

Bonnie Erickson

sixty-five

MR. ERICKSON'S TIME IN THE MINE

Mr. David Erickson, son of Lee and Mickey Erickson, was born on June 2, 1955, in New Iberia, Louisiana. He recalls taking a job for Cleveland Cliffs "because my brother worked for them, my dad had worked for them, and the money was good," he stated.

During my talk with Mr. Erickson, he talked about some of his hobbies. He enjoys fixing up cars and also greatly enjoys riding his motorcycle.

Recalling the eight years that Mr. Erickson worked for CCI, he remembered both good and bad incidents about working there as a laborer, cooler attendant, welder, and fill-in foreman, but his most favorable memory of the Empire Mine was the day he quit.

Just as in any job, there are parts that are enjoyable and parts that are not. Mr. Erickson liked most of the men he worked with. He also recalls a humorous situation where he watched a man park a pickup truck in front of a door where the Wabco 120s were kept. Just as the man got inside the building, the door opened and one of the trucks backed out over the man's pickup. The cab was flattened right out!

Besides good times, there were bad times as well. One occurrence that Mr. Erickson remembers was welding on the shiv wheels of a shovel at twenty below zero in the pit. Shiv wheels are wheels on the top of the shovel where the cables go up and over the top of the shovel and back down.

Another part of our conversation concerned safety aspects. "It was dusty, dirty, smoky, hot and humid in the summer, cold and freezing in the winter," stated Mr. Erickson. He also talked about working conditions and safety in general. He recalls that when he worked at the Empire Mine there was a problem with smoke. He also stated, though, that CCI did go a long way to take care of that problem.

We also talked about advice. Mr. Erickson thinks that the Empire and Tilden will be around for a while. He thinks that to stay competitive, CCI will have to find a way to produce pellets for a lower cost. "If they can't make it cost effective, they're gonna be hurting....They're making some pretty good strides," replied Mr. Erickson.

Mr. Erickson also talked about the future. He said that the next generation of workers should get a college degree. He says, "The technical skills that you need now because of the equipment that they use in a place like that, everything's specialized. You don't just go out and grab an arch welder and weld anymore; you have special equipment that you use." He said that everything used is more intricate than it was twenty years ago necessitating the technical training.

We also talked about the equipment that he used. As a welder, Mr. Erickson used many types of materials. He first started using stick welding, arch welding, gas welding, and then went to wire feed. Finally, they went and used pattern cutters.

Later in the interview, we talked about the union and the steelworkers meetings and strikes. He said that strikes start because of unfair treatment or because someone thought that he/she didn't make enough money. He also said that approximately

eighty percent of the workforce is affected by strikes since only hourly workers are affected.

Mr. Erickson put in a powerful statement as to why the union was important. He stated that first it was important because of safety aspects and treatment. "Before the unions were involved and came to be, the safety conditions, the working conditions at the mine were terrible. There was accidents all over the place. People got hurt. If a boss didn't like you, he fired you. They just got rid of you. They didn't need a reason," stated Mr. Erickson.

As the interview concluded, I could see that Mr. Erickson was a good man, who knew what he wanted out of life. Working at the mine helped him to see what it was exactly that he wanted--a college education. Mr. Erickson went to Northern Michigan University and is now a chemist/teacher at NMU, and he is quite happy.