

NARRATOR: JACK 'ROXIE' LAWSON

INTERVIEW: NOVEMBER 13, 2001

LOCATION: ISHPEMING SKI HALL OF FAME

1. Birthdate: January 24, 1922 and nickname origin
2. Parents and siblings-no names given
3. Life in Ishpeming: sold the "Mining Journal";
4. Schooling: Ishpeming graduate 1939; no college; worked for Miner First National Bank; one woman teller and spittoons
5. Skiing: Bietalas; started at age 18; Duluth Tournament and war casualty; redwing landing
6. 10th Mountain Division: Colorado, Texas, arthritis, Italy, shrapnel hit and 'walking wounded', opera in pajamas, baseball, discharge November 29, 1945
7. Jumping after the war: travels in U.S, record jumps, Duluth tournament
8. Technique: wind pressure and ride the air, guts
9. Nickname 'Hammerlegs" for Ralph Bietala
10. Ski Technique: old v. new
11. Equipment: old v. new, hill transportation, hill grooming, setting the track
12. Prizes
13. Marriage: wife and daughters (gave no names)
14. Women in the sport
15. Life now: breakfast group, deer camp
16. Trip to Finland for 80th birthday in 2002
17. Ski Hall of Fame

18. Ski professionals: Walter Hantz Anderson and Matt Heikkenan in 1920's

19. Demise of Ski jumping

20. Wife's liver transplant

INTERVIEWER: SUSAN HORNBOGEN

INTERVIEWER'S COMMENTS

JIM 'ROXIE' LAWSON AND SKI JUMPING

The interview took place in the library of the Ishpeming National Ski Hall of Fame. We sat at a table in the library and were able to talk uninterrupted.

Roxie Lawson is 79 years old and has a hard time with his memory by his own admission. He appears to be in good health and energetic for his age. He was tired by the end of the interview.

His memory problems appear to be with names. He would pause to think of the names of the military camps he had been stationed at during the war. He was very clear about the date he was discharged from the service.

He did not offer the names of his wife or daughters but it was clear he was very proud of them. When talking about the skiing time of his life he would get animated and it was clear to the interviewer that the group of jumpers from Ishpeming were and are a very tight bunch of guys.

Susan Hornbogen
Interviewer

Interview with Jim "Roxie" Lawson
Ski Hall of Fame
November 13, 2001
Interviewer: Susan Hornbogen
Transcribed: February 13, 2002

SH: Today is November 13, 2001. We are at the Ishpeming Ski Hall of Fame with James Lawson. Why are you Roxie?

JL: When I was younger playing ball, softball-baseball, there was a pitcher for the Detroit Tigers, his name was Roxie Lawson. That was at the same time that I was playing. So they started calling me that and it stuck with me all my life. And I'm 79. That's probably 60 years that I've been with that name. It doesn't bother me.

SH: So should I call you Roxie then?

JL: That's fine.

SH: Roxie, when were you born? What's your birthdate?

RL: January 24, 1922.

SH: Were you born in Ishpeming?

RL: I was born in North Lake.

SH: Have your parents been here the whole time?

RL: My father was born on the Isle of Mann and my mother was born in Champion. We've lived here all our lives.

SH: Do you have any siblings?

RL: I have two brothers and two sisters. But I'm the oldest. I have a sister living in Ishpeming and another sister living in Orlando, Florida. I have a brother here in Ishpeming and another brother in Jackson, Michigan. My parents are both deceased now. My mother was 91 when she died. My dad was only 62. He died of Hodgkin's disease. They didn't have a treatment at that time.

SH: So in 1922, tell me what life was like in Ishpeming when you were a boy.

RL: Well I lived in North Lake where I was born, and we moved to Ishpeming when I was 5 years old. In those days my dad worked at the mine at North Lake. When we moved to Ishpeming he had to walk back and forth. Winters were rugged because there was a lot of snow in those days. Very little transportation you might say, at that time. It was really something.

