

Heather Peterson

#62

A Miner's Memories

Kim Peterson spends his time fishing, hunting, going for walks, riding his Harley Davidson, shooting, and enjoying the Upper Peninsula. "I wanted to remain in the Upper Peninsula. I also wanted a good paying job with benefits, and that I could raise children here and not have to worry", said Kim Peterson stating why he chose to work for Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company.

Kim's dad is Roy Peterson, who was the manager of the Gossard Company for many years. Roy later worked for an engineering company until his retirement. Kim's mother Elsie Peterson was a housekeeper who worked in several different places. Kim is an only child who was born on June 18, 1950, in Marquette Michigan. Kim and his wife Marjorie have three children: Sarah, Heather, and Nathan.

Working for C.C.I. seems like a tradition for Kim's family, for he has uncles Bill Graham, Bob Peterson, George Kauppanen, as well as Peter Farm currently working there. Kim has worked for C.C.I. since 1976. Kim has worked in various places, such as: the concentrator, the pellet plant, the pit, and in the lab, where he works now. Kim started out as a laborer. He went into maintenance, and from maintenance back into laborer. He also worked at the pit where he controlled heavy equipment. "Now I work as a quality technician in the lab at the Tilden," he stated. Kim's current job is keeping specification on the

pellets that Tilden ships to different steel mills. "We let the iron manufactures know we analyze the dirt before it is mined. We also keep checks on the composite of the pellet." The Tilden does this so that the companies know everything that has to do with a pellet. C.C.I. has their own schooling. Kim's current job took about one and a half years of training. A worker must become a quality technician level three before running everything on the job. He progresses to level two, and finally reaches level one. Kim says, "The biggest responsibilities today in the lab are being able to have people come to C.C.I., and to know what we are doing, nobody can ever second guess what we are doing."

One thing that Kim and the workers use is nuclear on-line analyzers, which run the mine and keep all different reagents going to keep the mine flowing. C.C.I. also runs XRF machines which are x-ray machines. C.C.I. also uses a puck, which is made in Norway, to examine the dirt which has not been drawn out from underground yet. C.C.I. uses computers for tracking things, and other machinery for chemicals, iron, analyzing, and floating chemicals. Kim's working conditions are a clean, quiet, temperature controlled environment, with air conditioning, a stereo, refrigerator, and microwave, "I've worked in the rain, snow, and mud before, and then being able to work in this situation makes it nice," he stated. The conditions where Kim is working now are good, but the lab used to be taken for granted and called a "cush job," Kim says the thing companies are looking for is quality, "If we didn't make such a good product, chances are C.C.I. wouldn't be open right now," he explained.

Kim has been in special projects such as, when he was

working in the pit. He and other co-workers helped make the CD3 pit, which was a pit containing magnetite ore. Kim also helped build roads, and he made dams, and moved millions of tons of dirt. Kim has been doing hands-on testing since the beginning of his career. When Kim was asked, have you ever felt like changing jobs?, he said, "Well one nice thing at C.C.I. is if you don't like what you are doing, you can change into a different career field through the posting system," Kim's job requires taking a test every six months. If the workers pass the test they go up in pay. If a worker does not pass the test, they stay where they are until they get their journeyman's position which means that they are at the top. A worker can always stay as a laborer and make two points, or they can work their way up by receiving training and passing tests to make eighteen or nineteen points. Kim says C.C.I. is probably the best employer that he has worked for because, "They treat their employees more than fair. They pay them excellent for this area. I'd have to say they are one of the best employees you could have if you want to live in the Upper Peninsula," However, if Kim had to do it all over again, he would probably study to be a veterinarian so he could work for himself and not have to live by anybody else's standards.

