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Joe LaForge's interview  
with Paul LaForge

Me: This is my Red Dust interview, My name is Joe LaForge  
I'm at my Grandpa's house in his kitchen, It's the  
28 of November. My Grandpa's name is Paul LaForge.

Me: O.K. What is your full name?

Mr. L: Paul Roger LaForge

Me: When and where were you born?

Mr. L: I was born in Ispsoring on April, 22 1934

Me: What are the names of your parents?

Mr. L: My ~~parents~~ father's name was Wilford <sup>step?</sup> and my mother's name  
was May.

Me: What did your parents do for a living?

Mr. L: I think they started working in the wood and on the farm. But, later  
they went into iron mining.

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

Mr. L: Well I had brother that is alive right now, and his name is Robert,  
I have some brothers that are deceased which are, ~~Laoren~~  
the oldest would be Lawrence, and also I have two half-brothers who  
are deceased their names are Hill, Nels Hill and Ralph Hill.

Me: Are you currently married if so what is your spouse's name?

Mr. L: Yes, My wife's name is Alice.

Me: What are the names of your children?

Mr. L: I have four children, The oldest being Joseph, and next is Deborah, then Donna  
and Lee

Me: OK now we'll do the typical questions? How long have you been  
working in the iron industry

Mr. L: I believe coming March, It will be 4 2 years

Me: Why did you choose to work in the iron industry?

Mr. L: Well, the iron industry seemed to be the best choice for working, steady  
work and the money part. include

Me: Please name any relatives that have worked in the mining industry.

Mr. L: Relatives that have worked in the ~~the~~ mining industry (thinking)  
My half-brother by the name of Nels. I have a son that works at  
the Empire mine. My father worked in the mines years ago. I had  
various uncles who worked the mines. Pretty near all of my relatives  
worked in the mine at one time or another. Although, I can't recall all the  
name I guess that is where most of them worked.

include

Me: What are the mines or buildings you worked in?

Mr. L: O.K. first of all I worked for a company called Inland Steel. It was  
an underground mine located in South Greenwood, ~~near~~ maybe about 5  
or 6 miles from Ishpeming. Heading west from Ishpeming about 6 or 7  
miles was the Greenwood mine. It was an underground mine, and also when  
that mine shut down we started working at the Republic mine which was open pit.  
I worked as a welder there. I was ~~hired~~ <sup>hired</sup> as a welder and worked as a welder  
in the pit department. Which is the real mining part of it. I had worked there  
until the shutdown in '61 or '62. I was transferred to the other properties  
which included the general shop which was called the brownstone. I was ~~transferred~~  
also employed at the Tilden which is part of Cleveland Cliffs iron company. I was  
transferred back to Republic. Back to the Tilden and presently right now  
I'm employed at the Empire Mine.

include

emphasize that he's still working!

Me: Over the years what kind of duties have you performed in the iron industry?

Mr. L: Well like I said when I first started working at the mine I was fairly  
young, and I worked at Inland Steel underground mine, we started off at the  
lesser paying jobs, which were the way things started at the time, and worked your  
way up to possibly one of the better paying jobs which was the actual  
mining and drilling of the ore, and getting it out. When that mine started  
to shut down, I took in the trade of welding, from there when the mine did  
shut down in 1963, I went to work for the Cleveland Cliffs company as a welder  
and I have held that job ever since.

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Me: ~~In as much detail as possible~~ In as much detail as possible please the main duties of your current job.

MrL: Well the main duties of the current job is, well welding of course, its mostly <sup>mainenance</sup> ~~matenance~~ welding and the matenance is mostly in the pit department, the mining department its mostly preventive matenance some of it is making parts up, fabricating parts I guess the whole thing boils down to keeping the shovels and the trucks and stuff going in the pit, thats what it amounts to. <sup>include</sup>

Me: Did this job require any special training or a higher education.

