

Sarah
Harnett

Eighty-five

"Like One Big Family..."

"Working with all the fellas, years ago it was just like a big family." These are the words of Morris "Pard" Carlson when I recently spoke with him about his mining career.

Mr. Carlson was born on September 30, 1921, in Detroit Michigan. His parents were Eugene and Bertha Carlson, and he was the only child. He is now married to Jeanette Carlson and has seven children: Marlene, Morris Junior, Steven, Carolyn, Tom, Barbara, and John. He also has seventeen grandchildren.

Mr. Carlson started at the Moss Mine in 1940. He enlisted in the United States Navy in 1943. While in the Navy, Mr. Carlson played an heroic part in World War 2. On May 28, 1945 the ship he was on, the U.S.S. Drexler, was shot down by kamikazis and just forty-nine seconds later the ship sank in the East China Sea. Mr. Carlson and another man were in the sea for eight hours, both clinging to one life preserver! Luckily, they both survived. Out of three-hundred eighty-six people on the ship, a little less than half got off of it. Of the men who got off, they managed to find about sixty survivors. These survivors have reunions every year.

When he returned home from the Navy, he started working at the Mather A mine. Mr. Carlson explained "When I was young, everybody had a dad that worked in the mine. You practically knew you had a job in the mine." He also had a father that

worked in the mines and a grandfather who worked at the Cliff Shaft Mine for fifty years. He also said that CCI was the highest paying company at the time. Next, he was at the Mather B mine, and he retired from the Empire mine twenty-one years ago.

Mr. Carlson said that when he was sixteen years old he delivered ice for a couple of years. The top pay delivering ice was \$3.00 a day no matter how long he worked. "So, the minute I got eighteen I got a job in the mine," he stated firmly. You had to be eighteen to work for Cleveland Cliffs, and he was the youngest miner at the Moss Mine at age eighteen in 1940.

Mr. Carlson was lucky because he was partners with his father when he worked underground. In fact, once he and his father were picking ore after another shift had blasted. There was still dynamite in there, but the other shift had not reported this. Mr. Carlson had picked into a piece with six sticks of dynamite! "If that would've went off, I would've been pieces," he said thankful that nothing had happened.

Mr. Carlson also recalled a time when a man was buried in a cave-in. He said that the man caught in the cave had to cut the hair right off his head so that he could get out!

Underground had good points as well. Mr. Carlson stated "Everyday was humorous when 'ya worked underground." He had recalled a time at the Moss Mine that a co-worker's wife was expecting a baby. All of the men in that section threw a baby shower for the man! Now, remember, this was underground and everything was covered with hematite. "They had diapers, and booties, and everything you can think of right down in underground," Mr. Carlson said laughing.

I was also curious about Mr. Carlson's other co-workers, so

I asked him what he remembered most about them. He told me that the older and more experienced miners are who stood out in his mind. "They were excellent miners," he said. He also said that the more inexperienced and younger miners would always try their best to live up to their example.

Mr. Carlson was also a union member. He talked about being on strike five times. "In those days there was no give-aways. When you went on strike that was it. No food baskets, no nothin' ". he remembered. He also said that some strikes lasted as much as one-hundred and nineteen days. It was especially hard for his family because he had anywhere from three to six kids during the strikes. He mentioned how he had to scramble to find carpenters jobs, or a job driving a taxi. "Anything you could do to try to find work," he explained.

Mr. Carlson also told me an interesting story from on a picket line. He started by saying how rowdy it would get on picket lines. Mr. Carlson told me that one day one of the superintendents was on his way to work. He said that when he stopped at the entrance the guys said "'ya ain't gettin' in here today!" The superintendent said "You wouldn't dare!" And just about the time the word "wouldn't" came out he was flipped up onto the roof of his car!

Mr. Carlson also mentioned men called "scabs", or employees that worked during a strike. " One guy was getting a hair cut downtown in Johnson's Barber Shop" Mr. Carlson continued "And a couple of union guys seen him in there, went in there and cut a strip down the center of his head!"

Mr. Carlson said that they started out at sixty-six cents an hour and five dollars and twenty eight cents a day. He thinks

the United Steelworkers Union is important because, "They got 'em everything they got. If we wouldn't of had that Union, we'd still be makin' \$3.00 a day." he speculated

Mr. Carlson currently enjoys spending time at his camp, barbequeing, and being with his family. He also says he enjoys just relaxing.

In closing the interview, Mr. Carlson had one important thing to say: "I think I always had done a good day's work. I think if you do a good days work you shouldn't be ashamed of anything. When you go to get your paycheck, you shouldn't be ashamed to take it."

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