SH: So what do you remember as a kid?

RL: I peddled the Mining Journal as a kid. I can't remember the exact age I started, but I peddled all through school actually until I graduated from high school. I must have had a hundred papers or so. We used to get the papers at 5:30 in the morning and deliver them and then go to school after. It was rugged going. But we were kids and we were tough.

SH: How old were you?

RL: I think when I started I was around 12 years old. I was 17 when I graduated. I might have even started sooner. I have poor memory. It was all part of growing up and I enjoyed it. I made a lot of friends. I still know some of the people from back when I peddled papers. We used to pick the papers up on Main Street in Ishpeming. My territory was north of Ishpeming where I peddled. I lived at the Cleveland location in the other direction so I did a lot of walking. It was great.

SH: What did you do with the money you made?

RL: We didn't make very much money at that time. I don't even remember what it was. I really don't remember. But it was peanuts anyway.

SH: Did you have extended family here? Or was it just your mom and dad?

RL: My dad had a brother living in Ishpeming at the time. He also had a couple sisters here in Ishpeming. They all came from the Isle of Mann. My dad was the youngest of 15 children by the way. Two boys were here and two sisters were here. Some of the brothers went to the gold mine in South Africa to work back in the early days. My dad was born, I believe in 1896. So that was the early 1900s.

SH: So as a boy, what kind of chores did you do? My dad used to shovel clinkers. That's what he said.

RL: We had a space heater in the house in Ishpeming. Peddling papers was my big thing. That took a lot from me getting up early in the morning to peddle and all. But it was fun. I never complained.

SH: This might be personal, you might not want to answer it. What religion were you raised in?

RL: I'm a Methodist.

SH: And that came from the Isle of Mann.

RL: Yes. They say the Isle of Mann, they call them manksmen. That's English. They're all English.

SH: Did you go to a school here? You must have.

RL: I graduated from high school in Ishpeming. I went to all the schools in Ishpeming. I graduated in 1939. I was 17. I was one of the younger ones because a lot of them were 18.

SH: Did you go to college then?

RL: No I didn't go to college. One reason I grew up with all the fellows, we were skiing and all that stuff. We didn't even think of college. Out of high school I was hired by the Miner's First National Bank because I took business class. That was always my field. I was hired by the Miner's Bank. That was in the fall of '39. I remember my salary was \$40 a month. That's when I took clinkers out of the furnace. You mentioned clinkers earlier. I remember going down in the basement dressed up and everything and opening the door there and taking clinkers out, hotter than the devil. That was all part of growing up. When I worked at the Miner's Bank at that time, there was one woman in the bank. All the rest were men. Men's teller cages, they had spittoons. They would all spit and miss half the time. Now days it's mostly women in the banks. But one girl at the time. I just read, she just passed away not too long ago.

SH: So who had to clean up the spittoon mess then?

RL: That wasn't my job. But I distinctly remember that because it was so obvious you know.

SH: How did you get into skiing then?

RL: Skiing was the big thing. Where I lived in the Cleveland location everybody skied. I did a lot of skiing but I broke a lot of skis. My dad would get p'd at me for breaking skis. One of the Betela brothers, Roy and I grew up together. He and I went to school together. He got me to buy a pair of his brother's skis, Paul. Paul Betela was a great ski jumper. So I bought a pair of jumping skis from him. They were better than the ones I had even though they were second hand. Then I started to ski jump too. One reason I started is these guys were going on ski trips all over and I didn't want to stay home so I started to ski jump too. I never went to the junior class like a lot of them did. I started in B class which is age 18 and over. I did fairly well and then I went to the National Ski Tournament in Duluth, Minnesota in 1942. I was 20 years old. At that time, if you placed first, second, or third in the national championship you were elevated to A class the next week. So when we got to the jumping hill, Roy Betela, who I grew up with and was my good friend said see that fellow, there's the guy you have to beat to win. So the tournament was held and I had the longest jump in class B. But the guy he told me to beat, he was next to me and he got first place. That was okay, I got second. But we were elevated to A class in the next week. The funny thing is, when I think back, I didn't mind taking second. The guy that won, I never saw him before the tournament and I never saw him again because he was killed in WWII. Right after. So I said to myself, I'm glad he won. Something to take with him.

