

Sarah Coyne

FOURTEEN

"I Chose to Work over Further Education"

When I had asked Robert Asgaard why he had chosen to remain in the U.P., he stated, "I wanted to stay in the area. I chose to work over further education, and the mines paid well."

Robert was born in 1950, in Ishpeming, Michigan. He has been working in several different mines for over twenty-four years. Robert began his career at the Pioneer Plant in Negaunee. Next, he moved to an underground mine called the Mather B, where he worked until it closed. He proceeded to the Tilden Mine, then to the Empire Mine for a year, until he returned Tilden where he is presently working.

Robert started out as a laborer performing duties including crusher operator, underground miner and scraper man. When he worked at the Tilden and Empire mines, he worked as a brakeman and maintenance mechanic which is his present assignment.

When I asked him what he enjoys most about his job he responded, "The different skills I have learned being in the maintenance field, and also the money." The mine switched the maintenance department to computers, about a year ago. This was a challenging innovation for most of the employees because most of them did not have any previous computer experience.

There are some humorous things that take place in the mine. "Especially in the lunchroom when all the stories are told, but

that makes are day go much quicker," stated Robert. His co-workers range from thirty-five to sixty years of age. "There is a lot of joking about the old bucks working here, but they all have a lot of experience. They taught us a lot through the years. But the older generation still has some old working habits and it does cause arguments," explained Robert.

Working in the underground mines was dangerous. When Robert worked underground at the Mather B, he was caught up in what miners called a high country which is smoke after a blast. During about a ninety foot climb down, a lot went through his mind.

As late as the 1970's women did not work in the mines; for the most part they could not handle underground mining duties. However, now that mining is open pit and more mechanized and computerized women are able to work in the mines.

When I asked Robert what responsibility was involved in his job he stated, "Safety to yourself and to your co-workers. Safety standards are very strict at the mines today, versus back in the 70's or 80's, but it did cut out on the accidents. So I guess it is well worth it," replied Robert. At the Tilden Mine workers receive safety awards if the frequency of accidents is down.

After I had asked Robert what he thought the future held for the Tilden and the Empire he stated, "I think the future is good for both. We are two of the largest and most competitive mines in the world. Both mines continue to buy new equipment to improve their production as needed, and that keeps us on top." C.C.I is a successful company, because they keep up to date equipment, and they keep competitive by watching the costs. If

the cost of making pellets is not closely maintained, the mine will not stay open.

The iron ore of the Tilden and the Empire Mines will continue to be in demand. They have the largest ore bodies there, to fill their demands. Iron ore was and is so important world-wide that history is already made as indicated by its museums which show decades of primitive ways of mining as well as today's methods. The Tilden produces a high grade pellet at a low cost.

I asked Robert what advice he would give students today, about the mines and he said, "Go to school, get an advanced education and use your head to make a living, not your back." To end the interview I asked Robert if he had to do it all over again, would he make the same career choice? Robert stated, "No, like I said before it's good money, but it's not healthy working in the mines. If I knew than what I know now, a futher education would have been much easier and healthier."