

Debbie Lowes's  
interview with Ron Korpi



me: when and where were you born?

mr. k: In march of 1937 my parents lived in Humbolt and they moved next ~~to~~ door here when I was about 8 mon. old I guess in the fall of 1937.

me: what are the names of your parents?

mr. k: Nester Korpi and Martha Santa homma. She was from Chatam, Eben, Chatam area.

me: what did your parents do for a living?

mr. k: my father worked in the mine most of his life. He retired from Cleveland Cliffs in 1966 after about 37 yrs. or so.

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

mr. k: well my oldest I have 4 brothers ~~and~~ ~~well~~ or a ~~3~~ brothers and 4 sisters. In chronological order they are: my brother John, my sister Ethel, my sister Edith, my brother Ervin, my sister Jenette, my sister Donna, and my brother Dennis.

me: Are you currently married?

mr. k: Yep. Very much so.

me: So what is your spouse's name?

mr. k: Naoma. Everyone gets that mixed up. They all say Naomi. It's Naoma.

me: what are the names of your children?

mr. k: Ah, from the oldest to the youngest: Donald, our only son, and daughters: Kathleen, she's Kathleen Annala now, and Nancy, Nancy Cauldwell, and Molly. She's Molly Coduti.

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

mr. k: a little over 28 yrs. I started in September of '65.

me: why did you choose to work in the iron industry?

mr. k: Because of the money. It was only like 10¢ an hour more than I was making but 10¢ an hour (chuckle) was quite a bit then. include - possible quote

me: Please name those relatives who have worked in the iron industry.

mr. k: my father, like I said, ~~had~~ worked there, I think for a little over 37 yrs, my oldest brother worked for 44 yrs, he retired a few yrs. ago my older brother worked for 42 yrs, he just retired and my youngest brother he's worked for Cliffs now for 24 yrs, and I had a brother-in-law that retired from

emphasis family invol.

①

Cliffs for



(Cont.)  
mr. k: Cliffs a few yrs. ago he had worked in other mines, for another mining company before that but he had worked for Cliffs for about 20 yrs.  
Bill Dunstan.

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

mr. k: I started off as a laborer of course most do and after a few years of laborer and conveyor attendant and after about 3 yrs, there was a chance to get on a training program for an instrument repair man I, then I took the test for that tuck out and got that. include

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

mr. k: Well it's a right now were called electronic repair men and it's to maintain check, maintain, and repair control instruments and different pieces of equipment doing control of all different processes. include

me: Did this job require any special training or higher education? ~~If so please describe it.~~

mr. k: Special training like I said started off as we were called instrument repair men because there wasn't as much technical stuff as far as computers and that but this involved evolved where it's almost all computer run things now and it required first of all a four yr. training course (three or four) and on-the-job training course. include

me: It took quite awhile in other words

mr. k: Yeah, you're always learning because things are always changing and there's always new things to learn. quote

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

mr. k: Hmmm, well we use a lot of meters of different volt meters, meters, amp meters, oscilloscopes, different diagnostic equipment for checking whatever different machines

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

mr. k: I guess the most challenging or difficult part is when you run into things that you're, that are new to you and you don't know about anybody you know that's any one's job the hard part is not knowing once you know it the challenge is to be able to use what you know to fix things or whatever include



me: Thinking back over the yrs, what was the most challenging or difficult duty you had to perform and explain why?

mr.k: Hmmm, I really couldn't say what the most challenging or difficult thing was there was there's many of them. It's just that and there's ~~the~~ ongoing like I said because there's ~~always~~ always things you come across that you don't really about and ~~you~~ it takes time and that's ~~the~~ the challenging part I guess is patience and learning about this stuff.

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

mr.k: Finding out that you can do the job and learning, you know, about the new things and using there's a tremendous amount of new things coming out all of the time especially w/ computers ~~the~~ it's those kinds of things are always fun to learn and to use. *emphasize his willingness/need to learn.*

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

mr.k: Well I guess it wouldn't apply to me because I I can't think of any real dangerous situations I've been in. There's most of the things are relatively stationery, you know.

me: Have you been involved in or have you witnessed any ~~accidents~~ accidents? ~~If so please describe them.~~

mr.k: No, not anything serious I haven't witnessed any I've known of some but never...

me: never witnessed ~~none~~ any?

mr.k: never witnessed any bad ones.