SH: Do you remember his name?

RL: Max Wrench from Minneapolis. Never saw him before, never saw him again. He got first, I got second. He was killed in the Service. That's sad. Big strong guy. But isn't that funny, my friend Roy said there's the guy you have to beat and that's the way it was. There was probably about 80 ski jumpers in class B at that time. That was a popular class. The next weekend I was in A class.

SH: How did that go for you?

RL: Well I skied that in the next years coming up. A class was tops you know. I was fairly good at it. I wasn't a star. In my own mind I had a lot of guts. I didn't care, I was single. I didn't even care if I fell or not. I was notorious for falling. But I was one of those guys who always wanted to land with a red wing. I shouldn't have. I should have landed a little wider and stood.

SH: What's a red wing?

RL: A red wing landing is when you put your skis right together one ahead of the other. You get style points for that. I always tried to land with my skis together. Other guys would just land and stand, they didn't care. That's the way I was. Part of my makeup.

SH: I found in a newspaper, this is 1947. You are an Ishpeming Championship contender with Ralph Betela, Joe Perault, Wilfred Grasmusen, Clarence Hill.

RL: Yes. All friends of mine.

SH: So how did you get into the 10th Mountain Division?

RL: That was all, at the time a lot of them were enrolling, going in the Service and enlisting. The 10th Mountain was getting popular so some of us from here decided to get into the 10th Mountain. Luckily we came through the war. A lot of them were killed, but we were fortunate, some of us from Ishpeming. Some of us skiers.

SH: Where did you ski in the 10th Mountain?

RL: We didn't really ski. 10th Mountain Division, when we were in Leadville, Colorado, Camp Hail Colorado is where we were. After we trained there, we didn't really train on skis much, we were shipped to Camp Swift outside of Austin, Texas. We did a lot of marching there. While we were in Texas I developed arthritis in my feet real bad. I couldn't even walk my feet were swollen from walking. So I didn't want to march anymore so I volunteered for the boxing team to get out of hiking. That turned out to be a catastrophe because that was worse yet, the training you had to do. That was part of my military life. We shipped from Camp Swift to Virginia. I can't remember the name now. Camp Patrick Henry probably. Then we shipped over seas and went to Italy. That

was in December 1944. When we got there we were carrying gas masks and everything. A lot of equipment. We were walking up to where we were going to be and I remember throwing the gas mask in the river, getting rid of a lot of excess stuff. We ended up there with the Italian ??? trying to get rid of the Germans. While we were there I was a staff sergeant. I can remember going through the big bills and stuff like that. Whenever you got hit by shrapnel and bleeding, I was called walking wounded. I had shrapnel in my had. I got in the hospital in Italy and who's there but a girl from Ishpeming who lived in the same location I was from. She was a registered nurse. Her name escapes me right now. I can't think of her name. But she was from the same place where I was. While we were patients, we used to go to the Italian Opera House with our pajamas on. I can remember going to the Opera House, there were two operas, La Traviata and La Bohem. I can remember those two. It was fantastic. Then the war ended in Italy and we were in the mountains. I got to play baseball then. Things were pretty good. Then they rerouted to go to Japan. We came back to American and were at Camp Lacey, Wisconsin. Then I got transferred out to Colorado. I can't even remember the name now. See I'm getting old. 79 years old. But anyhow, I ended up there, Camp Carson I believe it was called. I was taking new recruits for the Service. I was helping enlist men in the Service. Then I got discharged from Colorado. That was November 29, 1945.

