

Jamie Hytinen

SIXTY-FOUR

THE MAINTENANCE MECHANIC

"Well, when I was eighteen years old, I was unemployed. My father asked me one day, 'Paul would you like to have a job in the Mines?' That was the best option available that day. So I took it and he got me a job at the Mather B Mine in Negaunee." stated Paul Hytinen recalling how his career with ClevelandCliffs Iron Company began.

Paul was born November 17, 1955, at Bell Memorial Hospital, in Ishpeming, Michigan. His father, Rudolph Hytinen, also worked for C.C.I. His mother was Elna Hytinen. Although she worked at the H.W. Gossard Factory in Ishpeming, she was mainly a housewife. His only sister is Sharon Sovae.

Paul has been working for C.C.I. for twenty years. In those twenty years he has worked at three different mines. When C.C.I. first employed him, his job was at the Mather B Mine. At the Mather B Mine he was a transfer scraperman, a supply motorbrakeman, and a motorman. When the Mather B Mine closed down, he went to the Tilden Mine where he was a maintenance mechanic. After a couple of years he transferred to the Empire Mine where he has been working ok since.

As a maintenance mechanic Paul must change teeth on shovel buckets. He also troubleshoots, and does minor repairs on the excavating shovels and the beast hole drills. He thinks the most challenging part of his job is to get the dysfunctional equipment running as soon as possible.



As Paul was thinking about his days at the Mather B Mine he could recall how challenging and difficult it was to be a motorman. He worked on the eleventh level, thirty-two hundred feet underground! Since it was dark, and at times very wet, he had many obstacles to watch out for. "There were things sticking out of the walls, hanging down from the ceiling that you had to duck and go around. It was quite hazardous duty!" exclaimed Paul.

Paul said that safety standards have changed dramatically for the working man. In 1973 the emphasis on safety was practically nonexistent. However, through the intervening years, men have been educated on the proper ways to handle equipment and to work safely. The improvements that can be made involve educating the workers more on the proper safety rules and how to do things properly.

At many work places there are always a few people who will do anything for a good laugh, and the workers at the Tilden Mine are no exception. Paul remembers very clearly a most humorous situation. It all began as a little gag game. In 1980 two men donned in a gorilla mask and put a dress on and they boarded a drilling machine in the Tilden pit. The operator of the machine was unaware of the men getting on. Other workers went in the back room and shut off the drill. Well, the operator of the machine did not know what caused the stoppage, and he went in the back room to check it out. When he entered the back room, the men stood in the corner and shook, moaned, and made a frightening noise. The operator of the machine had no idea what was there. He became so afraid he fainted. He thought there was a monster making all that noise!



When people hear of pranks, they usually are reminded of young people. When people are young, they need to develop skills for future employment. What skills will a person need to get a job for C.C.I.? Paul advised "To become a good computer user". Computers are starting to be used extensively at the mine. So if a student learned to use a computer when he is in high school "You could walk right into a job already being computer smart", stated Paul. He continued, "Go to school and learn as much as you can. Finish high school and go to college if you possibly can. Get the best education because you can always find a job", remarked Paul.

I asked Paul about women working in the mine. He said that if a woman gets a good education she could also get a job in the mine. Actually women are very good workers in the pit. "Women have gone from being the secretary to being a truck driver, a welder, and a repair man. They have taken over many jobs that have traditionally been a man's job out there" said Paul. He continued "I can see ClevelandCliffs Iron Company hiring more women in the future because they are good workers".

There are always special projects at the mines that men and women can get involved in. Paul was involved in the erection or putting together of the number twenty-three and the number twenty-four shovel at the Tilden Mine in 1980.

One thing that Paul is very active in is the United Steel Worker's Union, and he is currently a member of Local 4950. He has experienced being on strike four times. A strike begins when the workers, and Cleveland Cliffs fail to make an agreement on wages and benefits. When they come to an impass, a strike is called. The strike in 1993 totaled 1,850 hourly employees from



the Central Shops, Tilden Mine, and the Empire Mine. When there is a strike, a picket line is set up, Paul explained. A picket line is a way for the United SteelWorkers to monitor the people traffic going into the mine. He added, "Men who were at odds with each other in the workplace, maybe didn't like each other. When we were on strike, they stuck together. They went from not liking each other to being a united brother".

Most unions have monthly meetings. At the union meetings that Paul attends, they just talk over union business, such as communications from other locals. Members get a briefing on what is happening in the iron industry. They also find out the future of mining operations and new innovations on the horizon.

In Paul's opinion the steelworkers union is so important because "The old saying; United we stand, divided you beg". Which means workers are united they can get some good contracts with Cleveland Cliffs. But if they were not united, they most probably would not be making the wages or having the benefits that they have now because of reduced bargaining power.

If C.C.I. did not have good employees they would not be so successful. Paul said that they are so successful because "C.C.I. has positioned themselves in a no lose situation". When they entered a partnership such as Empire Mine and Tilden Mine, they own all or most of the ore body. Whereas if the partners in the steel industry are losing money, Cleveland Cliffs can be actually be making money, because they are still selling the tonnage out of the pit.

Paul thinks the future for the iron and steel industry in general looks to be extremely bright. There is a lot of competition because of composite materials, and ceramics. But



there will always be a need for iron and steel because in some things there is no substitute. The future for the Empire Mine and Tilden Mine will also probably be extremely good. "Both Tilden Mine and Empire Mines are going to be becoming good, lean, mean mining machines", stated Paul, "They are going to be through technology and threw bigger and better equipment, and through a smarter more experienced work force. They are going to be able to remain very competitive in North America" he continued.

In order for C.C.I. to remain competitive in the future they have to listen to the employees a bit more. Management should suggest workers do their jobs, but if they can find a better, easier way to do it they should be allowed to do it. "They've got a lot of good ideas, and Corporate Cleveland has to open up their ears and listen to them", said Paul reflecting on the values of employee input and shared decision making.

Paul said that if he had to make career choices over again he would still work for C.C.I. "There is a lot of good people out there in the mining industry. I've got to meet and know a lot of nice people, and I also like the area. So if I want to stay in the area, I figured I might as well just get one of the better paying jobs in the area".

Paul will be retiring in 10 years, and when he does I am sure he will have many memories about his days with C.C.I.

This has been a learning experience for me. I learned many new things about mining and the steel industry. If you have not already guessed Paul is my father, and I am very thankful that he spent his time to do this interview with me. Thank-you Paul.