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SIXTY-SEVEN

A SKILLED CRAFTSMAN

"I always liked building things--something new, something I would call a challenge." These were the words Don Byykkonen used to explain his interest in welding. Mr. Byykkonen, now retired, worked thirty-six years in the iron industry as a maintenance welder.

Mr. Byykkonen was born in Hurontown, Michigan on April 11th, 1931, to Abel and Lilian Byykkonen. He was one of five boys in a family of seven children. His father worked several different jobs as a woodworker, a miner, and a part-time farmer.

Mr. Byykkonen chose to work in the mining industry for Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company because work was available, mines paid the best money, and he didn't want to leave Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Mr. Byykkonen took a six week welding course hoping he could get into some kind of trade. At about the same time, the Mather A Mine posted openings for two welders. Mr. Byykkonen applied, and the Mather A hired him as a welder trainee. He continued augmenting his skills through a training program which took four years. During this time, he had to take such classes as a correspondence class which involved math, blue print reading, and shop calculations. Mr. Byykkonen was also tested on actual welding jobs.

At the Mather A, Mr. Byykkonen also worked as an underground

laborer, and a diamond drill helper as well as some welding. He worked at the Mather A Mine for approximately seven years. Mr. Byykkonen also worked at the Ore Improvement Plant for a year, and at the Humboldt Mine for a winter. The rest of his time at CCI was spent at the Republic and Tilden mines, where he worked as a maintenance welder. The Republic and the Tilden mines were open pit mines. "I repaired a lot of things including the big shovels in the pit, all the big trucks, and the graters, small trucks, all the drills, and anything that was involved in maintenance welding," answered Mr. Byykkonen to a question relating to his job duties. He also worked on big kilns, pipelines, steam lines, and air lines. When working on the job, Mr. Byykkonen used manlifts, boom trucks, and cranes to get to his welding jobs. When asked about the most challenging part of his job Mr. Byykkonen replied, "We worked high off the ground. I would say at times we were probably in between fifty and seventy feet in height."

Mr. Byykkonen enjoys the challenge of building and solving problems with creative solutions. The jobs Mr. Byykkonen enjoyed most were the jobs which involved welding his own creations. Mr. Byykkonen explained, "I think I enjoyed watching things grow." He continued on saying, "I believe I am the type of person who would have said I like to work with my hands." He liked to create handrails, stairways, lockers, and whatever had to be made. Mr. Byykkonen went on to say he did not like to do the same routine tasks day after day.

The most difficult duty Mr. Byykkonen had to perform while his service at CCI occurred at the Republic Mine when two trucks were heavily damaged. The first one went over the mine's dump

and got the back end totaled. The first truck was sent to Iron Mountain where a new frame was installed. The second one was sent to Iron Mountain and CCI was informed of a two year wait for delivery! Such a long wait was unacceptable to the company, so Mr. Byykkonen and his partner were told to fix the frame for the truck. Mr. Byykkonen explained, "The difficult and challenging part was with all the stuff on these trucks was that they had to be real close and very accurate." Mr. Byykkonen and his partner proceeded to make one frame out of the two damaged frames. Two weeks later, when Mr. Byykkonen and his partner finished they were only 1/16 of an inch off. Mr. Byykkonen proudly stated that if the truck had not been replaced, it would run today.

While working in the mine, Mr. Byykkonen's main concern and biggest responsibility was working safely, and working with your partner safely. When repairing shafts, at the Mather A Mine, he had to take extra safety precautions. Because of these safety precautions, nothing ever happened to him. However, Mr. Byykkonen said "Working in the shafts was always dangerous!"

Mr. Byykkonen and his co-workers were a real close-knit group of employees, who worked well together. As Mr. Byykkonen put it, "We were like one big family."

Later in his mining career, Mr. Byykkonen went to work at the Republic and Tilden Mines. While working at these open pit mines, he explained that the conditions at many times were cold and wet. He also worked in snowstorms and all kinds of weather.

Even though Mr. Byykkonen did enjoy his job, he experienced about four or five strikes, which totaled about one year. He said that a strike brought the steelworkers' union and the company back to the bargaining table. Mr. Byykkonen was a member

of the United Steelworkers Union the entire time he worked with CCI.

"The union is important because its a voice for the workers." Mr. Byykkonen said when asked about the union. He said the union also takes care of all the complaints, disagreements, and whatever comes on the line.

Mr. Byykkonen thinks that the future of CCI and the iron and steel industry in general looks quite good. He thinks there will always be a demand for iron and steel in our country.

When Mr. Byykkonen was asked how history would remember the Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company and its workers, he said that CCI helped a lot of people in this area. He also said, "At one time there was an awful lot of work with Cleveland Cliffs."

When asked if he ever wanted to change jobs Mr. Byykkonen replied, "No, I don't think I would ever have thought of changing jobs, especially after I became a welder and had a trade." He went on to explain that he was earning good money. He had real good benefits and insurance benefits, a good retirement plan, and most of all he was happy with his job.

Mr. Byykkonen encourages the young people of today to study hard, get all the education they can, and earn a degree or a good skill trade.

Mr. Byykkonen has been working with his hands all his life. Today, eight years into his retirement, he loves to work with his wood-working equipment, especially his lathe. He has made large projects, such as furniture and a large oak chest called an armoire for his daughter. Personally, he likes to make small things like toys, shelves, and bowls.

Mr. Byykkonen enjoys hunting, fishing, and just getting out

in the fresh air. He has a camp in Ewen, Michigan which he enjoys visiting. He has also been on a few hunting trips out West, hunting mule deer and antelope.

Mr. Byykkonen, during his retirement, has a lot of time to spend with his family. He is currently enjoying his retirement in Ishpeming, Michigan and Phoenix, Arizona for the winter months.

During the interview, I learned a lot about Mr. Byykkonen's role as a worker for CCI. I appreciate the time Mr. Byykkonen took to share his experiences and give me an insight on how iron mining had an impact on his life.