

Paula Hill's interview with Taisto Syrjala

Me; This is Paula Hill & its Nov. 30, I'm interviewing Taisto Syrjala
The purpose of this is Underground Mining. We are at 893
Main St. in Ishpeming.

When and where were you born?

Mr. S. I was born in North Lake location, October 15, 1918. That's 75 yrs.
ago. I was born on School Street, My mother showed me some
years ago when she was still living we drove on the street there
where she pointed out the house to me, but I don't know exactly
what house it is but I know what side of the street its on. That's
why I've been kind of curious and I've been wondering if there is
any records of which house it would be. ~~When~~ I know when I
was born, one of the neighbors was a mid-wife you
know so there was not a doctor until later, I'm still
kind of curious of which house is it. I imagine
its still standing. You know the two-family homes,
double homes actually. I haven't been able to find
out, I've been trying to find out if they've had the
numbers on the houses.

me; What are the names of your parents?

Mr. S; Names of my parents, uh my fathers name was John
Syrjala and my mother's maiden name was Selma
Vensberg. My dad was born in Finland, and
my mother was American born.

me; What did your parents do for a living?

Mr. S; Well, my dad worked at, I'm not sure which one
of the Marquette mines he has worked
underground. Then my mother was a
house-wife, but then when she lived in
town, she was a machine operator.

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

Mr. S.; ~~well~~ I only had one sister, she died, ~~she~~ Celia was her name. She died really a young person. She was married, but she didn't live too long after. She lived long enough. She had a daughter and then she died shortly afterwards, so the daughter was raised by what would have been her grandparents actually in Neguana.

me; Are you currently married?

Mrs. S.; Yes, that is my wife. ha ha

me; What are the names of your children?

Mr. S.; I've been married before also both Gert and I this is the second marriage for both of us. She lost her husband, and I lost my first wife. I have 2 daughters, one Celia, ~~and~~ stankorb. But she's not married, she's divorced now. Any my other daughter is Judith Carroll married to Bob Carroll. Celia my oldest daughter lives in Dearborn, and Judith, my youngest daughter lives currently they live in Roy, Utah. Her husband is a manager in one of the Shopko stores.

me; Can you state a brief family biography? @

Mr. T.; Well, that's it about my family, I had two daughters and like I say, they both live away. My oldest daughter has one child, a daughter, who is also gone too. She graduated from the University of Michigan and my other daughter Judis, well, she has 4 children. 2 boys and two girls. There's two of them who have graduated from Lawrence University and the third one now is enrolled in Beaver state. The youngest boy, he's a junior in high school in Roy Utah.

me; How long have you been working in the iron industry?

Mr. S.; Well, I've been retired since 1980, but I have worked a little better than 38 years. For iron ore ~~in~~^{for} Cleveland cliffs, I worked underground in Cliffs Shaft Mine. I also worked in the Empire mine.

me; Why did you choose to work in the iron industry?

Mr. T.; Well, that was the best job available, iron for me.

me; Do you have any relatives that worked in the iron industry?

Mr. T.; My daughter Judis's husband worked for a short time at the Republic Mine right before he started to work for Shopko. and a my first wife's 3 brothers worked in the mines.

me; What are the names of the various mines or buildings you have worked in?

Mr. T.; Well, I worked at Cliff Shaft mine here in Ishpeming underground and then I worked at the Empire mine _____

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^{get this info?} _____ when they were just getting started. It was 1961 when I started working there. Well, I worked there until 1980 and then I retired.

me; Over the years, what kinds of duties have you performed for C.C.I.?

Mr. T.; Underground Mining. I did just about all the mining jobs as I worked as a miner, drilling and blasting, and moving ore. I also did a little work on the main level where they travel out the

Include

Mr. T; cont. ore, At the Empire, ~~or~~ I worked a good portion of the time as a ^{production} truck-driver. The last five years I worked as a blaster.

me; Did this job require any special training or higher education?

