

Stephanie Bashaw's
interview with
Lee Erickson

I am Stephanie Bashaw and it is February 18 and I am interviewing Lee Erickson and I am interviewing him at my house.

me: when and where were you born?

Lee: I was born in Prescott, Michigan, that's in the Lower Peninsula, 1926.

me: what were your parents names?

Lee: Mildred and Earl

me: what were the names of your brothers and sisters?

Lee: I have 4 brothers Wayne, Neil, Bob and George.

me: And one sister Wanda.

me: were you ever married?

Lee: Yes.

me: If so, when and where?

Lee: I was married in Westbranch, Michigan on December 31, 1951.

me: what is your spouse's name?

Lee: Well her name is Donna but we call her Mickey.

me: what did your parents do for a living?

Lee: My parents were farmers.

me: Where did you go to school?

Lee: I went to school at a country school for 8 years where all 8 grades were in the same classroom and then I took high school for 3 years at Prescott high school and then I graduated from what was called the Burlywort Agricultural School
Burtmore high school

me: How old were you when you found your first job?

Lee: Well, I didn't really find a first job by working on a farm, you began working as soon as you get out and work, the first work that I did away from home, if you'd wanna call that my first job was working for neighbors doing chores for them before and after school and then working on weekends because there sons were all in the service, this would be back in the 39, 40, 41 era.

Me: What types of duties did you perform on your first job?

Lee: Well this would of been the as I say farming, milking cows, cleaned the barn, harnessed the horses.

Me: what stands out most in your mind about it?

Lee: I didn't like it. I don't know, what would stand most about it would just having, having ah been able out, these people more than anything else because I really, than I suppose getting paid would be part of something that stood out when I was a kid on a farm you didn't have much money back in the '30s so I guess that would stand out.

Me: Where you ever in the military?

Lee: World War II army air force

Me: Is there anything that, like, you can remember like was most important that you?

Lee: Well probably ah I was I enlisted in aviation cadets and then I didn't make that because of

my height, I needed to be taller than I was in order to be in pilot's training. So I opted to go into radio school and I had gone pretty much through radio operating mechanic school and then the war was over in Germany and they didn't even let us finish school. So, before, then I was shipped out and I went to Panama and I worked in Panama supplying the radar units that were situated along the Panama Canal. I guess that would be what would stand out, it was quite an experience in Panama during the war.

Me: How many total work years did you work in your lifetime?

Lee: Well from 14 to 66 so that's 52 huh?

Me: Yeh. what year did you retire?

Lee: Well I retired quote and quote from Cleveland Cliffs, in 1984.

Me: and then went back to work.

Lee: Right. I retired on March 31, and by the middle of May I was working ^{full-time} for Treco selling explosives.

Me: How did you choose your career when you first?

Lee: Well I had graduated from Michigan Tech in geology and then ah I went to work since I had a minor in ah I had a mining a ~~number~~ my major was in geology. I had a minor in mining in mining and a minor in physics, geo-physics. and when I graduated there wasn't much to do in mining so I went to work in the oil fields. So then mining picked up and I had an opportunity to

go back and go to work with Cleveland Cliffs in geology so that's why I guess I choose that career.

me: what did you do at Cleveland Cliffs?

Lee: well, I put in my first couple of years as a geologist underground at the Mather A mine than I went into foreign exploration, I was in Colombia, Peru, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Panama for two years. Then when I was getting out of foreign exploration I went into the research department and with them research at the Empire Mine or improvement pioneer. Then went into project engineering for the building of the Empire complex for Empire one.

me: what did you do in the Mather A?

Lee: I was a geologist.

me: was that like really neat?

Lee: Underground. Yuh, yuh it was different. I had worked underground. The reason that I had went into this type of work was that when I first came home from the service I went to California and I worked in a gold mine out there with my brother-in-law and I liked working I got interested in the geology and the rocks and the pretty gold and that's why I took geology in school was because my initial work in the gold mines. I had worked in the gold mines and then while I was at Michigan Tech I worked for two years in the copper mines.

me: That sounds neat. When I was in fifth grade my teacher used to always talk about the

underground mines and they sounded really cool.

Lee: I liked underground. Some people would get ah ask, how can you stand it? Goin' underground and that.

Me: Did anyone get hurt under there.

Lee: No Uh, there was nobody that really got hurt. When I was working in the Copper Mines ^{Up in the Copper country} we had a lot of close calls because that was pretty dangerous ground to be working under but the Mather, the Mather was a good one and I worked at the Ropes Gold mine too. I've been underground at the Ropes gold 2 or 3 years

Me: What was the most challenging or difficult part of your job?