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

mr.k: Um, I liked to but I guess ~~the~~ some of these things there funny but, there not for publishing (laughing) I was telling my wife about a little while ago and I said I can't say those things things that happened.

me: Please describe your working conditions.

mr.k: *include* Right now they're, my working conditions, are pretty good because I take care of all the outside area things and all the controls and measuring devices outside the plant which is pretty nice being in the fresh air and I've been doing that for the best 4-5 yrs. I guess so it's much better than being inside.

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



mr. k: Well they've changed a lot and almost all of them are for the they've changed in so much protective gear and protection and knowledge or information on it.

me: How have you seen the duties of your job change over the yrs.?

mr. k: Oh and also that improvements that need to be made, I would say they would be made in environment, environmental things such as chemicals and such. They still have, they'll have to work on those. Duties include

mr. k: (back to question) Duties of the job changing, I guess more & more we're becoming instead of repairmen, and right now it seems like we do more trouble shooting and replacing of parts rather than trouble shooting and repairing and replacing is what we used to do. It's, we don't know do nearly as much as repairing as we used to because of the smaller packages and computer chips and such the, some of these modules you can't repair so we replace instead of repair. impt difference - include

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

mr. k: Well, most of the co-workers are real good people ~~to~~ to work with. Anything special about them those, I guess that would go back to humorous stories and add that you (chuckling)

me: not for publishing. publication

mr. k: Not for ~~publishing~~ (still chuckling) Ha! Ha! Ha! right.

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

mr. k: Well, I guess the first special project was at the Pioneer Pellet Plant in 1971 it was a big project there to install a computer ~~it~~ that took work by everyone and it took quite awhile to put in. It was the only plant ~~is~~ in the world as far as I know that was run by computer completely, ~~is~~ that and the Ore Improvement Plant so it was quite a project ~~to~~ it was fun to work on.

include



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

mr.k! No, not individually safety awards won by department or crew or something but that's about all. And recognized, sometimes you don't want to be recognized for your job performance because it might not be good (chuckling) not really. No.

me! At any time have you felt like changing jobs or your career? Why or why not?

mr.k! No, not really ~~or~~ <sup>never</sup> seriously thought about changing it. because I enjoy my job I enjoy what I'm doing and people I work with so I wouldn't change. *possible quotes*

me! would you have changed before <sup>when</sup> the safety standards were worse?

mr.k! Well, the Pioneer and the Ore Improvement Plant were maybe if I would have had to stay there because that was very, very dirty it was so dirty there at times you couldn't see a person standing 10 ft. away it was so dusty and it's hard to believe but it's true. *include*

me! not too good for the lungs either.

mr.k! Yeah, and we didn't have the respirators like they do now. We had respirators but they would get plugged with dust so fast you couldn't breath so you had to take them off. and it was really bad there and maybe if a person had to spend all of their career there ~~not~~ they may want to get out sooner. I was there for 13 1/2 yrs. and it was cleaner when we left because the mines Safety and Health program, they forced them to install alot of dust collectors ~~and~~ in the place and to clean up the areas the remissions and every thing else so it was better when we left but it was still pretty dirty. *1 MPT - include*



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

mr.k: Well, I think they'll both be around for <sup>at least</sup> ~~about~~ another 20-25 yrs. <sup>with</sup> ~~but~~ the Ore reserves they have and as long as every thing else stays relatively the same they should be there with them

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

mr.k: Well, I don't see why they shouldn't do well as long as they keep a relatively modern industry as far as, you know, their plants, steel mills, they should do alright.

me: what do you feel must be done in the future for C.C.I. ~~where other companies have failed~~ to remain competitive?

mr.k: Well, I think they have to stay focused on producing pellets on mining and working out best and that's <sup>iron</sup> ore mining on making pellets. They've proven they're <sup>quote</sup> pretty good at that and if they stay with it.

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

mr.k: Well, it's probably what I just said if they stay focused they'll be a success. In about a dozen yrs. or so they made the mistake of trying to diversify and they went into they bought coal mining property, they bought oil shales properties, ~~the~~ thinking of making oil shale they went to a lot of different areas that they weren't really familiar with, they lost a lot of money on it, their stock went right to rock bottom, and they got in a lot of trouble until they there was some big money investors that forced them to rethink their position they sold most of these other holdings and they went back to zeroing on what they knew best and did best and that's what they have to do to stay successful

include



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

mr.k: Well, who knows what history will say but I'm sure a hundred yrs. from now they'll look at the holes in the ground and whatever other things may be left from what we leave here and they'll probably say they did a pretty descent job. The company and the workers.

me: You don't think they'll be forgotten?

mr.k: Not for a long time because it will leave right in this area it's going to leave reminders for a long time so it won't be forgotten until those reminders are covered over and that will be quite some time I would say.

