

Christi Korpi's
interview with Jim Skewis.

me: This is Christi Korpi. It is December 5th, 1993,
I am interviewing Jim Skewis for the purpose
of mining for Red Dust.

When and where were you born?

Uncle: August 20th, 1952, in Peoria, Illinois.

me: What are the names of your parents?

Uncle: Wallace Skewis and Mary Scanlon was
her maiden name

me: What did your parents do for a living?

Uncle: my mother worked for the state of Michigan,
and my father worked as a construction
laborer in different areas.

me: O.K., what are the names of your brothers and
sisters?

uncle: O.K. my brother Mike, my sisters Sharon
Johnson, Peggy Peterson, and Rosemary Korpi.

me: Are you currently married?

uncle: Yes.

me: What is your spouse's name?

uncle: was Nancy Jarvi

me: What are the names of your children?

Uncle: My son Andrew, and my daughter Jessie.

~~Me:~~ All the tough stuff, hey? (ha ha)

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

Uncle: Just over 20 years.

me: Why did you choose to work in the Iron Industry?

Uncle: Well at that time, it was probably the only thing to maintain in the area, it was well paying, with good benefits to stay here.

me: Will you name those relatives who worked in the iron industry?

Uncle: Um, Don't really have any immediate family, I have alot of aunts or uncles, on my wife's side my father-in-law worked 42 years, she has 3 brothers, and a couple brother-in-laws lots of cousins,

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

Uncle: Started out working underground at the Mather B, when I left there, I went to the Empire, worked in the Pit, and the concentrator and Pellet plant, worked at the Tilden Concentrator for a short period of time

Actual

me: Where is the mather D?

Uncle: mather B?

me: mather B

Uncle: It was in Negaunee.

me: O.K.

Uncle: It's where the school is now

(Negaunee High School)

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

Uncle: Well, when I started underground, working on the production crew then I went into the underground mining after that closed, I was transferred to the Empire. I worked in the pit, in the crusher, truck driver, other equipment operators I worked just about every operating job in the mill, at the Empire and at the Tilden

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me: In as much detail as possible, please describe the main duties of your current job

Uncle: Currently, I'm just work as a Laborer at the Empire which involves alot of just to clean up the basic, smaller jobs but filling in on alot of all the operating running equipment inside the mill

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me: Does this job require any special training or higher education?

Uncle: The only training would be on how to operate, some of the equipment and up, running some of the computer panels

Uncle: it runs ~~the~~ the main equipment in the mill

me: Will you describe any special machinery or equipment you use on the job?

Uncle: Right now, the only equipment is some of the small, mobile equipment the loaders different stuff like that, and then, again the computer panels, that operate the grinding mills *include*

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

Uncle: Right now, the biggest thing is ~~the~~ we do just about every job, filling in, knowing all the different jobs in the plant. *include*

me: Thinking back over the years what was the most challenging or difficult duty and explain why.

Uncle: The hard. (cough) The hardest jobs were when I worked underground the actual mining or the process of learning how to drill. The proper patterns, charging the holes, blasting them moving the dirt out. Uh, there was some when I first went out to the Empire, learning how to drive the big equipment, and handling the big, the big equipment

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

Uncle: The best part really (ha), was the people I worked with uh, there were sometimes there were

Uncle: underground the part was, actually, you could see
you accomplished something where now, the big
operations, there doesn't show alot at the end of the
day

Me: Did you have alot of friends in the mine?

Uncle: you met a lot and really again it goes back to
when we were underground, everybody was alot
closer. It seems now, its alot because of all the
big equipment, everything you do, ~~is~~ alot more on
your own, where before you used to depend on a
partner

Me: What are the biggest responsibilities of your job?

Uncle: Right now, the job I'm on really, its ~~is~~ Its just
filling in, working, making sure the plant, with
the plant running, filling in day by day with
different jobs being able to do whatever they
need on that day.

Me: If it applies to you, describe the most dangerous situations that you have been in.

Uncle: for dangerous, it would go back to when we were
working underground and we were mining
for example, when I was raise mining we
were going almost straight up, where you
would drill and blast over your head
and then you'd have to climb back up
underneath where you had just blasted
where all the loose rock may be there

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Uncle: and just working with explosives and at the Empire for the most dangerous stuff was ~~was~~ actually we were running equipment in the winter on the icy roads where you'd have actually sometimes trouble with equipments uh, spinning out, running off the roads.

me: Have you been involved in, or witnessed any accidents?

Uncle: I had a couple minor accidents when I worked underground where I busted my thumb, cut the back of my hand open when a chunk fell on it, uh, the most serious thing I was working when a man was caught in a mudslide at the Mather B and was killed. Um, the shift behind us, we were drilling with we called them our opposite partners that worked we were dayshift, they were afternoon, they drilled into a hole that hadn't gone off ~~off~~ and exploded and blew back into them they were just, they were lucky it was only minor. But uh, underground we had a lot of quip getting hit with chunks at times, broken arms, hands and uh, in the pit it's a lot less there's chances but it's not uh, the dangerous situations we had underground.

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

Uncle: I can't really come up with anything that's really unique or anything

me: Please describe your working conditions.

Uncle: Uh, working in the mill it's noisy,

Uncle: very noisy, you're required to wear^{your} hearing protection uh, some spots they're very dusty, others are wet and damp. I guess the basic is the noise and the dust that you run into more than anything

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

Uncle: As far as safety it's, basically they have a pretty good system, uh, there's always times it's lacking where it's quicker to do something without worrying about the safety, but I don't think you see near the injuries that we had years ago. That, uh, part of it being the work force, is uh, quite a bit older than it was before, there are people who have been on the job for years and know what has to be done.

