

Justin LaMene

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#### ONE RUGGED MINER

Ben Bray was born on January 23, 1934, in Vulcan, Michigan. Ben's parents were Jacob and Ann Bray. His brothers names are Ed, John, Andy, Frank, Jake, Joe, George, and one brother who died when he was very young. Ben worked in the iron industry for seventeen years. He worked at the Mather B, the Mather A, the Pioneer Plant, Eagle Mills, and the Empire Mine.

Ben has done some very dangerous jobs. "When we used to change the cables on the skips and main hoist in the mines underground was the most dangerous job I ever had," Ben stated. Ben has also been in an accident which made him retire at an early age. He was working on a compressor, and it blew up on him. During the accident he hurt his back which he now has problems with and will someday have surgery on. He was also working on a conveyor system trying to fix it, and he was prying at it when the injury reoccured.

Ben's working conditions were safe because he worked on the surface most of the time. The only time Ben went underground was to change the cables on the skips and main hoist.

"I think for the future if they work it right and if they get all of the dirt out they will have a long time going yet," stated Ben. Ben also thinks that young people of today need mechanical skills, and computer skills. "Everything seems to be

going into computers today so computer would be the number one choice if you can get into it and they are going to need a high school diploma," said Ben. Ben also wants the students of today to know that they must get a good education so they can get a higher paying job with the company.

Ben was a member of the United Steelworkers' Union for seventeen years. He has been involved in only one strike in those seventeen years. "A strike begins when both sides don't agree on the proposals that they start bargaining with," Ben said. He also mentioned that all of the hourly employees of the union were involved with the strike. Ben said that the purpose of a picket line is to show unity, that everybody agrees on the same issues and to let the public know that they are all together on this. "In my opinion the Steelworkers Union is so important because if you didn't have the Steelworkers Union I don't think you would have the protection you have now for all your benefits and wages," explained Ben.

Ben Bray is now sixty years old and lives with his wife Bonnie in Ishpeming Michigan. He has four kids Ben Jr., Louie, Kathie, and Chris. In his spare time he likes to do carpentry work like making cabinets and shelves. Ben also likes to go out to camp in the fall and go hunting.

I am glad I interviewed Ben because I have learned a lot about iron mining and what it is like to be there. I have also realized that underground iron mining was a very dangerous job that some people had to do to support their family.