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

mr.k: Well the role of women changed alot. There weren't any women working for Cliffs when I started not in the production end of it they there were women working in offices and that was all. They started off I guess mostly in the production type of job working on crews and that but they've advanced to right now women working on maintenance crews, repairing Shovels (big shovels) working in plants on maintenance, welding, alot of maintenance repair, <sup>there aren't</sup> many in the electrical departments, ~~yet~~ that I know of I almost sure there isn't any at the Empire I know there isn't any at the Tilden but I imagine down the road there'll be some.

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



mr.k: Well, they should definitely look to develop their skills in trades and crafts any type of electrical/electronic backgrounds, welding, anything to do w/ machinery (maintenance of machinery) and computer skills. That's the big thing that's very important almost every ~~face~~ <sup>include</sup> of workout in the plants now some computer ~~skills~~ <sup>face</sup> and the more you have the more you have, the better off you are.

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

mr.k: Wowzers! Well, just to try to stay focused and learn as much as you can because you'll enjoy a lot more of everything the more you know, the more you'll enjoy and in anything you do. That's easy advice to give because it's so general, you ~~can't~~ that's true. We're old enough where we can say "Oh, darn" I wish I would've learned more, or listened more." (chuckling)

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

mr.k: Well, I enjoy playing cards, I enjoy grocery stores (laughing) I like to shop in grocery stores and the bigger the better, and it depends on the time of the year too. Summer time! cooking outside, swimming.

me: If you had to do it all over again, would you make the same career choice? Why or why not?

mr.k: Yes. I would do the same thing I have no regrets. By working for Cliffs I've enjoyed my job that's why. I enjoyed, I guess, everything I did there.

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

mr.k: Well, what impressions stand out the most? Well, I guess it's just the a descent paying job and the pay is good so.... most of the people are good. They're fun to be around so I guess I enjoy the descent pay and the people. <sup>I possible quote</sup>



me! Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Steelworkers union?

mr.k! Yes, I am. I've since I started there, been a member of the union.

me! Have you ever experienced being on strike? If so, how many times?

mr.k! Yeah, I think in the 28 yrs. I've been ~~working~~ w/ them I think we've had about 5 strikes. The longest one we had was in 1990 the longest one I was associated w/. I think that was about 4 months. There was another quite long one in 1977 which was 3 1/2 months. There were a couple of short ones. Well, then we just got through with <sup>one</sup> this fall which lasted about 6 wks.

me! How does a strike actually begin?

mr.k! Well, it begins when management and labor can't agree on what should be in a new contract. It's that's all there is. There's no agreement and they refuse, neither side is willing to move anymore.

me! How many employees does a strike usually involve?

mr.k! It usually involves all of the hourly paid employees. The salary people will remain working and whatever, you know, has to be done ~~with~~ while ~~they're~~ <sup>we're</sup> on strike. But, ~~while~~, if, all the hourly employees are on strike

me! What is the purpose of a picket line and describe what happens there.

mr.k! Well I guess the purpose of a picket line is, maybe a little different now, but initially they were set up to stop anyone not anyone but some management people but to make sure other non-union people went in. Now, I guess, it isn't so much a problem w/ that so they're out there for more of a show of solidarity, perseverance, and stuff like that. They're used for now, + they would be used to stop "scabs."



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

Mr. K: No, not really. Those stories, but of hand I could n't think of any while I was on them anyway.

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

Mr. K: Well, the times I've been with them I, I can't think of any really unique thing that happened. I'm sure there were incidents that happened in the last 28 yrs. but, I don't know about them. There was an incident many years ago when I was young. It was in 1946 when the miners were on strike right here in W. Ishpeming two blocks away. There was some guys that were going through the picket line everyday and they were "scabs". Scab is a person ~~a~~ a union calls someone a scab when they, they're willing to work for wages or conditions less than union will work for. Anyway, these people were going through there everyday and they, it was becoming quite bitter. They were followed home almost everyday by quite a large group of strikers. One day they were near the house and they were thinking about dumping over a truck next to their house a dump truck. They were rocking it and a guy came out onto the porch w/ a gun and threatened them. There was a lot of shouting back and forth, and he did shoot a guy. A guy got shot in the leg/ankle. It wasn't real serious. We watched it happen. We were young kids at the time. That was kind of scary and unique, I guess. So, but that was a long time before I worked w/ the company.

