath the gum line. My wife said I think that it's about time you quit skiing. It's costing you. But my wife has always been one of my best supporters. She said she never worried about me. She worried about the way my brothers jumped. They were more reckless than I was. I met her after I was older. I knew how to ride the air. That was important. I could jump better on a big hill than a small one. So she never worried about me. We also spent 6 weeks in Squaw Valley as forerunners building the hill, skiing, making the first tracks every day. Set up the track for Olympic riders. We stayed at a school in Tahoe City, stayed in the 3rd grade. They had bunk beds in there. There was probably 30 of us in that room. It's things you talk about. We met some movie stars there. Jane Mansfield came to watch us. Oh she was a doll. She was pretty. She liked the ski jumpers. We were the forerunners so we would take 2 or 3 rides on the hill and then the hill would open up to the Olympic riders. We'd stay around and meet them. We had time to talk to Jane Mansfield, Janet ??? and Tony Curtis, they were married at the time. But Jane Mansfield...she loved ski jumpers. She'd tell us if you want to come, I'll get you tickets. Young and dumb. All I wanted was ski jumping. I had a girl at home. I wasn't worried about looking at Jane Mansfield, although she was pretty to look at. She had beauty...you'd see on the tv, she wasn't dumb. She was really nice. It was natural beauty for her. When you see a girl with a parka, you're not looking at a sex symbol, you're looking at somebody who looks into your face and smiles with you. She was great. Then we had our picture taken with Lee Renick, Ralph Bietela, Rudy Maki, Callabee Carton, myself, Willey Ericson, and Jack Larson. I have that picture at home. If you go down to the congress library, when they made that book *Anatomy of a Murder* we're on the back cover of the book. It's a nice deal. I owe a lot to ski jumping. I made a lot of friends. There was no money involved. You didn't even jump for money. You just went to a tournament. If you were lucky, the club you went to paid your room and board at night for two nights. The ski club would pay for your ride there. All you had to do is for your coffee money. I never went any place to drink when I was ski jumping anyway. I wasn't so good of a jumper anyway. Go to the tournament, take your jumps in practice, take your jumps in the tournament, get your coffee and pie...lots of coffee and pie...a lot of people remember you. It was 50 years ago I was jumping Suicide. 1951.

INT: When you won tournaments what did you get?

AC: When we first started going to tournaments there were prizes they gave out. I remember February 1, 1953. I won a watch. First place, St. Paul, MN. It was a Swiss watch. It said Swiss Movement. It was not a ??? but it started with a W. It was worth about \$50 in 1953. A lot of the tournaments, you won prizes. I won a life preserver for 3rd prize. A boat life preserver. Some of them would give out trophies, but wherever you go now they give out trophies. They're down in the basement. Maybe when I get older

I'll put them on the shelf. You have them up there for half a year and then they go in a box in the basement. When we first started it was just great. I won a bow and arrow one time. I won a fly rod, I traded it in for a tire for my car because I needed a tire. Stuff like that. It was good days. In Plymouth, WI I was 16 and it was a smaller tournament. I was in 1st standing for a long time in the tournament. For a long standing I won 10 pounds of longhorn cheese. That tournament didn't pay us anything so we stayed at a woman's house there for the night. On the way back we were broke so we were eating that longhorn cheese. I don't eat it to this day. Longhorn cheese wasn't much. It was good times. There were 5 of us in the car... "they give me another piece there." It was nice until you got to be about 35 or 36. Then you noticed the ride. Then you started noticing when you had to get up in the morning for work. I can remember coming home at 4 and getting up at quarter to 6 for work. You tell yourself to go to sleep but you don't. Coming back from Westby, they're always an hour behind us. But it was great going there. We knew all the coffee stops. I drove my car and we went to Oklare, MI. I said do you have a map? No, I drive through here and we're going to stop in Iron River. We stopped at the Rhinelander for dinner. Then we went to ??? and drove 4 blocks. We were supposed to turn someplace but went to the coffee shop instead for homemade pie. It was a truck stop. We backtracked 4 miles and then we hit a sign that said Chippewa Falls. I remember the names you turn at not the highway. Where you turn. My wife will say if I've been to one place once, I can usually go back there again driving. It was all night driving. I was a good night driver. You had to be. We went to Steamboat Springs and Leavenworth, Washington, New Hampshire, Salisbury, Connecticut, we drove for 24 hours. At Squaw Valley, Sunday night, I think we were in Reno at 5:30 which is 3 hours behind what we are so it was 9:30. At 10:30 on Tuesday night we were home. No stopping.

