

April Ulrickson

thirty-five

MY DAD; A HARD WORKING MAN

My father, Brian Ulrickson, was born January 24, 1956. He has two brothers David and George Jr.(Rick) and one sister Mary. His wife, Anita, and he has two daughters April and Briana.

Brian told me about his working conditions. "I work in a quite dusty enviroment, very noisy." Brian said. He has to wear hearing protection and a dust respirator part of the time . Brian operates a Gardner Denver, 120 blast hole drill, that drills a sixty foot deep hole sixteen inches in diameter.

Brian worked for the iron mining industry for almost twenty years. He has worked as a heavy equipment operator and a laborer. Brian has to set up and take down drilling equipment and move it around to various drill sites in the open pit mine. Brian says, "The most challenging or difficult part of my job is once the drill is moved into a new drill site, and it is erecting the mast and threading the drill rod together and setting up the drill." A difficult duty Brian had to perform was taking a bulldozer on top of a search pile which is a high pile of crude iron ore and pushing more into the feeder". He explained. The danger was either going over the edge and sliding down the pile or going to the inside and going down into the feeder.

Brian's biggest responsibility is to get the drill prepared to move out of the drill pattern before the blast is set off.

Brian said, "Our duties have changed in that we are given more responsibility with a lot less help and a lot less time to get the job done." The use of computers gives management more information on every aspect of the job and duties of that job.

Brian enjoys his job because he is able to work outside, and he does different things everyday with different co-workers that are also good friends. Brian stated, "My co-workers are very hard-working bunch of guys that take pride in doing a good job in the least amount of time."

Brian thinks safety standards have changed greatly over the years. "Safety awareness is one of the major concerns for CCI and their employees." Safety is stressed on every aspect of the job. Changes have been made but there is always room for improvement. In regards to his own safety he said, "The most dangerous situation that I've ever been in is probably drilling during an electrical storm on a high hill when the mast of the drill was struck by lightning."

Another dangerous situation that Brian has been in was when he was a crusher helper. The operator was getting a scan which is a light that flashes indicating a high sump pump level which is a pump that pumps water out of the bottom of the crusher, He kept turning the silencer to silence the alarm because it came on often and workers never paid much attention to it. "Until about an hour later when I went down to the lower floors of the crusher and found that the water level was about six feet up the wall and everything in the basement was flooded." Brian stated.

I asked Brian about the steelworkers union. He has been a member of the United Steelworkers for almost twenty years. He has been on three strikes since he started working at the Empire

Mine. Brian explained to me how a strike begins. "The strike begins by taking a strike authorization vote at a monthly meeting. The membership has given full authority by the executive committee to negotiate and bring back a contract that is desirable by everyone involved" Brian said. The last strike for CCI involved almost 2,000 working men and women. When the workers go on strike, they have a picket line set up at the main gate of the property to show solidarity to the management.

The picket line duty might include discussing contract issues, trying to gain more information, and spreading around accurate information. There are also leisure activities like storytelling, horseshoe, volleyball, cribbage, listening to music, campfires, and every day things to keep the strikers busy.

Brian explained that a union meeting is just like any other meeting. The meeting is called to order, roll call is taken, new and old business is discussed. It is a time for the membership to stand up and say what is on their mind, air their grievances and see if their problems can be solved. Brian thinks the union is important because "It solidifies the workers who sometimes need to take a stand against management for the way they have been treated or exploited on the job. The union gives the workers some type of recourse he feels has been mistreated or mismanaged."

In general, the iron and steel industry is still in an over-capacity state. More mines may close. There is still a 20% over supply of iron pellets in the country which means that the best mines and operations will stay in business. Hopefully these will be in our area.

Brian thinks the future for the Tilden and Empire "look real good. They have been able to cut their costs, downsize their operations, eliminate jobs, save money, and using technology" Brian said, " They came up with a consistent pellet product.

One project of CCI that stands out in Brian's mind is "In the early 80s when layoffs were effecting the area people. I got an opportunity to work on the exploration drill out in the northern end of the Empire property near Negaunee," Brian stated. They were drilling holes in the woods looking for ore body.

For CCI to remain competitive in the future the company must keep one of the most valuable resources that they have, their employees. Their employees should be used to help make management-type decisions which aids cost reduction. It provides a program for the reward for a good cost-cutting or money saving ideas.

Brian says that the key to CCI's success where other companies have failed" is probably having a good hard working, experienced work force that does not need a great amount of supervision. Guys that know the job and know how to get it done in the quickest and least expensive way." Brian explained.

The thing that stands out most in Brian's mind about his association with CCI" is the fact that labor and management takes such an adversarial position towards one another and so much time, energy, money, resources are wasted bickering, negotiating, hashing out problems when I feel these could be combined to meet the demands of the business and make a better product to stay competitive." He stated.

Brian picked mining as his career choice because it was the best paying job at the time. His father worked in the mines. His uncle worked in the open pit mines and as well as other uncles, brothers, and cousins. Brian worked in the Republic, Tilden, Empire Mines and also in the Diamond Drills.

My father is a hard working man. He does a lot to help his family. I am thankful I had a chance to discuss his career, along with his safety, and the duties of his job. I love you dad.