MrL: Well I guess it would. In my situation, it didn't because I was in a position where I had to quit school in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and I took it upon myself to get interest in more or less machinery and mechanical equipment or such and when I first started, I worked as a miner all the way up and finally took the chance and took a chance on becoming a welder, in which I had to start on the bottom of training. So I guess the most important thing is getting to be and finding out what you're going to do and go along with that. We're kind of getting away from the question here. I guess there wasn't any special training. I guess it was just more or less education and doing as the job came up. It's kind of self-taught more or less. <sup>include</sup>

Me: Please describe any special equipment or machinery that you use on the job?

MrL: I don't think we use too much special equipment other than the welding machines, which came a long way over the years. We used to have just a few rods back over 30 years ago. Now its changed some what now its more or less wire welding. The types of materials we weld are different and we have to now what that is if it is on a frame of some sort it would be called a T1 steel which is stronger, or if its in a place where it would wear it would be manganis or something like that on that order, because it takes lots of abrasion without much wear. So I guess that would probably be special equipment. ~~It would be the machines or the equipment that we use to put it down with the rods.~~ And the different types of rods and different types of machinery. I guess that's about it. <sup>impt - include excellent detail</sup>

Me: What's the most challenging or difficult part of your job.

MrL: Well that's going back to the other question, I guess the most challenging or difficult part of the job is knowing what material your working with, there's aluminium, steel, or alloy everything is kind of mixed up so you got to know what rod your using there. Well I should say wire because the wire ~~was~~ is kind of replacing the welding rod part of it. It cheaper (the wire) I think and its less waste. I guess the challenging part of it is knowing what steels or metals your working with and ~~knowing~~ what rod to use on your job. *include*

Me: Thinking back over the years what was the most challenging or difficult duty you had to perform in any of the places you've worked? Explain why.

MrL: Well I can't recall anything challenging or difficult. I can recall one instance were it wasn't challenging ~~or difficult~~ but it was kind of sad in a way. I sat on top of the opening of the shaft of the Greenwood mine welding the steel that was used to cap the shaft off and I guess that was probably the most difficult ~~because~~ <sup>knowing</sup> your sitting up there, although we had a safety belt on, but you know your sitting there with probably about little better than a half a mile deep hole right directly under you. So I guess that would be my most challenging part. *include*

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

MrL: I'd say over the years probably, oh I don't know, a lot of stuff have made. Its pretty nice when you make something, you fabricate it, you start from scratch and most of the time its your own plans, and *include* start with a piece of steel, you make it, and it fits when your done. I think thats probably ~~the most~~ enjoyed the most about the job.

Me: What are the biggest responsibilities of your job?

MrL: Well I guess the biggest responsibility of the job is getting it done in less time, getting it done to your best of ability, and also getting back to the other question making sure it fits, or works like its supposed to. *include quite part*

Me: Please describe some of the most dangerous situations that you've been in?

Mr L: Well I can't recall too much of a dangerous situation except for the one which was stated back where I had sat on top of the opening of the shaft of the Greenwood mine, which was a straight shaft. That was probably the most dangerous situation I've been in, although ~~some people~~ it wasn't exactly as dangerous as some people think it would be.

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

Mr L: Well I haven't really been into any place where I've witnessed any accidents other than an underground accident where I saw ~~another~~ <sup>follow</sup> worker fall into, what we called a "Grizzly". A grizzly ~~is~~ is where you dump the raw ore prior to being shipped by skip or what ever you want to call it, up to surface. It isn't that he fell very far but he fell with his feet through the grizzlies which are openings in rail and in doing so he fell forward breaking his leg and his hip I guess, and that was about the worst accident I witnessed. And for friends and relatives got hurt. I don't recall anything other than what we call everyday accident when somebody pinches a finger or something like that. I've seen lots of that. But that's about all of the bad accidents I've seen.

*In detail*

Me: How has the job affected your health and relatives health?

Mr L: Well, I don't think it's as bad as some people claim it to be, we've come quite a ways as watching out for safety. I suppose some lung damage has occurred over the years working in the mine. ~~So~~ <sup>short</sup> I couldn't say. My own health experience is I've been a little ~~short~~ winded but that could be from a number of reasons.

Me: Could you describe either the most unique or humorous situation you've been in?

Mr L: Yeah, I can describe one that happened a few years back, probably about a year ago. I was working at a job on the bench. It was dinner time so I started for dinner. When I was walking by one of my

Mr. L: fellow workers, he hollered to me, "Paul can you come here a minute?"

