

TAPE 1 SIDE A

Interview with Lowell K. Smail
100 Marble Street
Ishpeming, MI 49849

DATE: April 5, 1994

Interviewer: Mary Andes

Refers to Lowell as Uncle Lowell because he is her uncle.

LS: Born in Negaunee on January 21, 1923.

INT: Names of your parents and their occupations.

LS: Fathers name was William Chapman Smail and he was a telegrapher for the railroad. My mothers name was Clara Ann Penhale and was a housewife.

INT: Next lets talk about where you went to High School, the year that you graduated and what you did after high school which I presume was military service.

LS: Well, I never did graduate I never did go to High school, just went to work after grade school.

INT: Now, when you went to work after grade school what work was that and how old were you?

LS: sixteen, I was a bell hop at the hotel in Negaunee.

INT: Which hotel was that?

LS: The Breitung Hotel, I was bellhop and boiler man. I had to take care of the furnace at night.

INT: Now, was there a reason why you started working when you were sixteen, was it your choice or was it a necessity for the family?

LS: No, it was just, I thought I knew everything there was to know.

INT: And I see that hasn't changed right?

LS: Right!

INT: You were sixteen when you started at the Breitung, and then after that what and when?

LS: Well, worked there about a year, and then I went odd jobs, worked for the railroad for a few years, a few summers, then worked on WPA for a while. Wasn't supposed to but I was driving truck for my brother, he owned a truck so they hired the truck and I was the driver.

INT: Why was it that you weren't supposed to do that?

LS: Well that was for older people, I was only 18 at the most. Well that was later, I worked for Abe Wolf later on.

INT: Who was Abe Wolf?

LS: He was a junk dealer you might say, he picked up different metals then he went into car business, fruit business.

INT: O.k. so he's somebody that's probably fairly well known in Negaunee that people can place him. After you worked for Abe Wolf then what?

LS: Well, lets see, worked for the city of Negaunee for a year doing odd jobs and that, then I went to Detroit in the early forty's to work at the bomber plant, Ypslanti

INT: You did that for how long?

LS: I was there for roughly about 2 years, then my number came up to go into the Army, so I went in the Army.

INT: And how old were you when you went into the Army?

LS: About 21.

INT: And where did marriage fit into all this?

LS: I was married before I went into the Army. Got married roughly the first year I was in Ypslanti.

INT: And can you give me date of your marriage and your wifes maiden name?

LS: 1942. My wifes name was Dawn Tippett Smail. Original.

LS: November 25.

INT: Alright. I guess I'd like to skip over military service because that's another story and when you left the military what year was that and what did you do at the time you left the military.

LS: I was discharged in 1945 and it took me almost a year to get a job in the mines.

INT: Why did it take so long?

LS: They weren't hiring too many then.

INT: Just briefly can you tell me what you did for a living in between the time you left the service and the time you got in the mine?

LS: Well they gave us unemployment for so many weeks after we got out of service. And I also worked in the woods for Joe Erickson cutting pulp.

INT: That was in Ishpeming, Negaunee area?

LS: Yes.

INT: When you did get hired at the mine, what year was that and what type of job were you hired for?

LS: 1947. I was hired as a common laborer to begin with.

INT: Do you remember what kinds of things you were told at the time you were hired to orient you into what your job was going to be and what did they tell you what to wear and this was I presume underground, and I'd like to also know what mine it was?

LS: It was the Mather A and really they didn't tell us what we had to wear, you found that out from the other miners. You had to have rubber boots and heavy clothes, because it's cold down there.

INT: How cold?

LS: Oh some places in the 40's and some places a little warmer. But it was the same temperature all year long, you might say. Different spots were hotter, but the reason it was hotter was the poor air circulation, I think.

INT: Do you remember it being really humid or stuffy underground at all?

LS: Not really, it was pretty good air, most of the time?

INT: Did you have any special clothing other than the rubber boots and having something warm did you have to wear hearing protection, respirators anything like that?

LS: No. Our hard hats and our lights.

INT: Of the equipment that you had to have your hard hats and your lights, did you have to purchase that yourself or did the mine provide that for you?

LS: The company provided.

INT: If you can think for a minute about the very first day that you went to work in a mine, did you have any special recollections of what that was like or what your thoughts were before you actually started work on your first day. Any new job has a little anxiety and a little butterflies in the stomach and that kind of thing and I just wondered if there was anything in particular that you remembered about the ride down in the cage or what the other men were like?

LS: Well the ride down in the cage was scary the first time. Its just as though they cut the floor out from under you and down you went. Once you got used to riding in the cage it was good, but the first time was kind of scary.

INT: Do you have any idea how fast the cage went down?