SH: So you never did go to Japan.

RL: No. The war ended. So we were fortunate. That's when we really started ski jumping. We all came back from the Service. Most of us made it. We had a great time. Ishpeming ski jumpers were considered tops in the country, honestly so. Wherever we went, Ishpeming guys were highly regarded. I can remember in Norggie's Ski Tournament in Chicago, they'd have a lot of people there. We were standing there among the people and they'd announce who's coming. Here's another one from Ishpeming. Watch him! These kids are good! We had a lot of good ski jumpers in Ishpeming.

SH: So you were in your early 20s about then?

RL: Yes.

SH: So you were in prime.

RL: 1945 I was 23. But it was great. Those were great days. Then because Ishpeming was so highly regarded, we used to get invited to Steamboat Springs, Colorado. They had one of the biggest hills in the country. I worked in the bank so I had to raise the itinerary. I used to deal with Steamboat. They would wire us the money and we'd get 4,5,6 fellows from Ishpeming alone and they would pay our way out there and back. I used to do all of this by Western Union. This was in the '40s. There was no using a telephone. But they paid our way back and forth. We'd go out there on a Monday and they'd take care of us the whole week. We'd come home the next week. We'd take the Peninsula 400 from Ishpeming to Chicago. Then we'd take the City of Denver

Streamliner to Denver. Then when we got to Denver we rented a car to drive to Steamboat Springs, which was quite a ways west through the mountains.

SH: I've been there.

RL: Steamboat had a big hill, but Ishpeming guys honestly made the tournament for them because they didn't get too many jumpers in those days. Ishpeming guys dominated. Not me especially, but some of the other guys were terrific. But those were great days. Steamboat invited us, we went there several years. Really we were the backbone of their tournament and they admitted it. They wouldn't have paid our way to get there if they didn't think so.

SH: That's pretty neat. Small town rules.

RL: One of the louder tournaments, probably one of the best times I jumped in my life, I jumped over 300 then, 2 or 3 times and won the meet. That was unusual for me because I didn't get first very often. But I can remember it was fantastic. And Steamboat was a hill, as you came down the run it was fast. It was so fast, you'd hit the take off and it was so quick you had to be a pretty good ski jumper to handle it. But it was fun. It was great. And the ski jump was right there in town. The city is right there you know. It was wonderful. We used to stay at...what was that motel called. It will come to me when I get home. But we had a lot of fun.

SH: So...you hear people talk about running and how they get the endorphins going and it gives you a high, an athletic high, would you get the same thing? What was the best part of flying through the air?

RL: When you're young, and of course ski jumping was part of Ishpeming. I just remembered something, I'm going to back up slightly. At one of the tournaments in Duluth, Minnesota, we went there several years in January. It was always cold there. One year we went there and there was 6 guys in our car. That day, and there was a ski jumper from Sweden. Their national champion was there competing against us. Anyway, only 5 guys, or 6 jumped 190 or better at that time. Four of them were in our car from Ishpeming. The guy from Sweden was the only other guy that jumped 190 or better. That was a huge jump for Ishpeming. Ishpeming was tops in those days. And they're all good guys. Great guys. We're still good friends. Most of us are still living. Some have passed on, which is the way it goes.

SH: Can I go back to my question, what's it like to fly through the air?

RL: It takes a lot of guts. If you don't have guts you can't ski jump. I can truthfully say I had guts. I was single, I didn't care. But when you get up in the air there's wind pressure. If your skis are back they are just going to push you back. You have to ride that air. You can feel the air actually lift your skis in the air if you're laying on them. Especially at the big hills like Steamboat, Ishpeming always had a lot of wind pressure. The big hills had it. Small hills you didn't really notice it.

SH: So the wind pressure is what gives you the distance?

RL: Definitely. You have to ride the wind. You know when the wind is blowing. If your skis are back, they're going to push you back. So if you get the wind underneath your skis and then your body forward and boy it's great. It's a lot of fun.