(con) "No" I said "It's time for dinner." "Well" he said "Come here a minute it will only take a second." I went over there and he said "will you take a bar and try to get this shovel bucket door off my foot, my legs seem to be caught and I can't move." So I guess he wasn't hurt wasn't cut or anything except that he was stuck. And I think that's quite humorous. (laughing) That was a good one.

include

Me: Are there any funny things that you didn't see but heard about?

Mr. L: Yeah, there's a few things that heard kind of by way of coworkers I mentioned. One particular where we had an opportunity and we still call him that when we see him. We holler to him "Run Bob Run" It goes back to a couple of guys working. I don't know, do you want names?

Me: That doesn't really matter.

Mr. L: OK two welders working, this particular guy Bob and his partner went down with him, actually four guys, and they were pulling a man lift behind their repair truck, and they stopped and unhooked the man lift, for some reason the truck started rolling on its own. Bob, being the younger guy, started running after it and the other guys were just kind of cheering him on and yelling "Run Bob run." Well Bob ran and he caught the truck and nothing was lost and no one was hurt. So I guess it all boiled down to Run, Bob, run.

include

Me: Please describe your working conditions?

Mr. L: Well the working conditions now are pretty much the same, repetitions you would call it. There is a little variation from day to day. But the conditions are pretty good, we've got good lights, and good benches to work on. Are tools are unlimited. so I'd say the working conditions are real good. A lot better than they have been over the years. And they seem to be improving.

Me: Was there much difference between now and the underground?

Mr. L. Yeah, now its kind of routine, what they have they drill the ~~ore~~ ore, and blast it, then the shovels come in and load the ore onto the trucks which bring it to the crushers and its processed from there. Before underground they had many holes and they followed the ore bodies there was different rooms we used to call them 'stopes' and to get to those "stopes" we took what was called a drift which was just a little tunnel. Some were called dog drifts which were smaller than the other ones. We had to climb passageways which were called "raises". And they worked off of them into pockets of ore. Where today every thing is mined and even some of the rock is pulled out and its separated in a different way.

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Me: Was it cold and dark and sad like many people think, or was it not that bad?

Good job of questioning, Joe!

Mr. L. Well it was where you were working you carried your light with you, I guess before my time they had what they called carbine lamps but in my time 42 years we had electric lights which clamped to your head with a battery. And most of the places where high up the main drifts had lights every few feet, it wasn't quite as dark and gloomy as most people thought it ~~was~~ was. There were some places where you were when you turned your light off it was blacker than any night you've come across. I mean it was total blackness. There was no light or reflection of any kind. Its as far as the working parts of it, it was the same temp. year round. It was probably 54 degrees. As far as the weather you never what it would be like today or tomorrow or next week or whatever.

include

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

Mr. L. Well safety standards have changed considerably since I started in the mines. At first safety, kind of secondary, and now I think its the primary standard, or first job you have to do is to make sure the job is safe from the start. It has been told to us many times that we should work safe and plan your job and plan it around safety. and its changed somewhat over the years like I said its kind of ~~secondary~~ secondary they were still safety minded but not as good as it is now. Right now we have Federal Government who comes in, we have a Marquette County Safety Inspector who comes in, and we have several safety men who work right at the mine. Years ago

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Mr. (Con) we didn't have that. We had a Federal Inspector and a County Inspector but we never had a safety inspector at the mines. The conditions have changed a ~~lot~~ quite a bit. We have better fans, we got better lightings, we have better equipment, we have, oh, a lot of stuff, I'm talking about welding now, we have protective clothing, gloves, we have fans that suck the smoke out while we're working and it's changed considerable and it's better and over the years it's changed where it gets better every day. *include*

Me: ~~Did the Union have a lot to do with the changes?~~  
Did you have a lot of changes during that?

