

A joy to read!

INTRODUCTION MIKE WALLACE

Me: December the 4th, 1993 and I'm interviewing Mr. Mike Prusi for Mining and this is at National Mine, Michigan.

Me: When and where were you born?

Mr. P.: October 12, 1949 at Bell Memorial Hospital.

Me: What are the names of your parents?

Mr. P.: George and Prusi.

Me: What did your parents do for a living?

Mr. P.: My dad worked 39 1/2 years for Cleveland Cliffs and my mom

Me.: What are the names of your brothers and sisters?

Mr. P.: uh,. Lois Guzette was my oldest sister, my brother George Jr., my brother Jeff, my sister Anita and her last name was Anita Leash who lives in Minneapolis, uh my brother Andrew, my brother Joel, my sister Melissa.

Me: Are you currently married?

Mr. P.: No, I'm divorced.

Me: OK, How long have you been working for the Iron Industry?

Mr. P.: OO. Just over 19 years.

Me: What did you choose to work.. Why did you choose to work in the Iron Industry?

Mr. P.: Because that was the best job available at that time.

possible growth

Me: What are names of the various mines and buildings you have worked in?

Mr. P.: Uh. I started at the Mather <sup>B</sup>Beddey which was the last underground mine in Marquette County. Uh. Let's see, the Tilden when the Mather Beddey closed then I was laid off from the Tilden. I worked for uh,

*Brownstone*

Bellstone Shops after a couple years. Then I went to the Empire and back to the Tilden and back to the Empire so I worked at all of them.

Me: Over the years what kind of duties have you performed for your...mine?

Mr. P.: Uh, when I worked underground I was a scraperman for awhile which was just basically loading cars or get the one down to the rails an underground. Then when I went to the open pits I was a laborer driving a truck and operating equipment in the pits and basically worked in the concentrator at both mines and right now I am a plant repairman. Locally the President as you figured that out. *(of the union local?)*

Me: In as much detail as possible please describe the main duties of your current job.

Mr. P.: Uh, as a plant repairman we basically repair and maintain all the process equipment. Uh, conveyors, reducers, loaders, pumps, screens, whatever breaks down and needs to be fixed we make sure it gets back up and running.

*include*

Me: Did the job require any special training or higher education?

Mr. P.: Uh, to get into the plant repairman's field you either go in through the plannership program which was 4 years then you have to pass a certain amount of performance tests or you can test if you have some experience you can test right into your craft but you have to demonstrate a certain skill level to get the job.

*include*

Me: Please describe any machinery or equipment that you use on the job.

Mr. P.: Uh, welding machines ~~axe~~ settlement torches, hydraulic jacks, air hoists, uh, all kinds of power machinery, power tools.

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

Mr. P.: Ooh. I would say probably the conditions cause it's always over

100 decibels and generally in the summer it's really, really hot and in the winter there's cold places you gotta work. Dust keep noise cold wet.

Me: Think back over the years what was the most challenging or difficult duty you have ever performed?

Mr. P.: Hmm, This is a tough one. I guess it would have to be working underground there's been a lot of different conditions there and a lot of uh. I worked with . We were working over a 150 ft raise. One misstep and you would fall 150 ft to the bottom. There was a lot of different dangers and different skills when we would be underground.

*include*

Me: What have you enjoyed the most about your job?

Mr. P.: (Laughing) The paycheck every week.

Me: What are the biggest responsibilities of your job?

Mr. P.: Uh, well as a plant repairman it's making sure that the equipment that you work on is fixed properly and has all of its proper seals and parts and it's ready to run and it's ready to get its work out of it. Uh, as a local Union President there's a lot of other responsibilities that I consider probably more important than my job with Cleveland Cliffs.

*in quite*

Me: Describe the most dangerous situations you have been in.

Mr. P.: Uh, I would have to say as far as the injuries there's been a couple of fairly bad ones like I talked about underground working over an open railing and a working with blasting uh powder and dynamite and stuff. Uh, there's been chances to make fatal mistakes there but uh there's plenty of places I've had hit but other than underground with the blasting is probably the most dangerous place.

*include*

Me: Have you been involved or have you witnessed any accidents?

Mr. P.: Yea. Uh, hmm. There's been 2 when I was at the Tilden. I was uh assisting the mechanic who changed all the hot water circulating

pumps and uh there was a 18 foot head of steam of hot water trapped between two valves and when we released the pump uh, I was severely burned and spent 14 days in the hospital and about 4 months recuperating.

