

Louie Ostala

THIRTY SIX

LIFE AS A MINER

"You bet your life. One of the first. In fact when I joined the union we had to pay our dues in secret," remarked William Pascoe passionately when asked if he was ever a part of a steelworker's union.

Mr. Pascoe was born in Ishpeming, January 12, 1912. As he was growing up, his father, Arthur James Pascoe, worked for Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company and his mother, Beatrice Pascoe, worked part-time. He has two sisters, Hazel and Violet, and one brother, Richard Pascoe. He has been married to Myrle Pascoe for sixty years. He has four daughters.

Mr. Pascoe worked in the iron mining industry for about forty years basically because there were few other jobs available. He started working at the Tilden Pit in National Mine in 1934. He worked there until 1936. He worked at the Lloyd Mine from 1936 to 1955. After that he transferred to the Mather B Mine where he worked until 1974.

Mining in the old days was a lot different than it is today. There were a lot of different things to learn in mining. A miner learned how to drill to make a blast with dynamite. To make the cut they drilled a certain way so that the ore would fall down loose.

One time Mr. Pascoe remembers being within two minutes of



having been buried alive. He and Elmer Delangelo were in the fourth level which was practically "played out," but there was still a small body of ore left. As they were drilling, the boss came down and shut the air off the drilling machine and hollered, "Get outta here immediately--this place is coming in!" The ore was breaking loose off the rock and as it got higher there was a big body of ore, so when that slid everything came in flat. They just got back to the raise when everything flattened out. If they had waited just two minutes, they would have been buried alive, and their bodies never found.

While working at the mines, Mr. Pascoe performed many jobs. For example, he was a motorman, brakeman, backhoe operator, miner, hoist operator, tigger overhauler, tigger repair, and greaseman. Of these jobs he said that he enjoyed the backhoe job and the hoisting operator the most. While working on these jobs Mr. Pascoe met some very interesting people. He remembers one time he worked with one man for eight weeks and did not know anything more about the man when he finished the job than when he started with him. He also worked just one day with another man and he learned more in that day than he did in working eight weeks with another.

Mr. Pascoe was a big supporter of the steelworkers union and has been for quite some time. He was an early member of the steelworkers' union. In fact when he joined the union the members had to pay their dues in secret. So early, in fact, they were not yet recognized by the company. The union brothers had to go to Negaunee on Cherry Street to pay their dues to the guy who was organizing it.

Mr. Pascoe was on strike many times; the first and one of



the longest was in 1946. It lasted about three months. He feels that the union is something that the working people need and "Without the union things wouldn't be the best."

During the interview I got the impression that Mr. Pascoe enjoyed working for CCI very much, but there was one time when he did decide to try something new. He decided to go on and work on the railroad on the old Duluth- -Atlantic. He did not stay with them very long because if somebody older wanted to bump someone younger off for just one trip, they could and then that person would have to go on a different job or else back home again. Another thing he did not like about it was that the "old timers" wouldn't tell anybody a thing, so it was like a new worker was "working blind" all the time. He remembers one time being on a job, and they were meeting another train. The brakeman told him, "Ask 'em if they got any shortcars." Mr. Pascoe did not know what a shortcar was, so he asked the brakeman, and the brakeman would not tell him. It was such incidents that made Mr. Pascoe return to the mine where workers were more willing and likely to help each other.

Another reason Mr. Pascoe returned to the mines was because of the many men he worked with. He goes on saying, "There was so many people that I worked with, it was nice knowing everyone of them."

"The way CCI is going they should be pretty competitive for a while. If the one bodies hold out, the mines around here could last for a while," remarked Mr. Pascoe on the future of the mines. He would also advise young people to get as much education as possible and take up something special such as engineering or electronics. He also said, "If I could have had



an education, I would have made the same career choice."

In closing I am glad I had a chance to meet with Mr. Pascoe and hear many of his great stories. He is an interesting man who loved hunting and fishing, especially brook trout fishing, and has a lot of great memories about The Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company.