SH: Why does Mr. Betela call you Hammerlegs?

RL: After I had quit ski jumping I started to announce at the Ishpeming Ski Tournament. I announced for several years. I used to have a lot of fun because I knew a lot of the guys. Ralph kept jumping. He was a little older, but he was always a good ski jumper. He was starting to slip a little as he started getting older. He was probably around 50 years old then. I nicknamed him Hammerlegs. I don't know where I picked that up, but I've called him that ever since.

SH: Oh, so he's Hammerlegs. Not you.

RL: Yes. Every time I see him I say Hammerlegs how you doing?

SH: I was looking through this book called *Midwest Skiing*. I noticed that some of the technique has changed. You guys would just lay out over your skis. Now I see, especially when you watch the Olympics, they V their skis out and they're flapping their hands.

RL: That's like any sport. People come up with new ideas and it works. It seems to me there was a Swede over in Sweden that came up with that new style. The V style where they get their head in between. They get more distance. Everybody started to adopt that. That was after we were through though. We were out of it. In our days skis were...we had to work hard to keep our skis in shape. Now they have beautiful skis and they're all fixed up. You got coaches waxing them. It was tougher when we were.

SH: What were your skis made of?

RL: Hickory. Our skis were fairly heavy.

SH: Aren't jumping skis heavy anyway?

RL: Yes, but it seems to me now days the new style is more flexible and not quite as heavy. The ones we had were 16 to 18 pounds. Now they are 14 or something like that. But they're a lot better made. They're laminated and beautiful. The ones we had, they were good at the time and they served the purpose. But we had great times.

SH: Did you wax your skis?

RL: Yes, we did our own waxing. Now days the coaches wax for different conditions.

SH: How did you...I'm trying to remember from the Olympics, I think they gave all the guys a ride up the hill. Were you packing them on your shoulders and walking up?

RL: We always used to walk up the hill and put them on our shoulders. That's the only way you're going to get up there. Now days things are getting a little more modern.

SH: Who groomed the jumps?

RL: The jumpers themselves did. We built the hill. It was fun doing it. It was nice getting it all set and somebody to break track and get it going.

SH: Did you argue about who could break the track?

RL: Not really. Some guys were better than others at putting a track in. We wanted a good track. It was great.

SH: So when you set the track, did you ice it?

RL: No, we didn't ice it in those days. There was no icing. We used to put sugar snow on. It was fairly fast, especially after you got the track worn. Those were great days, they really were. We had wonderful times. Ishpeming had good ski jumpers. I can name many, many, many. Melvin Hoyan, Pinky Mitchell, Wayne O'Mantella, all the Betela brothers, Wilfred Raspenson, Ken Racine, Rudy Maki, Jack Betela, Gotheir brothers...I better not say too many or I'll miss a few. But there were a lot of good ski jumpers. You had to beat the guys in your own car to win. In those days it was all merchandise prizes too. If you place first, second, or third, usually you could take your pick of the prizes. You might win a wrist watch or a set of silverware, or a radio.

SH: No kidding. I always thought it was like a silver cup.

RL: That was more for the kids in high school so they couldn't take merchandise prizes. We used to win wrist watches and silverware and stuff. I still have silverware at home, beautiful silverware. That's old time. Beautiful stuff.

SH: How many wrist watches?

RL: They're out dated now. But they were Algiers and Hamiltons, they were good wrist watches. They weren't cheap in those days. A lot of guys that were better than I was, they won stuff galore.

SH: You could furnish a whole house then.

RL: Yes.

SH: So you got married?