While I was talking to Kim about his job at C.C.I., he mentioned safety as a reason he liked working for this company. Kim says C.C.I. is at an all time high as far as having safety be involved with the jobs. Currently C.C.I. averages one accident every six months. Workers make sure the safety is good, and people don't get hurt, "Most people do not take chances anymore. They always ask for help, or make sure that its going to be done safely before they do it," Kim explained. C.C.I. has awarded

safety prizes such as free meals, jackets, lights, fire extinguishers, for being accident free.

Working at C.C.I. is not without danger. When Kim was working in the pit pushing dirt over the edge, at about twenty degrees below zero there was a lot of fog, and he could not even see the tracks of the dozer. When Kim stopped the dozer and looked down, all he could see was air under him. Half of the dozer was over the cliff rocking back and forth! Fortunately, a serious accident was avoided. Kim told me more stories about working in the primary mills. A five hundred pound chunk of steel hit Kim's partner's hard hat, and crushed his shoulder. "Being able to see things like this happen, you never take safety for granted," he said. C.C.I. has really pushed towards achieving up most safety in every department over the years.

Throughout his years working for C.C.I., Kim says the most challenging thing about his job is remembering all of the tests that the workers have to run without looking them up. Kim also thinks that working on the primary mills is challenging because it is hard work.

Working at C.C.I. is not all hard work. Kim's co-workers all have a good sense of humor and can make him laugh. Kim has worked with all types of people who always have special stories floating around about deer season, camping, and fishing expeditions. Kim enjoys working with a variety of people, and getting to know them. Humorous situations at work happen all the time, because Kim's co-workers all have a great sense of humor. Work goes by a lot better if workers have a good working relationship. One thing everybody that works for C.C.I. enjoys is when people from different countries come to visit. Kim shows

them what he does on the job.

Part of being employed as an hourly worker in the mining industry is being a member of the United Steelworkers Union. Kim says, "It's mandatory that you become a member of the steelworkers' union when you work for an iron ore company." It costs ten dollars a week to be a member.

One of the purposes of the Steelworkers Union is to protect the rights of the members which sometimes involves a strike. Kim went on strike in 1983, in 1990 it was 120 days, and in 1993 the strike lasted a month and a half. A strike begins with a vote. The members vote to give the negotiators the authority to call the strike. If there are enough votes against the company's proposal, the members go on strike. A strike involves all of the hourly employees of C.C.I. A strike also involves a picket line. A picket line is to keep workers and vendors out of the mine while it is idle. The reason for a picket line is to make sure that there is nobody doing business with C.C.I. while the workers are on strike.

When on strike the workers have union rallies where workers get together and try to encourage each other. When not on strike, union meetings inform their members of solutions and problems about the work area.

In Kim's opinion the United Steelworkers Union is important, because it keeps track of all aspects of work, including safety, wages, and working hours. For example, before unions some people worked twelve, fourteen, or even sixteen hours a day, every day. Now if a worker works over eight hours a day overtime is assured. Days off are guaranteed. The unions are very important to the workers.

C.C.I. is a large company. The Empire Mine, where Kim works, is a half mile long and one-fourth mile wide. School trips are provided for students to see the immensity of the mine.

To remain competitive in the future, C.C.I. must produce a quality product that nobody else can produce in this country. This product must be cost competitive. That's why C.C.I. is reducing the cost per ton of pellets sold around the world. Kim stated, "The pellets are used for many things, such as, Huffy bikes, Ford cars, structural steel, etc. It's got to be a quality product!"

The success of C.C.I. over other ore companies is that it owns the mineral rights of the land. For every ton of dirt that C.C.I. takes they get a royalty. Not only do they get paid for making their pellets, they get paid for using their dirt. Most places do not have the benefit of doing that. "Hopefully people of the future will look back at C.C.I. not only as a taker of the earth, but as a contributor to the well being of the future," stated Kim.

Speaking with Kim, I can see that the Upper Peninsula is a very special place to him. Because of the mine industry, he has been able to spend his life in a place where his heart is. "This is home to me and my family of many generations back. I will live and work here as long as I can... 'til the day I die," he stated emphatically.