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

Uncle: Just going back to when I worked underground, it was basically almost all physical labor where it's now into the Open-Pit mines everything has been automated and then just the equipment, well it's been 12 13 years that I've been at the Empire It went from when I worked in the Pit for the biggest piece of equipment 110 ~~ton~~ truck up to 270 ton truck, now where everything is just bigger

: me: Please describe what your co-workers are like
~~uncle~~ Do you remember any special stories that stand out about them?

Uncle: co-workers in just about any kind and every kind of personality ~~and~~ ^{of} and person to think of that are involved in all different things. I don't know just a different, you know... I don't know what to say (ha ha) Bunch of different type of people those are the tough ones (ha ha)

me: During your career, were you involved in any special projects or have you implemented any new programs?

Uncle: No, I've never been in anything we they've developed anything new

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

Uncle: The only thing I ever had was I got a letter saying about the good job we did at working outside in the cold, getting the job done when it was below zero and that's the only thing I've ever gotten

me: At any time have you felt like changing jobs or your career?

Uncle: I think that enters everybody's mind at one time or another that there's always something else that you may have wanted to do. Probably can't say that I ever really was serious (8)

Uncle: enough to really think about it, seriously

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

Uncle: I think they both are gonna survive right through

The iron ore industry I think, has downsized where it isn't like it was 15 to 20 years ago when there was an oversupply of iron, where it's cut back where (I think that the mines that are here are gonna survive and produce what they have)

me: What do you feel must be done in the future ~~for~~ for CCI, to remain competitive?

Uncle: Well the same thing, it's always keeping going with the technical advances, keeping the strong workforce they have, maintaining the production, and the quality, production that they have now.

me: What do you think has been a key to success of C.C.I where other companies have failed?

Uncle: I don't think C.C.I has done anything different as far as in this industry through the last 20 years the downsizing, or not downsizing but the um, the large plants, the large operations, all stayed, the Cleveland Cliffs closed their Republic, the underground mines, that were expensive, the same as a lot of ^{the} other companies did, they closed the small plants and a few of the big ones are still left

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

Uncle: As far as the workers, there's already a reputation throughout the whole country as to the good workers on this iron range. Anywhere you go they mention they worked here they are known as good workers. As far as the company, that'll be to be seen how C.C.I. does 20 years or 30 years from now when ~~these~~ ^{these} mines do close what they do to replenish the area, to, you know, what they do at that time. ~~It's~~ It's hard to say now. You look back they had the jobs they did a lot, but it's gonna depend on what they do when the mines close.

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

Uncle: There's a few women working in the mine not many there were more before the cutbacks years ago but you still don't see many coming in because uh, there's a few jobs but there's a lot of jobs that the women, that most women physically can't do lot of men can't do them either, but there's some jobs in there but, there, I don't think you're gonna see a whole lot of women yet in the work force at the mines

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

Uncle: Basically, it's still gonna be the education because over a course of time the blue collar worker is being eliminated there is gonna be some coming in yet the maintenance wise, there isn't a whole lot of programs around here anymore that train people for the type of work that is in the mine in the maintenance, 15 years ago the schools, the college all had programs that taught people the stuff that they were going to need in the mine in the maintenance where now it's a lot of it is done in house, on the job training but, it's still basic education

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

Uncle: On the same thing, it is just education because in every industry, not only the iron ore, but the blue collar job, the laborer is being cut back, there's gonna be people that are just gonna be left to do whatever physical ~~work~~ work on the bottom and the ~~rest~~ ^{rest} are gonna be ~~the~~ ^{the} more educated people.

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

Uncle: Winter time it's basically, I cross-country ski. I'm still involved a little bit in high school sports activities which I spend time there. Summer now, just golfing and a little bit of softball. In a way, well it's still tied with the mine, but I am involved in the union activities

Stapled in upside down

Uncle: where I do alot of work with that.

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

uncle: Uh, hard to say, Probably not, at the time ~~but~~ it was different. Where I look back I always think I should've, I could've done something different ~~or~~ there are other things that interest me more looking back I've had a, in the 20 years I've had a good income, took care of my family, no problems or anything, but there's always a time you think you could've done something else.

me: What would you rather do if you were through at the mine?

Uncle: Uh, myself, I probably would have been something I like doing alot with numbers, I like sitting down, figuring things out, something in that area. Before I worked in the mine I did work for Commuter airline where I enjoyed I enjoy working with people. Where something to that aspect I you know, to be exact It's hard to say.

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

Uncle: Uh, working there it, my impression, just how things have changed, when I worked when I started at the Matheson underground It was it was real physical work, you depended on other people and it seemed like you did everything together. It was always a group from there since I've been at the Empire it's changed, it's bigger, you work more on your own and through giving you the company trends the times have changed where it used to be C.C.I. was basically a local company where the mine the mine managers, the people in charge, were local people who had ties here.

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Uncle: where now 90% of it is out of Cleveland or other areas and I don't see the concern that there used to be it seems that when it was run by people local, that they would see people on the street and would talk to them, where now the ^{road} people are away from here and it seems different.

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

Uncle: Why did I do this? (haha) No

me: OK thank you

Uncle: Mm hmm

machinery

people:

safety

job duties

working conditions

working conditions

future

looking back

mines