RL: Yes, but I got married later on. I wasn't one of these young guys who got married. I got married when I was 32. My wife was from Ishpeming. Her father and her brother were owners of the Sunbled Garage. A Ford garage. She was the daughter of Buck Sunbled. She graduated from Ishpeming and went to Augustana Hospital in Chicago and graduated as a registered nurse. She worked there for a while and came back to Ishpeming. I was working in the Miner's Bank as a teller. She used to come in the bank. I had known her before. She was a good looking gal. Fortunately I got to ask her out and eventually we got married. She was supposed to marry another guy and go to Germany. That was the best part of it. Anyhow, we got married. We have three daughters. Right now they are 43, 44, and 45. They are right close together. In fact, my oldest one just turned 46 on November 8th, last week. My oldest daughter works for the government in Washington, for the Office of the Controller of Currency. My youngest daughter is a mechanical engineer for Westinghouse, outside of Pittsburgh. My oldest daughter graduated from Central Michigan University. The one that's an engineer graduated from Michigan State. My other daughter graduated from Northern and she's a Head Start teacher in Ishpeming. Two daughters are single and one is married. The one that's married is in the Pittsburgh area. She has two daughters and a son. They're 15, 12, and 8. They're great. They're doing fine.

SH: The girls didn't get into the ski jumping?

RL: No.

SH: Were there any women that did ski jumping?

RL: Just that one gal from Norway that came here years ago. I can't even remember her name. Girls started getting into it later. There might have been a couple, but very few. But those were great days. We're still all friends. A lot of them in the country don't realize that we get together every morning for breakfast. 8 or 10 of us. Most of us were ski jumpers. Even now we're going to deer camp and all of us are former ski jumpers. One of our friends that's going to be out to our deer camp is Chuck Fairbanks who started his football coaching career in Ishpeming. Then he ended up as coach of the New England Patriots. He's here right now with us. He's originally from lower Michigan, and went to Michigan State. He started in Ishpeming and then went up the ladder. He's a great guy. He likes to come up every year because he knows all of us and this is where he got his start.

SH: So do you all go to the same camp?

RL: In our group we got 6 of us. Myself, Ralph Betela, Coy Hill, Aro Muffet, who also was a ski jumper and a pilot for US Air, and Chuck Fairbanks, and Pappy Ellis, who was a coach. He's a good friend of Chuck Fairbanks. We have a lot of fun.

SH: Do you ever get the urge to strap on the skis and give it one more go?

RL: No, not really. But I enjoy watching it. I don't miss...this year I am lucky, I was invited to go to Lutey, Finland at the end of February in 2002. I'm going with Rudy Maki, Paul Jacobs from Iron Mountain, Willy Ericson from Iron Mountain, Coy Hill from here, and Aro Muffet. This was the first time. They're inviting me because I will be 80 years old in January. And I'm the oldest.

SH: Is this a sister city?

RL: No. It's just that these guys have been going to Finland every year to watch ski jumping. That's like going to the World Series. They all have that ski flying style. I'm tickled pink. I can't wait. When Rudy Maki invited me I was on cloud 9. Rudy Maki was one of the top ski jumpers in the world. He also was a big officer for the Federation of International Ski. He went all over the country as the top man. He's formerly from Ishpeming and lives in Iron Mountain now. Great guy.

SH: So were you part of setting up the Ski Hall of Fame?

RL: Not really. That was more or less, some of the other guys. Burt Boyam was instrumental in that. Burt Boyam is a great guy, but he's in tough shape right now. But a wonderful man. He was the big man there. Without him we probably never would have gotten it in Ishpeming. We had fun ski jumping, when I think back. I had the privilege of having a good friend, who was probably the best ski jumper Ishpeming ever had. His name was Walter Hunts-Anderson. He was 20 years older than me. He died 13 years ago. He was a great ski jumper for Ishpeming. He won everything. He was tops. He won everything. Another good ski jumper was Matt Hakenin from Ishpeming. But Hunts-Anderson was the best. He was a good pitcher in baseball, he was a good hockey player. He was just an all around top guy. But I wanted to mention that in those days, that's back in the '20s and early '30s, he and some other skiers turned professional at that time. There was professional skiing. There were big hills out east in America. He was a die hard for staying in good shape. He used to tell me that they would stay at a place right next to the ski hill and it was a big ski hill. To stay in shape he would get up early in the morning before the other guys got out of bed and walk up and down the hill with his skis to stay in shape. The rest of them were still sleeping. I got a kick out of that. But he was that type of guy. Ishpeming was blessed with great ski jumpers.

