

Pete Hebeln

11

TO BE A MINER

"Because there was nothing else around, it was all mining," stated Mike Pietro as he explained to me why he chose to work in the iron mining industry

Mr. Pietro was born in 1909, in National Mine. He worked in the iron mining industry for thirty-six years, but he is now retired. He is one of the most interesting men I have ever met.

Mr. Pietro has witnessed and has been in many accidents while employed in these various mines. One of the most interesting and probably most painful accidents he has been in was when a rope got caught under his armpit and sent him flying to the ground. Some of his ribs were broken. Another accident occurred when he fell off something and landed on a track where a cart comes by. Luckily his partner came down and got him off the track. He told me an accident he had witnessed. Mr. Pietro was working taking dirt out of a shoot and there was water and mud coming in. There was arolley wire with 2,300 volts of electricity coming through it. If anybody had just touched that wire, it would them right there. There was a young man working with his dad and this young man was going down as Mr. Pietro and his partner were going up. When Mike Pietro and his partner came back, another miner told Mike and his partner that they killed a



man Mike Pietro said "never killed a guy, I never saw anyone in there wen we left." That young man came down and he was soaking wet, when he touched that trolley wire and it killed him right there.

He also has some other stories about the mine tat did not concern accidents. One time his brother, George Annala, and he went to Palmer to get jobs working in the open pits. Only his brother and George Annala were over eighteen, but they all got hired. The boss came to him every day and asked him for his birth certificate. Every day he would say he had forgot it, but he did not even have one. One day the boss came up to him. It was hot and when he was asked for his birth certificate, he said to the boss "I ain't got any birth certificate and you can stick this job too."

There were a lot of accidents back then because of the working conditions. When I asked him about the working conditions he said. "Well you almost had to make your own working conditions." The miners would have to make there own decisions about these kinds of things. They could not ask someone what they should do. They had to figure it out themselves. When I asked him what the hardest part of his mining career, he said "To be a miner." Even though this job was hard he must have tried very hard because he has won an award and was also involved in a special project. He had to put a set of timbers for the Moss Mine. He also enjoyed a lot of things about the mine even though it was a hard job. He especially liked the first day on the job when the company would gave the miners a shovel and put them on the main level, and they would have to scoop out all of the mud.

There has been many changes in the mine sinch he was working



there such as: Now the miners have better equipment, and they have to be a lot more careful. There are also many different rules to go by now. When he was on strike the miners would not get a penny, but now the miners get everything.

Mike Pietro has been on strike three times, three long ones. A strike begins when the miners are looking for a raise and better working conditions. A strike then involved 1800 to 2000 workers. In his opinion Mike Pietro thinks the steelworkers union is important because if there was not a union the company could do what they wanted with the workers.

Mike Pietro would have made the same career choice. He was practically forced to because he only had an eight-grade education. An eighth-grade education was not unusual then because many men dropped out and got a job, after finishing eighth-grade. He thought about leaving this profession, but he figured there was naothing else around. He once had a job for the Marquette County Road Commission, but they were not paying enough so he quit that job.

I had a lot of fun with him and he is also one of the most interesting men I have met.