*include*

Me: Also describe the ways in which your friends and relatives may have gotten hurt.

Mr. P.: Uh, well my dad had uh a couple of bad injuries underground. Fallen rock and uh broke his shoulder, broken leg.

Uh, my grandfather, uh, on my mother's side, lost an eye in an accident underground at a mine in Gwinn. He never went back to work after that day at least not that I know of.

Me: Describe either the most unique or perhaps humorous situations you have seen over the years.

Mr. P.: (Laughs) Well after 19 years there plenty of stuff that goes on on a daily basis but I don't know if I should share it with people who hear it when I read that question I was thinking of some stuff that would be pertinent but I can't really come up with any.

Me: Please describe your working conditions.

Mr. P.: Uh, as I mentioned earlier it's loud, extremely loud, crushing and grinding which makes a lot of dust. Transporting it there's a lot of water born with pumps which means it's all in slurite and it becomes real slippery uh, there's a lot of walking surfaces covered with mud and slippery stuff. Lots of climbing steps and ladders. Hot in the summer, dusty all the time.

*include*

Me: In the loudness do you like to wear any ear things?

Mr. P.: Yea. I wear the foam ear protectors which go inside the ear. A lot of the employees also wear earmuffs that are attached right to their hardhats. Uh, so you can tell were all the loud areas which is

*include*

basically as soon as you walk into the mine. Uh, you generally don't need them in the offices and in the lunchrooms. Every place else you're required to wear them.

Me: How have safety standards changed and what improvements do you see are yet to be made?

Mr. P.: Uh, I think the overall safety of the mine is slowly improving. It's uh, there's a lot of areas where it could be a lot better particularly out in the open pit. Out in the pit operation where you have so much big machinery going around in all weather, all hours of the night and all conditions in the weather. Uh, I would like to see the company and the union uh work a little closer together to make the improvements that the people on the job notice and suggest. Sometimes we have a hard time getting the company to agree to do things that we uh suggest and that we know that necessary. There are other areas where they do work with us so that's accepted to be confidential.

*include*

Me: How have you seen the duties of your job change over the years?

Mr. P.: Uh, well Monday morning I'm going in for (Mermack?) training which is computerized stuff. Uh, there uh computerizing the operations with big degree and people are going to have and to pick up some computer skills to stay ahead of the requirements of the job. Uh.... I think more technology is basically what's. When I started underground it was basically the same stuff they used 40 to 50 years ago underground like carbon electric motors, and scrapers, and hoists. So, but the open pits have really had to deal with a lot of technological change.

Me: Describe what your co-workers are like. Do you remember any special stories that stand out about them?

Mr. P.: Uh, Most of the people I had work in the mine are the basic, solid,

honest, hard work middle class people. Uh...I think that sometimes Cleveland Cliffs doesn't appreciate it as the people from the U.P. that work in there mines and uh... a lot of know how and knowledge and strength for the job everybody out there has quite a bit of seniorities nowadays because of the cut backs over the years and uh.. there go a real hard working force out there. When there's somethings need to be done-there always somebody ready to step up and get it done.

Me: During your career, were you involved in any special projects or have you implemented any new projects? If so, describe them.

Mr. P.: Uh, I was never really on any special projects for the organizer that I worked with at that built the pebble crushers system and the limestone system helmets that we had to start wearing years ago. I wasn't directly involved but basically as the local union president I'm involved in all kinds of different projects both on and off the job site. I'm more involved with the union than with anything that is involved with the mine. *quote*

Me: Have you ever won any awards or have you been recognized in any way for your job performance?

Mr. P.: Mm, not really, got my 10 year pin and waiting for my 25 year watch.

Me: At anytime have you felt like changing jobs or your career?

Mr. P.: Yea. When ah, the layoffs hit in '82 I was laid off for about 21-22 months. I got divorced at the same time and I planned on something else to do and end my career at Cliffs at 10 years but I actually went and called em back. I had to go back because it was the only place I could make enough money to uh catch up from the layoff.

Me: What do you think the future holds for the Empire Mine?

Mr. P.: I'd say at least another 20,25 years of uh, production. In the many

mines that I've been to cover out there. I think the integrative steel industry in the United States is that at least hold its own right now or increased their production off their exports capability uh, us being the basis field industry as far as a basic raw material that industry alive and healthy as the iron ore industry is doesn't look as healthy either.

Me: What does the future look like for the iron and steel industry in general?