Mr. I think so. I've been on the end of what I just mentioned about getting rid of smoke and that. We even where flown to Lansing to look over a General Motors to check out their job and equipment for removing smoke, it was interesting to see how they did it. Although their dust is not as bad as ours because we are working with a raw product, and I don't care how you go about it there's going to be dust and smoke. In going down to look at it we came back with idras for smoke reduction and the fan system is in use today. So I'm kind of a part of that. *include*

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

Mr. Well, mostly the coworkers have been ~~person~~ <sup>real good</sup> to work with, if your working somewhere and you need a helping hand, and a lot of jobs your put on by yourself and your co-workers are doing the same thing, there's times when you can't handle it yourself and you ask them and their right there to help you. Everyone seems to get along well and there's no fighting or anything like that. Its, I'd say we get along real good and there's good people to work with. And remembering any special stories that stand out about them is a couple that I mentioned back like "Run, Bob, run" and the particular fellow who told me to get that bucket door, which weighs about five tons, off his foot. That he was caught, just caught when he couldn't move, but not hurt. *include*



Me: During your career, were you involved in any special programs or helped install and new ones? If so please describe them.

Mr. L: Yeah, well like I said a little while ago we got involved in this fan situation and helped install that. We got involved in fabricating a lot of parts for the computers in the trucks and shovels. There just about all over right now. And its really helping them plan there job and do it right, I guess its probably the special ~~part~~ programs the rest is pretty routine as far as working. I think the computers and the new fans and snake systems in the shop are the biggest. *include*

Me: Have you ever won any ~~wards~~ awards, or been recognized in any way for your job performance?

Mr. L: No, I have not. I have been thanked many times over the years, when we've got a job done fast, but as far as awards, other then safety awards we've kept close on that, That's about the only award I've ever ~~won~~ won.

Me: At any time have you felt like changing jobs? Why or why not?

Mr. L: Well there's a few times when I first started in the mine, I that I was going to quit - I didn't want to work underground. As things ~~was~~ went along and got better, the money part got little better, like I said You started at the bottom and worked your way up. And working my way up to my present ~~standard~~ job which is a welder standard. Is, I don't know, Its been my job for 30 years and I've always been in the Mechanical department. *judde*  
I'll always like that and I don't know if I'd change. *in*

(STOP TAPE)

Me: OK. What do you think the future hold for the Tilden and Empire?

Mr. L: Well I think It looks pretty good they've got a lot of ore there and The way there mining now, I think it looks pretty good. They got bigger equipment which make it go a little ~~quicker~~ quicker. I think they got quite a few years that they can work there yet:

Me: What does the future look like for the iron industry in general?

Mr. L.: Well that sometimes from what we get some information on and read about in our local papers, some of it doesn't look too good, but like I said they've come a long ways in as far as the Iron mining where they used to just ship out the raw ore, now there making pellets and I guess as far as the pellets so they got something new coming up and I would say the Iron and Steel Industry is probably going pretty good.

Me: What do you feel must be done in the future to keep CCI competitive?

Mr. L.: I think the future of CCI to remain competitive is, there going to have to get back to some sort of training program so their people can maintain some of these jobs. Because these jobs are even though they have computers and bigger equipment and what not. There still going to have to have the people to work them, operate them, and maintain them and I talking as for welders, electricians, maintenance men, operators and there going to have to train them, get ready for it a little bit. Its going to have to be a training program where they need it for the future.

include + quote

Me: What do you think has been the key to CCI's success where other mining companies have failed?

Mr. L.: Well, I think the key to success of CCI is probably the mines that they've operated on where it seem where they've always made money on them, and they put out a pretty good product, so I guess I think that's probably why they've kept in the mining business, They've always been able to get rid of their product so that's probably some of the other people have failed and CCI been able to keep going I guess that's probably it.

include

Me: Looking far into the future how do you think people will remember CCI and its workers?

Mr. L.: Well that's kind of hard to answer. I know now when we pass by an old mine we say there's an old mine that belonged to Cleveland Cliffs: and, ah, some of the times when your riding by these mines when someone with you had a relative that worked there, so I think that's always going to be into the future because there here, in the Marquette Iron Mines, and there going to be here forever, so I think people will remember them and the people who worked there.

Me: How has the role of women changed in the iron industry? And how do you think it will take them in the future?