SH: In my personal opinion, there are a lot of excellent people that have come out of the Upper Peninsula.

RL: I agree with you.

SH: I don't know if it's the air or the water. I think it's neat too that a lot of them come back.

RL: It's a shame now that ski jumping has deteriorated like it has. In the old countries it's big stuff. They're national heroes. In America it's nothing now. But that's the way it

is. What can you do? Here it's baseball, basketball, football, hockey, and all that. Where ski jumping is nothing you might say. Yet ski jumping to watch is the most spectacular sport of anything. In fact in the Olympics that's the big thing to watch, ski jumping. It's tremendous to watch them. And being a former ski jumper you really enjoy it. It's wonderful.

SH: Was it the last Olympics that had the Japanese team?

RL: Probably.

SH: And they had the one little guy that kept falling down and falling down and he finally persevered and won.

RL: Japs are good ski jumpers. And the Finns are good ski jumpers. Oh there's lots of them, the Germans and Austrians, they're competitive. Now when we go to Lutey, Finland, they're going to have night ski jumping and cross country and all that stuff. I'm looking forward to it because I've never been there. They say Lutey is a town of about 75,000 people and they have these ski hills right in town. I should have brought a picture, maybe you've seen it.

SH: I haven't, but I'll go look on the Internet.

RL: They're tremendous, beautiful ski hills. And they get crowds, people galore, and most of them walk there because it's right in town there. I'm looking forward to it. They always send me postcards, my friends, so I know all about it. But to actually go there will be something. And especially when I'm pushing my 80th birthday. I was so happy when I was invited to go.

SH: Do you have any last thoughts on ski jumping for posterity?

RL: I don't know. In Ishpeming, this transition from putting up a new ski hill, I'm not sure what's going to happen. It's still in the questionable stage. But I will say if they get it where they predict it to be it will be tremendous. Even though we don't have the local ski jumpers, it will draw when we have people coming from other countries, it will be fantastic. The drawings are tremendous. But again, it costs a lot of money. If it does go through I think it will really revive the Ishpeming area, for a short time anyway. And it will be a good tourist attraction. I think it will be fantastic, really. But you know, all the while I was ski jumping, bowling was my hobby. I loved to bowl in those days. Ski jumping was kind of secondary.

SH: So did you bowl a couple 300s?

RL: No, I never bowled 300, but I won the UP All Events Tournament 3 times. Nobody else has ever done that, so I feel fortunate in that respect. I had to quit bowling this past year. I have arthritic knees. I just can't do it anymore.

SH: Did the shrapnel damage your knees at all?

RL: Not really. But I've had arthritis for a long time in my knees. I should say one more thing, it's really about my wife. My wife is a retired RN now. This coming January will be 10 years since she had a liver transplant at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. She's doing terrific. But she had a liver transplant. 10 years ago that wasn't as popular as it is now, transplants. But my wife came through with flying colors and she's doing great. She was an RN. They never found out how she got this disease. They never found out the reason. So they still have her old liver at Mayo there. They keep those things for the future to see if they can find out what actually caused the hepatitis. I can remember my wife was sick at Christmas and January 30th she had a new liver. She was lucky to live. One of the doctors came to us and said she's got 6 hours to live depending on whether a liver came through. Luckily a good one came through and she survived and it was great.

SH: You've been a very lucky man. She's a lucky woman.

RL: She's great. But isn't that something.

SH: Life is amazing.

RL: Well it's been a pleasure talking to you.