Mr. P.: Well from everything I've read uh, It always been a industry where it goes up and has its up points and down points but a I would say the trend right now is to maybe be a modest growth in production at least all the information I've read like some of the preview papers and uh, analysis ones. Economists, I would say at least the next 5 or 6 years you know pulled its own if not grown a little.

Me: What do you feel must be done in the future for your mine to remain competitive?

Mr. P.: That's an interesting question to ask me because of some of the things that punches away which is an interview is going to increase competitiveness at the mine is in the media viewpoint they're going to decrease because they're in the process of cutting jobs out there. I feel we have other ways to make them competitive rather than just start laying people off and reducing the amount of people trying to produce 8 million tons of pellets at least at the Empire. Uh, more investment in technology and training our people. Uh, get used to that technology is going to help us out.

*quote*

Me: What do you think has been the key to success of your mine where other companies have failed?

Mr. P.: Uh, probably the same answer as I gave in the earlier question

about the co-workers and the people I work with. I think uh, You can invest in these mines and spend a lot of money but if the people out there aren't skilled enough and dedicated enough to operate and produce that ore at a reasonable cost uh, then your not going to be successful and I think Cleveland Cliffs is probably averaging 45 or 50 million dollars a year in earnings in the last 15 to 20 years I think that's a tribute to the people that work at the mines.

*include*

Me: Looking far into the future, how do you think history will remember the Empire and its workers?

Mr. P.: Well the Empire Mine right now is a the largest producer of ore in the history of Michigan which made its 150 millionth ton uh, about a month and a half ago but uh, of the pellets and we are uh the better low cost pellets on the markets uh, I would say given the hopes that handle 20 to 25 more years of production I think basically we reached as far as the Empire Mine is a look on is a Cadillac of Michigan iron ore producers. As far as Cleveland Cliffs as a hole there fallen away the most battling iron ore producer in North America and been around 140, 150 years. I guess they would be looked on as primer company at least as far as production I would say that in a sense of management relation.

*include & quote*

Me: How has the role of women changed in the iron industry and what direction do you think it will take in the future?

Mr. P.: Uh, just started hiring women for work and production. They had jobs maybe 20 years ago and the big push for equality when the right came about a lot of those women were laid off and the industry went down in the 80's a bit of it recently hired people in the last few years to solve percentage so they're committed to make women part of the work force and I think the women that have been hired are out there



working to show overwhelming that they're a positive contribution that they can do the work than anybody else out there. *quote*

Me: What skills do the young people of today need to develop if they plan to work for the Empire someday.

Mr. P.: Uh, definitely computer related skills uh, m. industrial arts curriculum as far as welding or electronics or electricity or uh machinery maintenance uh there always has been at least half of the work force who has composed of the people of have a specific skill or craft uh, that would be the work that can inherit so if you are considering if you want to get into the iron ore industry you would have to have a lot more skills than were necessary 20 years ago. 20 years ago when I was looking for a job. *include*

Me: In a related question, what advice could you give in general to the students of today?

Mr. P.: Well I guess definitely pick out if not one premiere field and have a couple lined up just so you can make sure you know what's uh, what you want to do in life and have a back up and train yourself for the requirements that are going to be needed in that field uh because right off the back but uh, the way it's looking uh, employment picture looks you're going to have some special ed. skills in training but then if you had them there would be very few unskilled jobs that a person could make really a decent way of living on needs a lot more education in my generation was exposed to. *include*

Me: Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Steelworker's Union? *quote*

Mr. P.: Been one my whole career and right now I'm president of the local that represents representing.

Me: Have you ever experienced being on strike? If so, How many times?

*emphasize  
B  
union  
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Mr. P.: A 3 times in my 19 years. 111 days in 1977. 123 in 1990 and uh,  
38 earlier this month of December. *include*

Me: How does a strike actually begin?

Mr. P.: Basically with a breakdown in the negotiations between the  
meeting bargainers and the company bargainers where uh, they can not  
reach agreements um, on the issues that are in front of them  
generally over wages, pension, benefits, and language of the contract.

Me: How many employees does a strike usually involve?

Mr. P.: Generally all of the hourly paid employees uh, the salary people are  
not on strike and continue go in and out of the mine sites but uh, at  
the Empire we had around a thousand strike and between the other  
two locals probably a little over 800 so there's generally of 1800  
people on strike when you're there.

Me: What is the purpose of a picket line and describe what happens there?

Mr. P.: Well a picket line is to monitor who's going in and out of the  
facility and also to demonstrate to people that passing by or that *w/e*  
have business at the facility that we are involved in a labor dispute  
and uh, we basically monitor who's going in and out and get our  
message across but uh, that the facility is being struck by the union  
and there is no appreciable activity going on.