M: Well I guess the role of the women coming to work in the iron mines is probably the biggest cause for them to come to work was the pay. The hourly rate. Women had worked most of the time for less wages but they found out that they can come to work in the mines and do the same work as a man for the same amount of money. So I think there will always be places in the mine for women.

Me: Do you think it has a positive influence on everyone?

M: Has it got a positive influence on everyone? You mean the women working there?

Me: Are they against it or everyone thinks it's O.K.?

M: I don't think there's anything against it. They were when they first started but now they really accept them as a fellow worker and I guess everything's getting along pretty good. *include*

Me: What skills do you think the young people need to develop if they plan to work for CCI some day?

*include & guide*  
M: Well there's many skills they can do first of all is to continue schooling go to college, get a degree in engineering, mining engineering, or mechanical engineering. If you don't have the opportunity to go to college some type of trade school or that would be quite helpful. To get yourself a job there. I think in the near future it's going to be more complex for the people, there's not going to be any laborers job or everyday job. It's all going to be skilled some way or another whether it be electrical, mechanical, engineering, welding, what ever, even the operation of the machines, ~~there~~ they're getting bigger, they're getting more complex, they're getting much bigger, and they're all hooked up to computers, so I think that's what they'll have to do sharpen their skills on some of that stuff like that, but definitely school is the main thing.

Me: OK. As a related question what advice in general could you give to the students?

Mr. L: Getting Back to the question I just talked about definitely stay in school. Get as much education as possible, and find out what you want to go in to and further your education in that particular field. No matter what it is. It's hard to ~~change~~ tell somebody to do something maybe somebody who's interested in one job today, and tomorrow it's something else. But I'd say, Education is the main thing, so stick with it.

Me: Have you ever experienced being on strike and if so how many times?

Mr. L: Oh Boy, I been on strike several times many times. Our contracts used to run a year at a time, then 3 years, now its up to 6 years. We been on strike from hours to 12 or something like that days. So as far as strikes I've been on them.

Me: How does a strike actually begin?

Mr. L: A strike begins I guess when, Everybody thinks its wages, that the workers are after, but a lot of times it's got to do with general job as for a safety, its got lot to do with working conditions, as far as insurance, and in the later years been in trying to keep our jobs, make sure they don't get rid of our jobs and hire out to somebody else. That's sort of like a vendor or something like that. I guess that probably answered that pretty good.

Me: How many employees does a strike usually involve?

Mr. L: Well it involves many people not only the hourly employees who work at the mine who are on strike, but it also ~~the~~ hurts alot of people who are indirectly connected with the mine, I'm talking like people who supply parts for the mine, tires maybe for the equipment, fuel oil, gasoline if ~~is~~ they don't buy it they can't sell it. It interferes with a lot of people not just at the mine, people all over.

Me: What's the purpose of the picket line?

Mr. L: The Purpose of the picket line is, It seemed so years ago than it does now, the picket line right now, lets you know and lets management know your.

Mr. L: interested in your union and so you go to a picket line and make your presence know. Before the picket line was there more or less the same and also to keep any workers who would want to sneak in and go to work, we don't have much of that now, but I guess the main thing right now, at this time, is just to show them that you support the Union and you there to do this.

Me: What actually happens there, what kind of stuff do you do?

Mr. L: Oh Boy, we do a lot of things you sit and tell stories, play some horseshoe, and probably drink some beer. But the main thing is what you do is a bunch of people getting together at the gate or entrance to the property, letting management know you back the Union and ~~you~~ letting them know your there.

Me: Do you remember any interesting stories from on a picket line?

Mr. L: Not really, I don't recall in any amount, in all the times I've been to the picket line, I've never experienced any trouble, with anybody trying to cross the picket line. Before that when the Union first started I guess they did have the had people turning over cars of the people trying to go to work. Those particular people were called "Scabbs" and there ain't no Scabbs no more. There are people who would like to work don't cross the picket line. So, I guess that about it or that.

Me: In general what is the most interesting or unique story from any time the workers were on strike?