INT: You would drive all the way out.

AC: Yes. The first time we went to Squaw Valley was 1959. They had a new ski hill. They have to have a major tournament before they can have a national championship. So they had the North American Championship in Squaw Valley in 1959. We didn't know the smaller hills. That hill was done. We got a flat tire and got a new one in California. On the way back Coy Hill's car burnt up and we had to buy a new car in Rock Springs, WY. I had to ride with Willey Ericson from Iron Mountain because Richard had broke his arm. So there was only me and him driving. Ralph Bietela and I left Reno and we decided, "you drive as long as I drive." We'd stop for gas. Then when it got light enough I saw they were switching drivers on the fly. I was trying to stay awake. The stuff you remember, Coy's car burning up, pulling it with an 8 foot chain with skis coming out of the back of Willey's convertible at 70 mph to Green River. They didn't have a Ford garage, then to Rock Springs where they had a Ford garage and trading his car. Then the Squaw Valley road trip the next year. I can drive, I can keep going. I remember coming home at 10:30 and she'd say are you home? We had good times. You had a fellowship with the Ishpeming and Iron Mountain skiers. They always hung around together. When we went on road trips, we went to Steamboat three times. Ishpeming and Iron Mountain boys would go together. 2 cars together. Like it happened in 19059 when Richard broke his arm. I had another because Willey couldn't drive

alone. We stayed together and stopped for coffee together. Never stopped to sleep. Slept in the car. The car was moving the whole time. It was a fellowship. Even when I was 16 and 17, we'd travel to Westby and had a place to meet. We'd meet with Jim ??? and Jackie Hooper. We were the same age. The 4 of us would walk the town. Of course we were all in bed by 10. You had to be, you were tired from the night before. But just being in a strange town, people would look at you because they knew you were strange. Like Westby was a small town so they knew you were a ski jumper. There was one place in Westby that had yellow ice cream and we could remember...we call it New York Vanilla now. No other place had yellow ice cream. I never had pie alamode. I had yellow ice cream on my pie. With ski jumping we worked hard on it. It wasn't all fun and games. We'd go out to the Winter Sports area, Al Qual they call it now. It was Winter Sports in those days. We'd probably take 150 to 200 rides on the small hill at Teal Lake within a 2 week period. We'd get it all fixed and do it our way. Then we'd go to Negaunee and get 50 to 100 rides on that hill. If we weren't skiing, we were working on the hill. If it was too windy we'd be together doing something on the hill. Just to be together with everybody. The fellowship was there. Everybody in Ishpeming worked hard on the hill to get the hill ready for the tournament. They still do to this day.

INT: How many were in the club at that time?

AC: I can remember the first year that I jumped, there were probably 22-24 skiing for the Ishpeming Club, just the Ishpeming Club. As I got older, we were lucky to have 12 or 14. Now I don't think we have anybody. It's a hard sport. You have to work hard on it. If you don't work hard at it, you're not going to have the guts to ski like we call sissies. If you work hard at it and do your practice and training, then all your fears go out of you. You just go out and do it. Ishpeming has an alumni softball tournament this summer. The class was getting together. These guys don't play ball from year to year, but they come up for one game, maybe two or three. It's easy to do that. But can you imagine a ski jumper doing that? Unless you jump an awful lot you're not going to be able to do that. It will be how do I catch up to the skis? People don't know what I mean by catch up. You don't let your skis go ahead of you. You take your skis with you. You're with them. Then you start off slow and then gradually work up. It's just like if you were running a long distance race. If you start off and just run fast, in the first mile you're dead. If you've got to run 10 miles you're not going to make it, so you pace yourself. The same with skiing. You start off slow and pace yourself and gradually work up to a point where you can handle the speed, height, air. There's a lot of air pressure when you rise. When you're going back to Marquette, when you're going 50 mph, just roll your window down and put your hand out like this. It will pull your hand back. This is what happens when you come off a bump. This is what you feel. Now put your hand like this and you'll feel your hand start to rise. That's what you have to do is skiing. If you can't catch up to it, it will push you back. Even if you're going at a tremendous speed, it slows you down. That's why you have to catch up. When you have a long jump, it pulls you up. That's how you get a long jump. Just for the heck of it try that when you're going home. You'll get to a point where your hand wants to pull up. Don't do it if there's a lot of traffic, but try it. I used to tell people when they'd ask how do you feel in the air, that's the feeling I would get. A lot of people ski for years and don't feel that. I would