Lee: Well if we look at the overall ^{work} ah from. From my career as being ~~starting out~~ starting out as an operating engineer and then the plant superintendent, then the ~~pit~~ superintendent. I guess management was what would be the most difficult uh I guess maybe ^{how to handle people things} because I had a different philosophy of the management that I used to work with and that made it difficult because I had a different outlook on people and how to manage people wasn't, the idea of managing my job and knowing my job, the idea that to get along you have to go along that was always the tough thing for me.

Me: Did the um duties of your job change like through the years? (Did you do different things?)

Lee: Well, actually the duties, the duties didn't change that much after project engineering where we worked on development and construction that when I got in the plant operation in the operating prospect of it then from being an operating engineer in the pellet plant to the plant superinten

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to the pit superintendent didn't really change my duties that much because it was management oriented from then on and not only just operating, not just the operating of the of the facility and following the flow sheet and understanding the quotement then you were working with people and the same thing when I, I spent to my last 8 years in Cleveland Cliffs, well actually 9 in the purchasing department and I ended up in the sameway purchasing. I was assistant purchasing manager. So I still had people.

Me! Um, did any other of your family members work for the same company?

Lee! Both of my sons did at one time and my son Donald still does, he's a welder at the Empire.

Me! Um, could you describe some interesting or humorous events that happened?

Lee! Oh, lots of them, but if it has nothing to do persay with this area probably one of the most interesting in my career was probably the time when I was in South America and I drove with another gentlemen a landrover from Santiago, Chile to Lima, Peru roughly 3,000 miles, 7 days and 7 nights over what was called the Pan American Highway and back in those days, I'm talkin' 19 early 1960 that I made that trip. In 59 I was in the jungles

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of Panama and in 60 I was in the deserts of South America, but that trip would probably be one of the most memorable if you will of any of my experiences. Good + bad.

Me: Um, what were your biggest responsibilities on the job?

Lee: Well in management, my biggest you couldn't say the production was more a responsibility than safety. I don't know you say what was the biggest responsibility. The biggest responsibility was having a department that you were responsible for I mean budget wise, people wise, production wise, safety wise. You name it, it was your department and that's a pretty good size responsibility when you're talking about being involved with a mine at that time, we just had the Empire 1 which was just one, one kiln in the pellet plant and six lines in the concentrating room but we still were responsible for a million and a half plus tons of pellets to be produced.

Me: Um, did your employer ever give out any awards for like if you did, for your job performance?

Lee: Did you ever hear the story about the trainman and the whistle? (laugh) Well it's similar to that you never, never really got rewarded

you got self-satisfaction I guess, out of what you did. Once in a while someone would say that was a good job but most of the time and I guess that's why I had my problem with management, most of the time and it's still today Stephanie it's not that much different people and the work force are expected by there management to perform and so on and so forth without a thank you I mean it's part of your job, you should be lucky I've got you hired and so there for and that's, that's good enough and that was difficult for me, to live with that.

me: Um, did you have any favorite hobbies or leisure activities. Were you like in any clubs or organizations?

Lee: I was in the Amvets, in fact I was commander of the Amvets, I was in the J.C.'s in the chamber of commerce. I was active in church, still am active in church and uh, hunting and fishing mostly. But, the hobbies that I've found more than anything else now are woodwork and rock polishing.

me: Overall, what are your fondest memories? Do you wish you could do something different?

Lee: Well, I guess at 66 honey I just glad that I'm where I am. I think that, well ~~anything different~~ that's always been a funny question to me, would you do anything different I can't, when I think about 2 wonderful sons and a wonderful daughter and my fantastic grandchildren if I did something different I might not have any of those. So to do anything different, I just thank the good lord I got where I did.

Me: Sounds like you've had a pretty interesting life so. Um, if, were you a member of a union.

Lee: No. Ah, well I, I was a member of a union at one time but that's before I went to college that's after I got out of the service and I worked for Dow Corning and Dow Chemical company in Middlean, Michigan and I had to join the union there but that was the only time being in a union and I remember ~~so~~ so little about that because I only worked there a couple of years.

Me: Well this is the last, the ending of the questions so do have anything else you would like to add?

Lee: No, not that I can think of, ah, as you said sounds like I've had a pretty interesting, I have, it's been interesting I probably, I probably had as many different jobs at Cleveland Cliffs, than anyone that ever worked ~~at~~ there, because I, as I said from being

a geologist in the beginning. In the beginning at the Empire before, even before I went to South America I was running magnetic surveys on the farms in Palmer before mining was ever, well it was just being thought about doing. So I can remember the Empire when it was just farms and you go out there today and see that big hole in the ground. That's, that's the interesting part. One of the things, well you asked what stood out most with me, I would say having the opportunity to have worked with so many different people, meet so many different people that would be one of the most outstanding things that I haven't been you know been button-holed or put on the shelf somewhere in a place where I could, where I couldn't be out in meeting people.

Me: That's the last question so Thank You! very much for doing this.

Lee: You betcha, hon.

Me: I really appreciate it.

Lee: You betcha!