Mr. T.; Well, there was all on the job training that you just learned to do. There was no special education written for it outside experience. include

me: Can you please describe any special machinery or equipment that you used on the job?

Mr. T.; Underground was all the machinery for drilling and of course blasting of the ore and then the equipment that we used underground to load the ore with ~~at~~ the broken ore into what you call it a raise where it could go down so it trapped out the ore from the shaft ⑤

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

Mr. T.; Underground, there was always more dangerous working. In the like Cliff shaft Mine is all under the ~~workings~~^{city} of Ishpeming. It's all worked by room & pillar methods so there is some pretty big openings down there. under town. There was always a danger of if something loose would drop or something like that. What they call a bad ceiling.

include quote

me; Thinking back over the years, what was the most challenging or difficult duties that you had to perform?

Mr. T.; It was physical labor there especially underground. There was more bull-work in the pits. Well there was an offering the way you were driving trucks. The trucks were working as they were supposed to and there wasn't much physical, just that there was the size of them and so big. (6)

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me; Over the years, what have you enjoyed most about your job?

Mr. T.; The pay I guess, haha. Well, it was a challenge aright. Getting the jobs done and to produce (as an underground ^{contract} minor) to earn pretty good rate of pay. As a contract minor there was such a nature as the more you produce the better your paid. Where in the pits as a truckdriver there was no incentive pay there was all (they just started incentive pay when I retired) they do get incentive pay now on just about all the phases of pit work.

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me; What were the biggest responsibilities of your job?

Mr. T.; Well, safety was the biggest responsibility, especially underground being in pit work you had to work safely to protect yourself and everyone else involved.

me; if it applies to you, describe the most dangerous situations that you have been in.

Mr. T.; Well, I suppose ~~there~~ there were ~~jobs~~ underground they were probably the most dangerous.

me; Have you been involved in or have you witnessed any accidents?

Mr. T.; I've never had a lost-time accident in my 38 (little better than 38 years) *quote*

me; Have you gotten any friends or relatives that have gotten hurt?

Mr. T.; Well, I guess there would have been a brother-in-law and some friends that have had injuries or that sort of thing that they lost time from work, broken bones or something like that. I suppose they were even serious even (8)

Mr. T.; Broken bones, but there wasn't no
not a death or anything like that
or crippling injuries you know the
long lasting injuries.

me; Could you describe ~~the~~ the most unique
or perhaps humorous situations you
seen?

Mr. T.; Well, alot of joking and that especially
in the smaller crews like in
underground a smaller group of men
but I don't recall anything specific. There
was alot of good nature kidding and
joking.

me; Could you describe your working conditions?

Mr. T.; Well, the working conditions were (underground)
more hazardous than in pit work,
with equipment, the size of it got to
be bigger the size was much
greater than you could get underground
when you start driving a truck
down there wider than this room
even, it takes a little while to get
used to something like that.

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

U.M.T.; Safety in Cleveland Cliffs was always pretty strict on safety, it was (like in underground) its what you did on your own more or less that you had to work safely. In underground they couldn't be watching that close or anything like that, you had to do your own, make sure that you worked safely to protect yourself.

include

me; How have you seen the duties of your job change over the years?

U.M.T.; I suppose like underground, it was all in the mining contract it was you and your partner who worked there you were more or less alone, kinda isolated at times from other groups, where in the pit you were alone too. If you a truck-⁽¹⁰⁾ driver, sometimes I used to say

include

Mr. T.; you climb up in that truck at the start of the shift you wouldn't come down until quitting time, you would be up there just going back and forth with the truck.

me; Can you describe what your co-workers are like?

Mr. T.; they were all a good bunch of guys that's something since retirement that I kinda miss that companionship with some of the guys that you worked with. Don't even get to see some of them that you worked with.

me; Do you remember any special stories that stand out about them?