Me: Do you know of any interesting stories about an incident on the picket  
line?

Mr. P.: Uh, there are plenty of a things that go on that are quite amusing  
but uh, I think one of the nicest things we used to see is a as we  
everybody out there around the clock uh, a lot of the picketers would  
put out leftover hotdogs or fish or whatever they had for their snack  
or their meal out there and uh, feeding the foxes and putting out bread

and vegetables for the deer at the Empire picket line. We feed the foxes and the deer and uh, ravens and the whole shot but uh, you know there's a whole lot of things that go on at the picket line and it's basically a lot of people that go to see each other because they work in different departments uh, they don't interact a lot during the day.

Me: In general what is the most interesting or unique story that you have remembered for anytime the workers were on strike?

Mr. P.: Oo, we've had a several large <sup>stakeouts</sup> ~~stakeouts~~ if you want to call them parties but uh, like wild game feeds and uh, the president of C.I.O of Michigan visited our picket line while we were putting on a wild game feed that probably feed about 120 people. Uh, we have the women's picketers on Friday nights that uh, that uh, really line them up the picket line and have them stop all the traffic just to check who is going in and out. They had rolling pins and frying pans just as props. I don't think ever intended to use them on anybody. The wives of the strikers were creating some interesting snacks.

Me: What takes place at a union meeting or union rally?

Mr. P.: At a union meeting we basically have a set agenda or a committee report on their activities for the month. Safety factors, computer services, we have staff report for the international representative. We act on communications and requests for donations and different things, membership laws, some issues that are raised to the form of motions and seconds uh, basically we conduct a month-to-month papers to pay bills and stuff like that.

Me: In your opinion, what is the Steelworkers Union so important to the workers?

Mr. P.: They basically plan even organize for over 40 years now. They basically provide the workers with a way to deal with there employer

than use offers them a lot of measure of protection contractually like the steel workers negotiate contracts with the employer and attempt to make the employer make all the proportions of that contract.

Basically we it helps to be organized no matter what your doing and organizing for the purpose of collected value in the muteral taxes is a very important concept in no matter what economy you work in.

Me: Please describe what you enjoy doing in your spare time.

Mr. P.: I don't have a lot of spare time but uh, I hunt in the fall and fish for many years but I played basketball in Negaunee City League and softball in the summer. Uh, I like to read when I get some time. Visit with my kids when I'm on vacation.

Me: If you ever do it again, would you make the same career choice?

Mr. P.: Hm. That's a question that I've answered different ways many times. A lot of times I say living here in the U.P. is where I was meant to stay but I have moved away on different times in my life and wondered what it would be like if I held a lot of those jobs away from everybody. I guess if you're asking me today I probably do the same thing. I guess I was born to be a miner and work in a mine.

Me: Why?

Mr. P.: Followed my dad in there. He had 5 sons and he always said than he never wanted any of us to work in the mine. He wanted us to get an education. Do something else but 3 of his sons are working there now and uh, gets if if you make a good living basically because you have something to work for. Force the company to share in the wealth in what we work for those of us that do the dirty and dangerous work so it's kind of rewarding career although I spent a couple of years on layoff and close to a year on strike and you get the strikes uh, yea I'm satisfied with my career.

Me: Looking back over the years, what impressions stand out more in your association with the Empire?

Mr. P.: I guess a looking back I can go back 35 year to when my dad was on strike in the 1950's and he was fairly accurate. The impression I got then there was a little lump lock between management and the work force and I guess one of the major questions is it Cleveland Cliffs because they have been mining here so many years. They've been very reluctant in the forward in the area of a relationship with their workers. They have proven that they have stayed on top of the iron ore industry and the field of technology and production and profitability that your basic overall association with their work force.

*include*

Me: Before we end the interview, is there anything else that comes to mind that you would like to add?

Mr. P.: Yea. Only that a it's good to see that your school is continuing this historical investigation and get you kids aware of what drives this end of Marquette County and the communities. I think it's important that you kids be very exposed to this stuff and stay attention to and learn something about it. Whether you end up doing it around here or anywhere else you're going to run into the same sorts of situations. Uh, the communities have different employers and different applying options. Whether it's Marquette County or it's mining where it focuses to a representation to the rest of the world. And the rest of the map.

*include*

Me: Thank you for your time!

Mr. P.: You're very welcome!

5-8 topics

Safety

Job duties

underground mining

Unions

training

future