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The Truck Driving Man

Peter Remick

"I like it a lot. I got along with everyone pretty good. I had a lot of friends there." These words were used by Mr. Richard Lucas to describe his career in the mining industry.

Richard Lucas was born in Ishpeming in the year 1917. His father's name was Richard and his mother's name was Helen. His dad worked at the Barnes-Hecker mine, and later he managed the Hoist Restaurant.

Mr. Lucas has no brothers or sisters. He has been happily married for thirty-three years to Katherin Sandretto. Mr. Lucas has two sons, Tom and Richard.

Mr. Lucas remembers hanging around The Hoist, and sometimes his dad gave him a sandwich. Mr. Lucas went on to tell about a day that he hurried up and was only a half mile from the Barnes Hecker when Captain Tippet's wife stopped him and asked him what had happened. He said he didn't know what happened at the mine. She said, "Well doesn't your father work there?" Mr. Lucas told her his dad worked at the Hoist. She suggested that something must have happened because all the power went off near the Barnes-Heckler. When he got home that day, Mr. Lucas asked his dad about the incident. His father told him that Barnes Hecker mine had filled up with water. The company started pumping water out of the shaft using what they call bullies. Bullies are a cage like device that takes water out and lets it drain down. The tragedy killed fifty one men.

Before Mr. Lucas worked in the mine, he worked in the Army, and then he worked at the lumber yard. He found out that workers at the mine were making five or six dollars a week. He thought that looked like pretty easy work. He decided to try it out.

On the first day of work he got on his brand new clothes and went to see the boss. The boss told him to stick with Anci Cheusnaw his new partner who would teach him what to do. Mr. Lucas and his partner got in a cage went down six levels before getting off. They sat down there for a while and ate their lunches. Soon the work bell rang and Glen Roberts the shaft boss came down and informed them of what their jobs were and how they would perform them. Mr. Lucas was working on a scraper for scraping rock. "O.K. start her up. I started scraping rock. It went scraping back and forth for about five minutes and I shut her off. He laughed, "I said what happened? He said the scraper hasn't even touched the ground yet because I was holding the ropes too tight." Mr. Lucas had a pretty exciting first day at the mine.

Mr. Lucas did several jobs for the mine. He lubricated the machinery and the conveyor belts. Mr. Lucas remembers one day they sent him out to Manistique recharging fire extinguishers. They even had him painting the boss's house! Mr. Lucas got laid off in 1960, but was called back in 1962 to the Republic Mine. He was assigned to driving trucks. There were three sixty-five ton trucks. The rest were forty-five and forty-one tonners. The first day the boss handed him a work card where he put down what he did and how long he worked on it. There were lights to instruct him when to dump the truck's load. When the red light came on do not dump. When the green light came on the ore was

dumped.

In order to do his jobs he had to know how to do them right. When he used the drill, he had to know how to operate it properly. He would often have to fuel the oxygen tanks and he would have to know how to properly do that.

Mr. Lucas's favorite part of his job was driving trucks in the summer because he would get to drive up to Michigamme. He said he would often see deer and fox up there. He used to stop and the deer and fox would walk right up to him.

Mr. Lucas was also involved in some dangerous situations while driving trucks. He remembers once the motorman where they were going at the end of a drift. There was a slide. Mr. Lucas realized he did not slow down. He said, "Where are you going? slow down!" Mr. Lucas turned around and started to shine his light at him. He braced himself by putting his foot up against the car. Otherwise there was no brake on the car. He was glad he did because a couple of the trucks jackknifed. Some of the guys got scraped up a little but luckily there was nothing major.

Another time Mr. Lucas was driving trucks, and he approached a large steep hill. That day the roads were wet and slippery so he approached it cautiously in the thick fog. When he was about half way up the hill, the wheels started spinning, and he started moving down backwards. He slid down about forty feet until he finally stopped. He then slowly drove back up the hill. When he reached the top he stopped and looked down the hill relieved it was over. "My heart was going pitter-patter pitter-patter," said Mr. Lucas. He waited at the top of the hill catching his breath when a pickup truck drove up the hill and stopped near his truck. The boss got out of the truck. He asked Mr. Lucas if he wanted

to switch jobs. Mr. Lucas just said, "Hell no."

From my interview with Mr. Lucas I have come to the conclusion that he is a hard worker that was not afraid to do a lot of hard work. I learned a lot from interviewing this fascinating man.