Mr. T.; Well, no I don't.

me; During your career, were you involved in any special projects or have you implemented any new programs? (11)

M.T.; Well, when we started at the Empire
mine, it was (just when we started)
chainsaws ~~the~~ ^{we} ~~cleared trees~~ ^{cleared trees} ~~of~~ the
land and then we cleared enough
of the older boulders of of these
bodies so it could be drilled
and blasted and truck the ore, it
was more or less a test run than
to see how it was going to work
We cut trenches ~~of~~ ^{to} the right
across the hillside at the Empire
and that ore was crushed at the
old Volunteer Mine Crusher and
they had a cascade mill set
up there an experimental mill that
they put on the ore just to see
if it was going to work on the
larger scale then what they had
done on a small scale what
they had done ~~on~~ at the
research lab at _____ mills

include

Mr. T. cont.; They had a mill there, an
experimental mill there at _____ mills
That's what's the basis where they
proved out, I guess they crushed
about one hundred thousand tons
of ore then and they ran the
grinder grinding just to see how
the ~~it was done~~ was. That was probably
one of the most, ~~that~~ that was really
the start of pelletizing and grinding
at the Empire mine.

include

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

Mr. T.; Was it the gold pin I guess
for twenty-five years of service
and then ~~it~~ for thirty-five
years, no, we got a pin for
thirty-five years and we
got a watch for twenty-five

end

me; at any time have you felt like changing jobs of your career?

Mr. T.; Well, I couldn't really do much changing after I got married and had a family it was more or less, I didn't have any further education I would have had to go to school to get a different job. I didn't go to college after high school so.

me; What do think the future holds for the Alder and the Empire?

Mr. T.; I think its good. Its going to be good for both of them.

me; What does the future look like for the iron and steel industry in general?

Mr. T.; Well, I think they'll always need steel of course they've got to have iron ore too so. I think it's going to go pretty good.

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

Mr. T.; Well, I ^{green} think as they're doing now, I think they have to continue research projects. So now even they're thinking about hoping to get a partner to go in on that Republic Mine different projects their, different projects stuff like that would help alot.

me; What do you think has been the key to success of C.C.I. where other companies have failed? (15)

mm.T.; Well, their research alone that's what really got the Empire started. The Humbolt was going earlier, pelletizing and that, but they spent a research ~~project~~ process that really kept them going.

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

mm.T.; Well, I think they'll be remembered for a big producer of iron ore pellets kind of a pioneer actually grinding and pelletizing process.

me; How has the role of women changed in the iron industry, and what directions do you think it will take in the future?

Mr. T.; Well, I think they'll be there
I know it is there were women
working there, even driving the
truck in the pit when I left.
I don't know what other jobs
there've been on.

me; ~~XX~~ were there a lot of them?

Mr. T.; Well, I don't know how many,
but there actually was not
a lot, they required a certain
percent of the women, I don't
know the exact number.

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

Mr. T.; Training for their education
that's for sure no matter
what phase of it is now it
involves more education and
skills, computers or just job
training of some kind cont. (17)

Mr. T; ~~that's not at all~~ college training level,
but some kind of training.

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

Mr. T; Get as much education as you
can. ————— because the
learner needs it.

me; When you were working, were there
any nurses or doctors if people
got hurt? That worked there?

Mr. T; ~~There~~ They've always at the Empire
a nurse always on duty. I don't
think there were any doctors
there, but they each ^{property} had a nurse.
I know the Empire and I'm
sure at the Alder too. Of
course it was hard to even
hire a doctor.

me; Please describe what you enjoy doing
in your spare time. (18)

M.T.; Well, go to camp, I enjoy getting out there in the summer time, and now there's a bunch of us retirees on Friday afternoon we go bowling. Of course at camp I do fishing or something like that or more or less being out there even. I'm not a hunter, and I don't do any hunting.

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

M.T.; Well, I suppose now, I could have used more education. I think I would have had an opportunity to go to college after ~~high school~~ I graduated, but I ~~didn't~~ didn't take it, I had a sister who was one year younger ⁽¹⁹⁾ than me, and wasn't much smarter.

