

Title: Terri Campbell's
"Crusher Don" interview with Don Roberts.



me: This is Terri Campbell. December 4th 1993. I am interviewing Don Roberts on the Iron Mining Industry for National Miners' Schools Red Dust Project. I am interviewing Mr. Roberts at his house.

me: when and where were you born?

Mr. R.: I was born May 17th 1920 in a place called ^{Salisbury} Salisbury a suburb of Ishpeming. I was born in the same room and the same house as my mother was born in.

me: what are the ^{names} of your parents?

Mr. R.: Parents were, my mothers name was Emily Barrett. My mothers family, my ~~Grandpa~~ Grandpa and Grandma had a dairy farm that ^{named} the hills near and around Salisbury. My fathers name was Richard Roberts he came from England in the year of 1904. He was born in 1888 in a place called Cornwall in England. When he was 16 years of age he came to this country and got a job in the mines of ^{Salisbury} Salisbury.

me: What did your parents do for a living?

Mr. R.: My dad was an Iron Miner he started in the mines around Salisbury and in those days they were called pits instead of mines. Mother didn't work in those days a mother was a housewife she stayed home taking care of the house and raising the family. When I was two years old the family moved to Iron River, Michigan and my dad got a job with CCI at the Speer's mine which was owned by Cleveland Cliffs the first mine they made was prior to the second mine.

when he was called to Iron River to work for the Jones and Laughlin Steel Company my father worked there for a while

then he was called back to Salsberry again, then he was called

again to Iron River as I said before to work in the Speed Mine.
They lived there all their life until they passed away.

was raised in Iron River from two years and up.

I'm not familiar with this name - check it

me: What are the names of your brothers and sisters?

Mr. R.: I have five sisters and no brothers. My sister names were, are Margaret, the oldest, Olive, Lillie, Marian, and Carol.

me: what is your spouse name?

Mr. R.: My wife is called Marian, and I've been married for 33 years and have two children.

me: What are their names?

Mr. R.: I have two children my son's name is Donald John Jr. and my daughter's is Marilyn, and they have, I have five grandchildren

my daughter is married to Richard Hill and they have two charming daughters Kristen and Jacqueline and my

son-in-law also works for Cleveland Cliffs. Kristen is graduated from Westwood in 1992, and Jacqueline is now a Sophomore at Westwood High School. My son has three children one sweet little girl and two very grown up boys, and we love very much. ~~the~~ The girl's name is Chelsea and the boys Jacob, Jesse.

My son Donald is married to ~~the~~ Lynn Johnson a daughter of Raymond Johnson who was also a foreman at the Republic mine. Mr. and Mrs.

me: How long have you been working for the Iron Industry?

Mr. R.: I started my mining career at the Speed mine in Iron River in 1940. I did work there for one year and at the end of that year.

Emp has size the family in value many for the

②

emphasis

November 6, 1941. I was called into the service of our country
 when I left for the army on November 6 I was never
 when war was declared and I know I would not come home
 for a long time. I chose to work in the mine because there was
 no work anywhere else and just coming out of the
 depression, many of us, very scarce, and jobs were also scarce
 as well, so then there was no choice. I couldn't go to college
 because it wasn't enough money. I went to the service and
 I got wounded quite badly in the service and was
 unable to work when I came home, when I got discharged.
 I spent a lot of time in a hospital in Paris, and in
 England and finally I came home in a hospital ~~ship~~ with
 President Washington. Not being able to work I went to
 Northern and tried to become a teacher, during my
 recuperation period. I spent two years and a half but
 was shell shocked and nervous I quit, could not settle down
 to study, so I had to quit and when I was able to go
 back to work I started at the mather ^{BoFA} in 1948. That
 was when I found out I had lost my time with
 the company and started as a new man. When I
 came home from the army I did report to the mine
 but they did not report it to the main office in
 Ishpeming, to keep my seniority. At that time
 also my time was spent. I lost five years all together
 and then three more when the mather ^{mine} shut down.
 I did end up with 32 years anyway. I would have
 had 43 total otherwise. It took me three and one half

years to recover to be able to work at all. My left shoulder-blade was broken and some of the bone was shot off and missing. include

me: Eww!

Mr. R: But I am very fortunate to my buddy who was with me in the same fox hole died nine days later so I am thankful to be home at all. Our family has three generations that work for CCI. Wood. include

mom: That's the next question!

me: Please name those relatives that have worked in the Iron Industry

Mr. R: OH. OK. that have worked for different mines. My father had worked many years, approximately 40 or more ^{when he} came to this country at 16 years old he started to work at the mine almost immediately. In those days you could get a job being very young if they wanted good men, my dad has worked previously ~~at~~ mentioned at the Speer's mine in Iron River and he passed away after he retired from the Speer's mine. you can skip that. I had worked at all those years previously mentioned at the Speer's mine in Iron River, Mather "A" Humboldt, Cliffs Shaft and I retired from the Alden Mine with a great variety of jobs.

me: Over the years what kinds of duties have you performed for CCI?
~~Back to last question~~

me: Please name these relatives that have worked for the Iron Industry.

