

Alyssa Rogers

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eighty-seven

A MILLION AND ONE HEADACHES!

"Because I wanted to live in Upper Michigan. I was born here, and I do think Cleveland Cliffs is one of the better employers," stated Mr. Don Lohman when I asked him why he chose to work in the iron industry.

Mr. Lohman is a sixty year old, hardworking man who was born in Calumet, Michigan in 1933. He has been working in the iron industry for over twenty-nine years. He has also worked in several copper mines as well. Currently, he is the union president local # 4974 as well as an electronic repairman at the Tilden Mine.

Becoming an electronic repairman was not an easy task for Mr. Lohman. To become an electrician, he took an I.C.S correspondence course to become an electronic repairman and he also took a home study course.

Mr. Lohman's job is not always free from trouble. There have been many challenges and difficulties he's had to face. He stated, "Keeping up with technology, in my case I'm a high school graduate, it requires more schooling than what I had. The technology is such today that it requires more than what was formally required." Keeping pace with technology is difficult.

When he talked about the working conditions, he mentioned danger. Mr Lohman has worked in dangerous places, including when he worked in the copper mines. He also worked as an electrician for about twenty-five years which included working with high voltage electricity. He told me, "A lot of times in bad

conditions, in dark wet places, and some have suffered' we've had serious accidents--fortunately I never had one."

Although Mr. Lohman has never been in an accident, he has witnessed some. In fact, two of his partners suffered fatal accidents. When he was working in the copper mines, a partner of his was killed by a fall of rock. Another accident happened when an electrician he worked with was killed when a grinding mill starter shortcircuited and created an electrical flash. He was burned severely and was so badly injured that he died the next day. He says, "I suppose I'll always remember. It's not something you forget."

Mr. Lohman described working conditions in some of the mines. "It's a bad environment, noisy, there are fumes from chemicals, dust. Some places are dark and wet, too." But he says safety standards are changing dramatically, which is reflected in the decrease in the numbers of accidents.

Mr. Lohman explained that MSHA or Mining Safety Health Administration, the company, and the union have all helped to decrease the number of accidents. MSHA is a federal agency that oversees safety and health administration in the mines. They regularly tour the plant, and they review the circumstances of all accidents. MSHA recommends and tries to take whatever steps are necessary to see that most accidents are prevented before they occur. The company, the union, and MSHA share the credit for improving the safety of working in the mine.

Some of the jobs Mr. Lohman performs are installing wire and controls for some of the changes that have been made over the years. He describes it as a group effort, because everyone helps with the work. He says, "In varying degrees they all

contribute."

Every hourly paid worker at the mine is a member of the United Steelworkers Union. In fact, Mr. Lohman is the president of local 4974. As president, Mr. Lohman has an important job. He has the responsibility for negotiating a contract. He is responsible for the appointing to a negotiating of other local union people who participate in the negotiating process.

When I asked Mr. Lohman what was the most difficult part of his job as being union president, he laughed and said, "A million and one headaches!." He continued, "Working with people is very difficult, and therefore problems--serious problems and quite often no easy answers. We have to deal with them as best we can."

The most difficult job of being union president is to negotiate a fair contract. Dead lock of issues often leads to a strike. Since he's been working at the Tilden Mine, Mr. Lohman has been on strike four times. He explains how strikes begin, "Sometimes your deadline comes up, you're just far apart, you feel you've moved as far as you can. The company also feels they've moved as far as they can."

A strike involves all members of the union hourly workers--which is about 750 people at the Tilden. Mr. Lohman also told me about a picket line. A picket line is to inform the public and the members and to notify the people that the miners are on strike.

Another way that the miners' concerns can be addressed is to go to a union meeting. Any member that has a complaint or a question can go to these meetings. Unions are democratic organizations where workers have the right to tell their officers

what they think and instruct them as to their opinions of what to do. Mr. Lohman sometimes receives requests to do something that is not possible. He has to work within the limits of what he can do within a contract.

Mr. Lohman feels that the unions are important and necessary to ensure that safety is always the Company's number one concern. Good wages and benefits are useless if someone is killed on the job. Secondly, miners work under a contract. The company is limited on what they can tell a miner to do and what not to do, for they have to live up to the contract. Grievances, a form of complaint, are sometimes used to solve the differences between the company and the union. In a non-union company, a worker has to do what their boss tells them to or else they will be discharged. But in a union company, Mr. Lohman says, "You can stand up for your rights without fear of reprisal by your supervisor." The unions' primary concern is to provide job security, a safe and healthy environment along with good wages and benefits.

*What does future hold for unions?*

What does the future hold for the Tilden and Empire Mines? Mr. Lohman believes they will be survivors in the highly competitive steel industry. However, the steel industry and the iron ore industry are closely tied, one doesn't work without the other. Mr. Lohman states, "no one has a crystal ball."

Mr. Lohman thinks the reason Cleveland Cliffs has succeeded is because they pay attention to quality and cost. They have to produce a quality product at a competitive price.

Some advice Mr. Lohman suggests to younger people is to get better schooling and training. When I asked him if high school graduates need to go to college to get a job to work for CCI, he

told me that they are going to need equipment operators and craft people. This does not necessarily mean students must go to college, but they would probably benefit from attendance at a technical school. He advises, "Go as far as you can, because the rest of your life depends on it."

Even though Mr. Lohman is a busy man, he has time for other important things. He used to hunt and fish, but mainly he fishes in the summer. He owns a camp where he spends a lot of his summer.

Some impressions for Mr. Lohman that stand out most concerning CCI is that his association with CCI has been a good one. He believes that the steelworkers' union and the employers have made significant contributions to the iron ore industry and they will continue to do so.

I learned a lot from this interview, and I am fortunate that I was able to interview him. Everyone appreciates the hard work Mr. Lohman has put in for Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company, and I certainly appreciate the time this very busy man set aside for this interview with me.