Mr. L: Well I can recall, being in a family that's been working in the mines for years, Uncles and father, brothers, sons. I got to go back to when the Union first started, I had an Uncle who was president of one of the local Unions, and prior to becoming president he didn't care for the Union. He said it would just make things worse. But something happened where the company kind of changed his mind for him. And he became one of the best Union men around and also became president of the local union. And listening to him talk is where they thought guys who were getting their hair cut in non-Union barber shops. A lot of, kind of too much on the side of violence. But that's the way it was, and it's now longer like that its very, very, seldom you see any trouble with anyone trying to cross the picket line.

Me: What takes place at a Union Meeting or Union Rally?

Mr. L: Well at a Union Rally of course you're there more or less to support the people you have in office of your Union and you get a big turnout of people, when you're on strike it's usually ~~around~~ around Labor Day, and we have kind of a parade in Marquette and a lot of people come for that. I think the biggest part is to show Union people and we're serious about what we should believe it should be, and I think with a big turnout like that I think they realize themselves. I guess that's what happens. As far as a Union Meeting goes it's primarily the same thing, they've got a lot of things they do for the goodwill of the people, they help out they plan a lot of stuff, they donate money to ... probably little league baseball but the most important thing is they get a chance to talk about the job, the place you work, safety, any grievances that come up on the job, what steps they are in and how they settle them. And just an every month report on how things are doing.

Me: In your opinion why is the steelworkers Union so important to the workers?

Mr. L: My opinion why the steelworkers Union is so important, I think it's made better people of the people of the Union. It takes It gives better job classifications where they got like a welder standard, and electrician standard, and it's all based on probably what the company and the Union came up with. They've kind of made everybody stick together a little bit more, we don't have people coming and going. You get a job at the mine, it seems like when you start there you're there till you retire. So it's got to be somewhat to do with the Union and the way the company and the Union get along together.

Me: Did the Union have a big effect on safety standards and job classifications?

Mr. L: Oh yeah, the Union has very much become a part of ~~the~~ as far as our working conditions and safety items. When a county safety inspector comes around there is a Union safety man with him, and a company safety man with him, so right there you have three people looking out for your welfare right there and any way they can help you or recognize any job that could be potential danger. It's come a long way ~~since~~ in the later years about safety it's a good idea.

Me: Please describe what you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Mr L: Oh Boy, I definitely like to fish and hunt and go to camp. I guess that's about it, I like to monkey around in the garden a little bit.

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

Mr L: Well, if I had to do it all over again in the same part of the country, same place I was we were born, there's not much to do but mining or logging - and I think I would do the same thing again, I like the challenge of working with Iron and when your all done you know its going to fit or make it for somebody else that you just got the word of mouth from, its quite a challenge and quite a reward when to know that its done the way you want it. That's why I'd do it again. ~~I guess I'd do the same thing again~~ I'd do it again. *include + quite*

Me: What Impressions do you have in your mine concerning your association with CCI?

Mr L: Well looking back over the year, although I haven't been ~~around~~ with CCI along with all my mining experience, but I've been with them for 30 years plus. I think the biggest part is the way the mining is done today. I think I mentioned back in the interview that about the equipment its gotten much, much, bigger, we used to have 4 yard shovel buckets, today they're coming out with 33 yard shovel buckets, our loaders before where 1 1/2 to 2 yrd. buckets now they have 16 to 20 yrd. buckets. Every thing is bigger, everything is moving faster it seems and I hope its for the benefit of everybody - its come to where they're moving more dirt and iron ore I don't know really what to say other than that things ~~are~~ have changed considerable. from what it used to be ~~fill~~ now. Its more or less its bigger, faster and better. *include*

Me: Before we end the interview is there anything else you'd like to add?

Mr L: Not really, we've covered quite a bit so far. But I know without Iron Mines I don't know what this place would be like. It would be sort of like a desert with a lot of trees. There would be no people, maybe it would be better that way, maybe it wouldn't, I don't know. But I know the Iron Mines ~~are~~ have helped a lot of people there's a lot of people working at the Mines and I hope that they continue;

15) Me: Thank You. That was interesting Mr L. Good

- 1 Welding and job requires
- 2 Stories
- 3 Why pick job and later on
- 4 Underpound
- 5 Improvements
- 6 Safety
- 7 Opinions
- 8 where worked

yellow

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orange 2/6