Mr. R: I also have a lot of relatives that have worked and are still working for Cleveland Cliffs. The Roberto's name was a household name around the mine. My uncle Sam worked at the Cliffs Shaft for many years, and his son Earl also was a foreman for a long time. I have cousins working at the Alden as well and then all Roberto's.

me: is not one the names of the various mines or buildings you have worked in?

Mr. R.: I had a great variety of jobs: Contract miner, motor man, maintenance, kiln operator, balling operator, grating operator, gate attendant and many more. I cannot remember. I retired from the Tilden as a crusher operator. I was labelled as "Crusher Don."
When I retired in 1983, my son Donald John Jr. worked 17 years for C.C.I. at a disability discharge due to an injury while working as a maintenance man for Tilden.

me: In as much detail as possible please describe the main duties of your current job. (or the one you held.)

Mr. R.: One of the special jobs I held at Humboldt was operating the kiln. That baked the pellets it was a very special job as to what to do to hold the temperature. Always the same
2400° to bake the pellets so they would not break up and bunch up wheels coming through the kiln. Yes we did have some training before taking over the kiln.

include
quick

keep the kiln going & how to

me: please describe any special equipment or machinery you used on the job.

equipment

Mr. R.: I still on the other job, that was the most challenging job I ever had because if the temperature got too hot and the kiln would stop it would cause a defect in the kiln and burn a hole through it. We had to know what to do and how to do it quick or we would have to shut down for quite some time, for repairs that would happen.

include

I did enjoy the open pit over working underground. ^{quite}

me: Please describe any special machinery or equipment that you used on the job

Mr. R.: I just did

me: what is the most challenging or difficult part of your job,

Mr. R.: I said that too.

me: what was the most challenging or difficult duty ^{you had to perform} and explain why.

Mr. R.: that was in the other one too.

me: what have you enjoyed most about your job?

Mr. R.: I enjoyed working with the men in the operations I was connected with. yellow

Yellow well, I enjoyed working with them. ^{I include - possible you}

me: what are the biggest responsibilities of your job?

Mr. R.: I said that in the other one back there. yellow

me: Describe the most dangerous situations you've been in.

Mr. R.: Well, when I worked underground we had to be careful of cave-ins. when my father worked at the Spear Mine in Iron River he was buried under fifteen tons of ore. when he was checking on his men he heard a crack in the drift and before he could hide under the stage plank this dirt came down. His leg didn't get quite under the plank and ~~it~~ ~~was~~ crushed. It bothered him the rest of his life.

Emdence x include

He walked with more or less of a limp. I say the Lord was with him, I sure or he would have been killed. It was close. I always enjoy a challenge and that were a number of jobs I had. the most men job underground was always one you always had to watch out for someone walking on the track.

The kiln was a big challenge along too. But the crusher operator job every job, I had was some kind of challenge and that is what I enjoyed about working. My biggest responsibility was the kiln operator job you had much equipment experience to be responsible for.

me: Could you describe the most humorous or unique situation you've been in over the years?

me: Have you been in or witnessed any accidents?

Mr. R: The most dangerous situation I was in was in Iron River in the 'Spears' Mine. Parts of the mine were very wet. The raises, we call them raises, it was a tunnel going straight up. Would get filled with water along with it it would be very difficult to get the ore out of the shoot without the water. Many times we would have to drain the water out but if the dirt would come down with the water it would cause the shoot to burst and all the water would come down and bury up the cars. Mother 'A' had the same problem, but when they got the top timber shoots it would eliminate all water coming down in the shoot. Yes, I witnessed quite a few accidents underground some of which I can't describe. It would bring back too many memories not only for me but for relatives and friends who have been injured. I would not want to talk about them. Improvements have eliminated a lot of hazards at the workplace. It does improve each year but the company & the men must work together and understand that if there is some idea to be considered for the betterment of everyone concerned I am sure.

Possible question

our experiment must be tried and made to be better when there were concerns ~~from~~ or improvements in a workplace.

me: Could you describe perhaps the most humorous or unique situations you've seen over the years?

Mr. R: At times we did have some fun in the workplace when I was contract mining we used to take off our boots in a pile of dirt when the boss would come to check us out we would hide and ~~he~~ he would think we were in that pile of dirt and he would start digging. That was one of our ~~best~~ jokes and we had fun doing that. another time ^{good} we used to connect live wires from the

include

telephone wire to the track and watch the rats and the mice come there for a piece of bread and it would kill them.

Mrs. R: That's terrible.

Mr. R: It was work, but we made it at times a fun place to work.

me: Could you describe your working conditions?