Mr. T. cont.; I thought it would be better if they could afford to put her well she did go to Northern and she was in here last year (4th year) when she got married, she never did finish her year. Of course she died at a young person. She was only twenty three years old when she died.

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

Mr. T. Well, I think they've been a pretty good company. I think as far as my own work and labors, I think the majority of the people who work for CCI the company profits by their efforts, so its kinda of a mutual healing.

include + quote

me; Were you involved in a union or anything? @

ym.T.: I was a member of a union before they had _____, I'm still involved in the Marquette Range Steelworkers retirees club.

me: Have you ever experienced being on strike?

ym.T.: Oh yes, I was on them strikes that started in 1946. There was one in 49, 52, and I don't remember but there was quite a few of them. Some were long, about one month.

me: How does a strike actually begin?

ym.T.: Well, when it comes to a disagreement and they can't get to a settlement (issues) they become bullheaded. The companies don't want to give in so the only weapon really that the labor has,

me: About how many employees does a strike usually involve?

mi.T.; Well, like C.C.I. at one time had ~~sometimes they~~
~~when all the mines were going, they~~
~~had about 3,000, that were employed~~
~~in the mines. Well not it must~~
~~be pretty close to 2,000 yet~~
~~inbetween the Empire and the~~
~~gilders.~~

me; What is the purpose of a picket and...

mi.T.; Well, that's more or less to show
strength actually, and solidarity and
to keep what you call scabs at
work, try to keep going into
work.

me; Do you know of any stories about
an incident on a picket line?

mi.T. Well, there was a lot of stories,
but none that I can specifically
recall now, I think most of
them were publicized in the old
write ups in the newspapers
at those times.

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

mm. I; I can't really remember a specific story. I can remember that one long strike that started in January and it was a little over 100 days we were out. In fact in those days we didn't have the kind of strike they have nowadays now when they go on strike. At that time it was only a little bit of a handout that they might have got a little "purosa" or something like that. It didn't happen very often. It wasn't much because we didn't have the strike fund back in those days.

include

me; What takes place at a union meeting or rally?

Mr. S.; Well, they usually follow the same order of Robert's rules of order so that they go through a regular procedure and usually ~~starting~~ ^{early} in the meeting they'll have the communications what are seen and then they go through if there is any old business, I guess they reveal them if there's been any action on them. Of course they have committee reports always too they have like safety committee reports or when they have reports from ~~Agreements~~ ^{Griemis} committee and reports that enter the Griemis that have been worked out since the meeting before that and then any new business items that come up also discussed.

me; In your opinion, why is the steelworkers union so important (24) to the workers?

M.T.

include

Well, I think when you've got a lot to do about getting the benefits that we do get. Even I as a retiree I'm reaping the benefits of what is a pretty good pension, I was hoping to get it better but actually, once you retired the company doesn't have to really negotiate for the old retirees. These new contracts will always have pretty good change for the ones who are still working then that are going for retiring if they're going really well on that but this time, well we do have a, on this latest contract we do have a couple lumps on payments coming every now and then. There is supposed to be one coming in January '94 now but we haven't, since I retired in 1980, I think it was we had a couple of, they were like a cost of living adjustments for retirees.

ym: s cont.; It was soon after I retired the first year, but since then there hasn't been hardly any change in our benefits and pension pay.


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

ym: s.; Well, not really, I think it's pretty well covered, most of the things there we said earlier.

me; Well, thanks a lot for this.


ym: s. Well, thank you, I hope it helps you.
ha ha

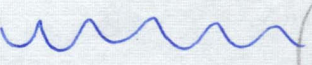
me; yeah, it should! Thanks again!


Safety (responsibilities)  (4)

working conditions  (2)

Job Duties  (1)

Equipment and Machinery  (3)

workmates  (5)

special projects 

future 

strikes 
pickets
lines