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

Mr. K: Well a regular union meeting we have once a ~~month~~ month. It's just regular union business we discuss different grievances that different people have during the month, different working conditions, any problems that may have come up in the month, and plans for whatever actions



Mr. K: they maybe taking, just regular monthly business, your know, it's boring most of them. The rally's are a little different. A rally is usually something that'll try to organize when there's a special project or a special incident that they want to back and, you know, show support for whatever they were backing, you know, it maybe some situation someone. A rally is a little different, A rally is something special that is organized. Where a union meeting is once a month boring thing. <sup>at the time</sup>

me: would you consider a union rally like a pep rally for a game?

Mr. K: kind of. Yeah, it's an order and just to show support for whatever it may be.

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

Mr. K: well, I would, I think the union is important not only to C. C. I, workers but to a lot of other workers in it's something to for others to think about because <sup>include quite</sup> it gives them a sense of dignity, it gives them a descent wage, which it's really hard to come by these days. It just with all of them it would be everyone would be worse off. Everyone. Salary people (and of course hourly people), and other so many other jobs and people in other non related jobs. Unions are, to me, are very, very important and they, unfortunately, they're taking a beating in the last dozen yrs, or so, but because of the administrat~~ions~~ions we've had but they're still the only one's with descent wage and another man told me about



mr. k: that the most important things unions have given workers is dignity and the work place.

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

mr. k: I can't think of anything. I guess your going to National Mine which was kind of a mining hubb in its day and it still is with the Tilden out there. Any history mining around would be good, you know, for all young people to learn about. That's about it.

~~me:~~ (mr. k. added a little comment for mr. Annala but I'm not going to write it down.)

me: And as a conclusion of my interview with Ron Korpi, an electronic repairman for the Tilden mine this is Debbie Lowes signing off.



~~Safety~~

2 Job education needed                      (1) ✓

3 Strikes - unique story                     

(how started)

combine

4 Family involvement                      ✓

5 ~~future outlook for iron mining~~

6 key success to mining                      ✓

7 Safety Standards - made + need to orange                      ✓  
be made

8 Special machinery used on job                      (3) ✓

9 Difficult part of job + main duties                      (4) ✓

10 Reason for working in mining business                      ✓

11 Duties performed over yrs. + changing                      (5) ✓

12 Enjoyment of job                      ✓

13 Special project involvement                      ✓

14 working conditions                      ✓

15 Skills needed to work for C.C.I                      (2) ✓

16 why Steelworkers union so important. yellow                      ✓

order of colours

- pink/purple ✓
- orange ✓
- pink ✓
- black ✓
- red ✓
- dk. green ✓
- black ↔ lgt. green ✓
- yellow ✓
- blue ✓



RON KORPI

EXTRA INFORMATION FOR ~~RET~~ RET  
DUST STORY

1. HOW MANY YEARS DID YOUR FATHER  
WORK FOR C.C.F.? 37 YRS.

2. WHAT MINES DID YOUR DAD WORK IN?  
LLOYD MINE & MATHER "B"

3. AS BEST YOU CAN, DESCRIBE THE KINDS  
OF DUTIES YOUR FATHER PERFORMED.

MINER, CAGE RIDER - DELIVERED SUPPLIES - ETC

TO WHATEVER LEVEL OF THE MINE ~~THEY~~ WERE NEEDED.

DRYMAN, CLEANED THE DRY, PUT <sup>HEAD</sup> LAMP BATTERIES  
ON CHARGE. HANDED OUT HEADLAMP BATTERIES  
TO MINERS COMING ON SHIFT.



4. WAS YOUR DAD EVER INJURED WHILE WORKING, IF SO PLEASE DESCRIBE IN AS MUCH DETAIL AS POSSIBLE.

INCLUDE DETAILS ABOUT MEDICAL TREATMENT, REHABILITATION, WORKMENS COMP, TIME OFF THE JOB, ETC. ETC.