feel it on my legs and back, pulling me down. Go with the air. Now all the jumpers are so good. They know how to do it. I just marvel at it. I was probably born 40 years too early. Even when I first started jumping, I skied with my skis wide on the top. And I used to lean a lot from the ankle. Well you aren't supposed to lean a lot from the ankle. You're supposed to get docked for having the skis wide. I'd get docked. Now that's the style. I didn't know at the time, that's why I was getting long jumps. When I was 16 years old I was only 105 pounds. I wasn't very heavy. So how can I get down there in front of some of those bigger guys? Riding the air. Lean a lot. They used to be jack knife style in those days. I used to lean a lot. So I was born a little bit too early. I don't think there's much in my life I regret now. I've had a good life.

INT: How tall are you?

AC: I'm 5'4. When I skied I weighed 150. I had big legs. I was solid. Now I probably weigh about 175 or 180. I used to weigh 190 but then I had heart surgery and now I'm down a little. But when I was skiing I weighed 150 pounds. Just strong enough. This is after my army years, strong enough to fight the air to keep me going. That's all I needed. I was short and stocky. Until I went in the army I never weighed more than 135. This was at 19 years of age.

INT: Did you ski in the army?

AC: No, I was assigned in Korea. Korea was right after the war was over. If I was in there now and I was a ski jumper there would be ways for me to ski because you're not far from Japan. I could go TDY and be a ski jumper. The Servicemen love it too, to have somebody representing them over in the Far East. I don't know if I could remember enough Japanese to do that. We made friends with some of the Japanese ski jumpers, and the Finnish ski jumpers naturally because everybody could speak a little bit of Fin. Even Joe Perrault, who was French, one of the guys called him wistepeca. That means dark skinned. Joe's not dark. But he was trying to give him a compliment. Joe took it as a compliment. They were good guys.

INT: Were there a lot of Japanese?

AC: Yes, I met ??? and a few others. Aochi was over here, I remember him. Ukio is probably the one I remember the best. He came over here with ??? but Ukio in '72 won the gold medal in Japan. He was over here in '62 and '65. He was really a short guy, but tremendous legs on him. He could really jump. You could actually see it through his ski suit. They would just be bulging at the thigh where he worked so hard at it. When you watch some of those skiers now, they may be small stature up here, but they have big legs. They have to have it. There's some smaller and some bigger. I kind of liked Ukio. He was short. I liked Cullabee Carcanin. He was short. I hung around for a month with him. I couldn't speak Finn and he couldn't speak English, but he could say whiskey coke. I'd say yes I know what that is. We'd go have one. I didn't drink...I didn't drink until Ukio. Then I went out.

INT: What kind of training did you do?