Mr. R: Underground in those days it was rather difficult but it's a safe place to work if the men make it safe. an accident is always an accident if you're more or less ~~careless~~ careless, but overall safety was a big factor in the mines. me: How has safety standards changed and what improvements do you see are yet to be made?

Mr. R: Well, every year things get better than union and the company works together to make it as safe as they can possibly make it of course sometimes everyone makes mistakes, but when they get together and figure it out it's all ironed out.
me: How have you seen the duties of your job change over the years?

Mr. R: Well, technology is a big factor. No companies have to work at a minimum cost to pay us and if they don't make money there's no jobs so they try to eliminate men through technology to do the same thing and cut out as many men so they can save and still compete.

include

me: Please describe what your co-workers were like and any special stories that stand out about them.

Mr. R: I enjoy working with men and usually we get along well ^{in most cases} and sharing our jobs together and have a lot of communications there never a time you had to work by yourself or had a partner that didn't work with you. ^{and he} Every ^{one} had a partner. ~~and he~~ became very close to you while you were working with him.

include

Mr. R: you make a lifetime friend too. they see you down town and remember so you make a lifetime friend through your co-workers.

④

quote

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

Mr. R: No, I never.

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

Mr. R: no.

Mr. R: you got safety awards those knives, belt buckles, all kinds of safety awards stuff like that.

Mr. R: we did get safety awards for production and good records. I worked at Mather A for 10 years and never lost a day and never had an accident I thought that was quite well. *includ*

Mr. R: wonderful.

me: at any time have you felt like changing your career? Why or why not?

Mr. R: NO, I was quite satisfied ^{with what I was doing and} ~~there~~ ^{working in} until I retired. most of my jobs ~~was~~ were concerning production and at that time there was always a challenge to beat the other shift. Well I am sure that safety comes first like any other job many records were broken and that's why safety is the main factor.

include

me: are you now or have you ever been a member of the Steel Workers Union?

Mr. R: Yes.

me: Have you ever experienced being on strike?

Mr. R: yes, we were on strike many many days sometimes too long!

Mrs. R: about 4 months 3, it was a real long one!

Mr. R: I think our longest strike was 101 days just a little too long. But we averaged out pretty well.

me: How does a strike actually begin?

Mr. R: well when we thought we wanted more we just went out, but sometimes it paid sometimes it didn't but we wanted an understanding on what should've been done and what could've been done. But ~~the~~ the union was more concerned in the right to work and seniority that was the main thing that you wouldn't years ago when my ~~and was boss~~ ~~at the~~ Speed mine he came home one day and told me he had to fire a man that was in the 30's and that man was one of our best friends. But in those days there was no union.

Mom: Right

Mr. R: He said you got to fire him because he just got to go. But if there was a union in those days they couldn't do that because seniority would count.

Mrs. R: If they just dislike somebody or something, they could just let them go for no reason. That's what the union fights today for. *include*

me: How many employees does a strike usually involve?

Mr. R: It involves all the hourly workers it did not involve the bosses.

Mrs. R: How many would you say just as she would have an idea?

mom: Probably quite a few thousand at some time.

Mrs. R: How many did they employ at that time? She probably wants a number of how many men.

Mr. R: I don't know. There's probably 22 hundred working for the company now, hourly men. When you go on strike it would involve all of them.

me: What's the purpose of a picket line and describe what happens there.

Mr. R: Picket line prevents the hourly men ^{brown} from going to work when there on strike when there on strike when there on strike. ^{brown} When there on strike the operations are down and nobody is supposed to work during the strike if someone does get through the picket line they are not very well liked they are called a "scab."

me: do you know any interesting stories about an ^{incident} ~~incident~~ on ~~a~~ picket line?

laughing.
Mr. R: I don't want to talk about that. laughing.

me: Now you'd want to repeat in other words eh? OK.

me: In general what is the most interesting or unique story that you can remember from any time the workers were on strike?

Mr. R: That goes in the same category.

laughing
Mr. R: I'll skip that one too.

laughing
me: What takes place at a union meeting or union rally?

Mr. R: Well, we have a format to go by. We talk about what the strike concerns and what they are looking for, approximately how long will be out. First thing to look forward to, if you can get help from any other source. But in those days when we were on strike, before I retired, there was no help from anybody. But now I guess there is a little help here and there.

mom: with food and stuff.

Mr. R: We didn't have it then. ~~But~~ they had food coalitions now that do help the strikers out.

me: In your opinion, why is the steelworkers union so important to the workers?

Mr. R: It protects the workers' right to work. The main thing is seniority when you're on the job and someone gets hired they can't be put ahead of you. When you're on the job you're on the job to stay until you decide to change.

me: What do you think the future holds for the Tilden and the Empire?

Mr. R: I do think that both Tilden & the Empire mines do have a good future.