- HAD A DRILL ROD (ABOUT 1" <sup>6' LONG</sup> DIAMETER) FALL FROM ABOVE AND GO THROUGH HIS BOOT & FOOT.

A LARGE ROCK GRAZED HIM - BREAKING HIS COLLAR BONE, - CHIPPING 4 VERTABRAE, AND BREAKING HIS LEG. ~~HE SPENT A FEW MONTHS~~ OUR FIRST REPORT OF THE ACCIDENT WAS THAT HE WOULD PROBABLY DIE. HE SPENT A FEW MONTHS IN THE HOSPITAL AND A FEW MORE RECUPERATING AT HOME. THIS HAPPENED WITHIN THE SAME YEAR AS THE STRIKE IN 1946 SO IT WAS AN ESPECIALLY LEAN YEAR OR SO FOR HIM & HIS FAMILY HE RETIRED IN 1966 FROM THE MATHER "B."



5. NAME ANY OF YOUR UNCLES OR COUSINS THAT WORKED FOR CLIFFS, AND IDENTIFY WHERE THEY WORKED.

UNCLE (GEORGE) CORN NOB - <sup>KORPI</sup> BUNKER HILL MINE AMONG OTHERS UNTIL ~~RETIRED~~ HE RETIRED.

COUSIN - CHARLES BROWN - WORKING AT THE EMPIRE  
AUNT MARION LAAKSO - WORKING AT THE EMPIRE.

6. PLEASE DESCRIBE ANY UNIQUE STORIES ABOUT UNCLE'S OR COUSINS ABOUT ~~AND~~ THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH C.C.I.

COUSIN JIM LAAKSO <sup>MARION'S SON</sup> WORKING AT THE EMPIRE.  
NEPHEW RUSTY AHO WORKING AT THE EMPIRE  
NEPHEW BILL DUNSTAN WORKING AT THE EMPIRE  
NEPHEW ED SANDBERG WORKING AT THE EMPIRE.

father

2 cousins

1 uncle

1 aunt

3 nephews

3 brothers

1 brother in law



7. ONCE AGAIN, ① NAME ALL BROTHERS WHO WORKED FOR CLIFFS, ② IDENTIFY WHERE THEY WORKED, ③ DESCRIBE THE JOBS THEY PERFORMED, ④ HOW MANY YEARS EACH ONE WORKED, AND ⑤ FINALLY, TRY TO RECALL ANY INTERESTING INCIDENTS OR UNIQUE EXPERIENCES THEY HAVE TOLD YOU ABOUT THAT THEY WERE INVOLVED IN.

BROTHER JOHN WORKED AT THE MATHER "A", MATHER "B", REPUBLIC, TILDEN, AND EMPIRE, HAVING DONE VARIOUS JOBS ON <sup>MINING</sup> OPERATING AND MAINTENANCE. HE RETIRED IN 1990 AFTER 44 YRS. ~~OF~~ WITH CCI.

BROTHER IRVIN WORKED ON THE DIAMOND DRILLS AND ON MAINTENANCE AT THE BROWNSTONE SHOPS. HE RETIRED IN 1993 AFTER 42 YRS WITH CCI.

BROTHER DENNIS WORKED AT THE MATHER "B", TILDEN, AND PRESENTLY <sup>S</sup>AT THE EMPIRE. HE STARTED WITH CCI IN 1969. AND HAS WORKED ON MAINTENANCE MOST OF THE TIME.



9. YOUR DAYS OF WORKING AT THE PIONEER ARE VALUABLE. THINK CAREFULLY AND TRY TO DESCRIBE ANY OTHER THINGS THAT YOU RECOLLECT ABOUT YOUR ASSOCIATION WITH THAT PLACE.

\* THE PIONEER STARTED PRODUCTION IN 1965  
IT <sup>PELLETIZED</sup> ~~PROCESSED~~ ORE FROM THE ORE IMPROVEMENT PLANT. THE ORE IMPROVEMENT RECEIVED ORE FROM THE MATHER "B" PRIMARILLY AND THE ORE WAS ~~DROD~~ PUT THROUGH A DRYER, THEN WAS PULVERIZED IN ROD MILLS AND SENT UP TO THE PIONEER PELLET PLANT.

BOTH PLANTS WERE EXTREMELY DUSTY & DIRTY. THEY AND THE MATHER "B" ENDED PRODUCTION IN 1979.

\* couldn't see a guy