AC: We didn't have any. Now days you have coaches that train you. You train, you ski in the summer...we didn't. I played a lot of softball in the summer. I played tennis. Tennis is good for your legs when you're quick at it. Then in the fall we played 2 hand touch football. It was almost like tackle without pads. That will toughen you up for your falls. We were always working at it. The only time of the year I hated was April to May when there was nothing to do. In May I would start playing ball again. In the summer I would play tennis and swim. I worked on the section at that time too. I didn't have to worry too much about getting in shape. I would spike ties all day. That's hard on you anyway. So I stayed thin until I got in the mine. I probably stayed thin until I quit skiing when I was 40. That's when I started...I was lifting weights too. We didn't have anybody telling us how to lift weights. You had no coaches, you just went out and did it. If you were good enough you went someplace. If you weren't, you didn't. Now, the juniors need a coach. When you're out skiing they need a coach. Sometimes I think we're over-coached. I have nothing against coaches. I think they're important. But I watch some of the skiers from the United States and they're over-coached. They have little radios and talk back and forth. Come back and see me I want to tell you what you did. It's great if they're in a real rut. You don't want to do something wrong 20 times and do it 20 times wrong. That doesn't help you. But I think sometimes they're over-coached. They spend too much time listening and not enough times on the...We have good jumpers in the United States, but we're not as good as the foreign jumpers because when they come here they just jump. At the end of the day they talk to their coaches. They jump every day. I don't want to get in trouble with the politics, but I haven't seen enough from our team togetherness jumping. Somebody asks, you're a coach. I was a coach 2 days before the meet. I get them all in one room, throw down 2 cases of beer and say hey let's talk about this. Let's have a little fun, let's do something. Let's not be so tight and stiff. Just relax and have a little fun. If you don't win that's okay. That's usually what you say when you're old and don't win. I was a poor loser. That's what I would do with a coach, from what I've seen of them. You can't be tight when you ski. You can't be tight when you do anything. You can't even be tight when you go to make a speech up on a stage, like if you're doing a commencement address you know. If you're tight you're going to stutter and stammer and forget what you got. If you're tight when you're playing ball you're going to strike out. I think some of the coaching I had when I was on the National team was wrong coaching because I got hurt. I got hurt on New Year's Eve in 1959-60. I should have been on the Olympic team. The way he was coaching me, they put me in a shell, take it easy, you've had a concussion and two sprained ankles. If I had stayed with the Ishpeming boys and Ralph Bietela, they would have forgotten about the sprained ankles and the concussion and go out there and do it. But you listen to your coach. That's why I'm against over-coaching. Over-coaching can get you wrong too. I'm not saying for the 9, 10, 11, and 12 year old kids...they need as much coaching as they can get. But they also need to be taught one thing, to have fun. We would jump and at the end of the day we would jump for coffee. Not a big deal to anybody, but it was to us. At that time it was a dime a cup. If there were 6 of us that went out to ski, you had to buy 6 coffees. You didn't want to buy 6. You wanted to jump the farthest. You didn't want to be the shortest. At the end of the day we had a ride

and sometimes we'd do anything stupid just to get the longest jump. I remember down in ??? we had a trail coming down and Ralph put a little kicker on where he jumped. I went a little farther so I then we went on that one. We didn't care if we fell or not. We weren't going for style, we were going for fun. This is what I remember at the end of the day...hey I didn't have to buy coffee. Stuff like that. I think it's important to have fun in life, whatever you do. That's my philosophy. Whether it be a bunch of girls playing softball, I try to tell them to have a little bit of fun. One year I coached a ??? team. Girls right after track season, I had 4 girls from Westwood, 5 from Negaunee, 3 from Ishpeming. These were immediate players that were going to play all the time. I'm from Marquette. How do you get them to play together when they're against themselves in basketball and all. Yet they played together. They taught each other to have fun and they taught me how to coach them. They taught me how tough girls are. Really they are. The philosophy I have is have a little fun while you're doing it. If you lose the game...and I felt sorry for the girls. It was my job when the girls lost. They played hard. I would walk over to them and console them. By the end of the summer we were really competing with these teams. This was the first year they had fast pitch for the girls and they did a good job. They're winners. Have fun in life. I think the friends I had taught me to have fun. I wasn't a fun loving guy in those days. Everything I wanted, I wanted hard. When I'd play ball I'd run right to the fence chasing after a ball to try and catch it. Skiing was the same thing. Just being around these guys and to have fun when we practiced, it kind of wore off on you. When you were in Oklare and fell, so you didn't win. There were things I remember...I remember Ralph Bietela saying...I had a jump suit on with a pocket in my back. He said, do you have any money in there? I said I always carry a dollar. He said you know, I can run two cups of coffee and you can buy two hot dogs with that dollar. That's what we did. I had fell and we forgot that. We went over and saw Mrs. Zelki. Keith Zelki's wife. That's things you take with you through life. Whatever you do have fun.