

Kari Manta

Eighty-Two

Mr. Isotalo's Experience in Mining

"I choose to work in the iron industry because the wages were higher than any other job", Mr. Sulo Isotalo stated as he told me about his twenty-one years working in the mine.

My grandpa was born in Humbolt Township on March 15, 1921, so he is seventy-three years old and in good physical shape. His parents names were Gust and Hilma. Gust worked in the mines as well as on his farm. Hilma was a house wife. My grandpa has four brothers named Jack, Charlie, Mathew and Robert. His sisters' names are Mary, Sylvia, and Irene. Mr. Isotalo is married to Elsie Isotalo. They have five children named Dale, Dennis, Susan, Sally and Tammy.

Mr. Isotalo worked in the mines for twenty-one years. Some of the relatives that he worked with are Arnie Laakso, Robert Laakso, his father-in-law Gus Laakso, his brother Jack, and his dad.

Mr. Isotalo worked at the Champion and Republic Mines. He worked in the pellet plant, in the pit as a drill helper and a drill operator. He also worked in the warehouse. His main duties of his job was checking out the merchandise that comes in and bookwork. In the pit, he operated the drills, drilling holes and helping on the drills.

This job did not require any higher education, but a worker was trained on the job for a certain length of time

before becoming an operator.

Mr. Isotalo stated that the mines are very dangerous. "The dangers you had in the stopes were they caved in mostly on weak ends. In the open pits the dirty air made it dangerous to breath." He stated that the air was really gassy and sometimes he could not see clearly for a whole hour after a blast. Mr. Isotalo had a lot of responsibility to be safe. Every move a worker made had to be careful.

Mr. Isotalo had difficult situations with the skips in the beginning of his career when working in the underground mine because a worker went up twenty-five levels with no protection from anything falling down from the shaft. He was lucky not to get hurt from having no protection on the skips.

In 1973 Mr. Isotalo was involved in a terrible accident. He fell right off a drill rigging with ice on top of it while he was putting alcohol on a jet rig. "I fell backwards and come to find out the next morning I had a broken neck," replied Mr. Isotalo. That was one reason why he retired.

As my grandpa ended his career, he noticed a tremendous change in the mining industry. "You had to learn more about machinery and different aspects of your job."

Grandpa Isotalo explained the success of C.C.I had a good management, and they knew what they were doing more than some of the other companies. He also said that C.C.I was a better place to work, and fortunately they had an excellent quality of workmen as well.

When I asked him what the young people of today need to develop if they plan to work for C.C.I, he responded by saying, "I think they should have skills in welding, maintenance

mechanics, and electricians. The labor that's been used all the years I've been working there was common labor which to the strong back and weak mind."

Grandpa Isotalo experienced a difficult time when he was on strike. The strike often begins because of the cost of living rises and workers want more money for living expenses. When Mr. Isotalo was on strike at Champion, it involved about 150 men. The last strike he could remember for C.C.I involved 3,500 men.

A strike was a bad situation for Mr. Isotalo. "But if it was not for all the sacrifices we made during the strike, alot of these younger miners right now would not have benefits," stated Mr. Isotalo. Sulo Isotalo told me what happens at a union meeting. "In a union meeting everything is discussed especially safety. At the meetings we talk about we talk about benefits we should have, how to approach to a company and get along," replied Sulo.

Mr. Isotalo was very interesting to interview. It was neat to learn about my grandpa's past. Mining is a very unusual but important subject to learn about, and I am glad that I learned this information from my grandpa.

My grandpa hopes that the company stays around for a long time. "I hope to see the mines operate while I am here and long after I am gone," stated Sulo.