

Alan Wikman's interview with  
grandpa <sup>Eino</sup> Rintamaki

1993

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This is Alan Wikman and I'm interviewing my grandpa Eino Rintamaki on his life as a miner in my home in Green Creek, Michigan. The date is February 27, 1993.

me: When and where were you born?

grandpa: I was born in Ishpeming, Michigan on August 1906 East Superior Street. The house is still there as it was 80 years ago. My father's name was Isaac and my mother's name was Susana Rintamaki. I had 2 brothers, and 3 sisters, who have all passed away. My parents had a farm in Green Creek for 4 years and then moved to Rumley in Alger County. I started school in Green Creek in the 5th year. We then moved to Rumley. In those days, most of the kids went as far as the eighth grade. We had to start working on the farm at an early age. The average age was thirteen. After getting through eight grades, times have changed a great deal in the past years of my life. The "good ole days" were also horse and buggy days and hard work on the farm, to the mechanized world today. Speaking of the "good ole" days, I wouldn't want to live through them anymore. Again, it was hard labor every day. Everything was hard work or horse labor.

We had our special games to play with the neighbor kids. There were fun days also. We do a lot of ski riding; hills with jumps and sliding down the hills on deer hides.

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grandpa chuckles, we had door hicks for slights when they died out.

me: How old were you when you started mining?

grandpa: I have something on mining, here. The depression years of 1930's, times and jobs were practically nil, Roosevelt was the President at the time and he formed the W.P.A. which was a government project to help the people with jobs, such as building roads and other kinds of work. They also had what we called the C.C.S. camps, where young fellows were out camping, making roads through the woods, fixing up State parks and such work. We were paid 44 dollars a month and we got surplus goods also. Times started to pick up in the 1940's that is when I started to work for the Greenwood mine. I put in 23 years there until 1963. Prior to mining I had worked in lumber camps and trucking. Wood work was in the 1920's. These jobs were low pay. At lumber camps the pay was \$30 a month.

As a miner I operated a drilling machine and different types of machines for loading the ore into cars after blasting. Any new employee would pair off with a fellow who had worked for several years at mining. That is how we knew guys learned

the ways of mining. Safety equipment was hard hat, hard toe boots. There were certain rules you had to abide by. Mining was a dangerous job. There was one fatal accident at the Greenwood mine. A fellow was climbing up a pile of ore after blasting, and a large chunk of ore started to roll down and he was killed. There were several incidents where a miner got hurt, a broken leg or an arm. After 1963, when the mine closed down, I done carpenter work. I was self employed, and I was kept busy on different projects. My fondest memory was when I got the job at the Greenwood mine, was a relief after many years of looking around and times when picking up. In closing, I must say that the great changes that have happened during my life time, the times when I was a kid from horse and buggy days to the motorized days of today. I recall the first World War when our boys were sent over seas to fight the Kaiser and Germany, and also two other wars we have gone through. It's unbelivable the things that have changed. The atom bomb, aviation, the automobile, electric has changed and has <sup>unwieldy</sup> limits of gadgets. The standard of living has changed it's an easier world to live in and has happened in few short years.

me: Here are a few more questions I have to ask my grandpa on mining.

How was the mine started?

grandpa: I don't remember that very much, but I know that they were around here, the blacks. I don't know how they got started. They had ways of testing the ground to find if there is or there they diamond drill it. And then that mine is swamp all around. I don't know how many feet of that swamp is water, before you hit the ledge, that's solid ground then. So they mined that shaft down under air pressure. That air pressure is a chamber, they worked inside that chamber, and there is air pumped in there and great air keep the water and everything from coming in, but they can still muck it out to cans, I don't know what kind of an outfit they got, I've never seen that. So, anyway, that is what they had until they got down to the solid ground, then they had the regular mines come in and sink the rest of it down.

me: What was the typical start?

workday like? When did you

grandpa: Well, we used to take the first cage at quarter to eight, so we'd get down there by 8:00, then would start

working, and then we'd take the first cage up at quarter to four, and everybody was out of the mine at four o'clock, so it was an eight hour day, and twenty minutes to a half hour for lunch.

me: How deep down did you have to go in the cages?

grandpa: Well, that mine was 6 levels, 7 levels and they were 300 feet apart. 1900 feet was the deepest level and there was 6 levels 300 feet apart, and there was mining on every level.

me: At the same time?

grandpa: No, there was different crews on different levels, working where ever the ore was that they were mining there.

me: Do you remember anything funny that happened, or any jokes that they had?

grandpa: Oh, well there was a lot of jokes going around all right, but I don't remember them.

me: What did you do when you drilled? What was that for?

grandpa: We drilled holes so we could blast. Now, take for instance that there is an ore body, (grandpa points to the wall) and you wanted to drill that out, you set up a machine, we had

machine that were stopers, they had an air leg on it that pushed it while it was drilling, and then we had posts ~~that~~ that was about 8 feet long, if there was a back like this, you know that they'd be able to do it, there was 2 men always in a gang, and then we'd hook a machine on the arm of the ~~machine~~ <sup>post</sup> so we could swing it around, and we'd start drilling. We'd drill one hole up there, (to points to the wall) drop down 2, 3 feet, drill another hole, 3 feet another hole there, and then in between them, we'd back up here about 4-5 feet, and in between each one, we'd drill a hole, so it all depends on how big the face was, we'd have maybe, when we'd get through, we maybe have 25-30 holes in there. And then we'd load them holes up with dynamite, or powder. In later years, they used electric blasting, but we used fuses. Then we'd cut the fuses, we used 1, 2, 3, 4, like that.

me: Were you ever hurt doing your drilling?

grandpa: Well, I got hurt once, but I was tramping dirt or hauling dirt out and we just got loaded from the chute, were we had to lift up boards and dirt would run into the cans. The chute was empty and I jumped down, and was checking the dirt under the wheels of the can, so it wouldn't go off the track, while I was down there, a chunk came bouncing down that empty chute, and bounced