Of the company and the working men come together and work things out for both parties. If a profit is not made there is no money to operate and that is the name of the game. One must work with thought that he is working for himself, and do the very best he can do and to keep the company as competitive as there will always be work. I am sure Cleveland Cliffs will always be remembered, or that's the next question. include

me: what does the future look like for the iron and steel industry in general?

mr. R: I think the future looks good if they will stop the importation of steel from other countries, that is taking jobs away from this country. I am definitely sure that if they would eliminate all the imports of steel, this country would survive as far as the steel industry is concerned. include

me: what do you feel must be done in the future for C.C.I. to remain competitive?

mr. R: I think I've said that.

me: that's almost the same thing as the last one.

me: what do you think has been the key to success of CCI where other companies have failed?

mr. R: well, Cleveland Cliffs have had access to more property for their expansion and if they want to expand and if they can acquire their property they can keep operating. Whereas the other companies are done because they just don't have any more place to operate. include

me: looking far into the future, how do you think history will remember the Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company and its workers?

mr. R: well, Cleveland Cliffs has always been a sound company. I am sure that if they will stick with the steel and iron they will just keep going. include

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. R: The role of women has not changed the company in any way while I was working at the Humboldt women came into the work force and they did do their part. I worked with the very first women that came into C.C.I. in Humboldt. It was hard, but putting women where she can work and do the job well and she will do her part. Women do share a lot in the work force for C.C.I. and I am sure it will not change anything in the future.

include
Mrs. R: They have to do their part just like a man just because they're a lady. No favoritism you should say in there. (to Mr. R.)

me: What skills do the young people of today need to develop if they plan to work for C.C.I. someday?

Mr. R: Young people of today should study in computer science and accounting and should have a business career in mind, a company will always need people with a training and technology of some sort. Of course if a person desires a mining career he should major in engineering of some sort.

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

include
Mr. R: Speaking of technology there is a lot of change in technology as I have been told all the construction trucks are controlled by one computer. There is no chance for a break from the pit to the crusher. Every driver is kept busy from one shovel to another. When I was in Humboldt I drove a truck of 35 ton capacity. Now the production trucks are over 100 ton capacity and that in time cuts down the work force very much. One man item before, wait now.

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

Mr. R: In 1940 when I first started at the mine the pay rate per a company, account miner was 68 and $\frac{1}{2}$ cents an hour

Mrs. R: Aint that something.

Mr. R: When I retired from the mine in 1983 the wages on my job at the crusher was 11.92, I still have those due bills. I saved them. How many years. That was in a 43 year span of working.

include!

me: If you had to do it all over again would you make the same career choice?

Mr. R: I had to retire for 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ years and the most I'd do, I do enjoy is helping other people in any way I can. I belong to the Pioneer Kiwanis club of Ishpeming. We do a lot of volunteer work. For the kiddies and the elderly. We build ramps we have Kiwanis parties for the special Ed and handicap children. I do most of a lot of things keeping me busy. The wife and I do walk a lot and keep in shape.

me: ~~If you had to do it all over again, would you make the same career choice?~~

include

Mr. R: ~~If I had to do it all over again, maybe I would make the same choice. C.C.I. has been a good company to work for at times. Maybe it could be a lot different here. The men got along with certain circumstances and some time it could have been a lot better with a better understanding of what they had to do and maybe if the working men had more to say. It may well be a better place to work.~~

me: Looking back over the years, what impressions stand out most in your mind concerning your association with C.C.I.?

Mr. R: Looking back over the years when I think about working for Cleveland Cliff, I have much to think about, when you work for a company or any particular person you have to know what stands out in your mind ^{most} when it comes to work, a company like Cleveland Cliffs wants the best work force they can get, a man has to be steady and a man has to know what he wants and to work for what he wants. The company has been there to work for and if you would do the best you can there is no question you would have a job as long as you want to work with them.

me: Before we end the ~~interview~~ ^{mind that comes to} is there anything else you would like to add?

Mr. R: No, not really. When I look back over the years I think that right now at the age of technology a person should go into something else ~~to do~~ ^{rather than to} hope that mines ~~are open~~ ^{more less} when you think of a mind you think of pick and shovel. But there are some technical jobs you can do if you have the right training for it. I would advise any young person to go to school to learn to get all he can to better himself and if he could stay away from the mines.

me: OK, Thank you.

1 years working for lion industry & awards -

2 main duties of job & equipment -

3 most dangerous situations -

4 unique or humorous situations -

5 changing job duties over years -

6 co-workers & enjoyable times & spare time -

7 felt like changing jobs & pick same career -

8. how strike begins - ^{how many people}

9. future holds & how history will remember CCI & key to success -

10. skills of young people & advice -

- red
- purple
- blue
- green
- yellow
- brown
- orange
- pink
- black