LS: I should know, I ended up being engineer in the engine house, I think it was 1700 feet a minute.

INT: Did that leave you with a butterfly feeling in your stomach.

LS: Yes.

INT: Can you describe the cage a little bit and how many people it could hold at one time?

LS: Well, its roughly 8 feet square theirs two decks on it, altogether its about 20 feet high. The deck itself is only 8', 6 feet maybe. It comes to a point at the top. It was safe enough in there.

INT: Why is it called a cage?

LS: I have no idea.

INT: Was it all enclosed on the outside or made with bars.

LS: Yes, all enclosed metal, with sliding door on each end.

INT: So, it kind of felt like an elevator.

LS: Yes, like an elevator, only there was no lights in there, it was pitch dark. If you turn your headlight off it was pitch dark in there.

INT: You might have answered this question already but, how many men would go down in a cage.

LS: All together I'd say there was 30 men to the deck and there was two decks so you'd have 60 men.

INT: The process when you would get to work was what?

LS: Go into the dry building, clean clothes first, take your clean clothes off, then you go to your clean clothes dry into the dirty clothes dry and put your dirty clothes on. Your winter underwear, overalls, your boots, hard hat, belt.

INT: How many layers of clothes would you have altogether?

LS: I generally only wore long underwear and a pair of overalls.

INT: When you say changing from clean clothes to dirty clothes, describe why you were calling the dirty clothes the dirty clothes?

LS: They were covered with iron ore dust and that, they were dirty, you wouldn't want to wear them home, that was for sure.

INT: And what color?

LS: Red. When you brought them home every two weeks, maybe or every week to wash them, the washing machine would turn red.

INT: I bet they smelled real good to huh?

LS: Pretty good.

INT: We had tape stopped we started talking about some of the horseplay that happens on the cage.

LS: There was one fella who was kinda dirty, especially if your a new man, he'd get up behind and pee down your pants leg. Course he got a couple of kicks now and then, but he still kept it up till his old age. I don't know how he lived to be old. That was one of his dirty tricks.

INT: Did he do this to every new employee?

LS: Everyone he could get to, to do it.

INT: So it didn't matter how long you had been there, he would do it anyway, right?

LS: Yeh, he'd try to get you. Then they would kick each other in the legs, flip your hats off on purpose, sometimes they even knock them off and they go down the shaft they'd fall out the door and down the shaft they'd go.

INT: What would happen if somebody did lose their hat down the shaft like that? Would you have to pay to replace your own hat or would the company replace it, or how was that done?

LS: You'd have to pay to replace your own hat.

INT: And how much did that cost?

LS: \$2.50 if I remember right.

INT: Do you have any other recollections of silliness that would go on in the dry or in the ride down or lunch time or the funny nicknames people had for each other, things of that nature?

LS: Well, in the dry sometimes, in the shower room, they'd turn the hot water off on you if you weren't watching them close, that was one of their games, or steal your soap and you'd have to try and wash without soap.

INT: Any body every steal your clothes?

LS: No, they were pretty good about clothes, if you got caught you got in trouble?

INT: What kind of trouble?

LS: You could get fired for stealing somebody's clothes, even though it was a joke.

INT: You ever know of anybody that that happened to without mentioning any names?

LS: No I don't.

INT: Let's get back to the first job, that you started with, you said it was as a laborer, and can you describe that for little bit for me?

LS: Well, when I got down on the level, the boss told me to go in the drift and there was a car in there to start mucking the ditch. When your working in the mine like that, there's certain percentage of the water coming down carries ore with it and it started piling up in the ditches so we had to go in an muck out the ditches by hand and throw them in these cars.

INT: When you say mucking out the ditch, you had to shovel the muck out?

LS: Shovel it out, and it was sticky. It would stick to your shovel and stick to your boots, it would stick all over.

INT: So there was a little oily consistency to that too as well as being sticky

LS: Right there is.

INT: When you had to muck out the ditch, you would do this for the whole 8 hour shift?

LS: Whole 8 hours shift, day in and day out until you got promoted, you might say.

INT: And how long would it usually take before you got promoted?

LS: Month maybe, couple weeks, all depends how short handed they were.

INT: During the course of a work day like that when you were mucking the ditch, how much of a break would you get like a bathroom break or a lunch break or something like that?

LS: You had twenty minutes for lunch that was the only real break you got, otherwise you kept steady at it so you could show progress you might say.

INT: And how many people did you have that you worked with in your immediate area, doing this?

LS: Most of the time four of us worked together.

INT: So you got to know those four people pretty well then?

LS: Yes, and then sometimes they'd switch crews. They'd take one man away and give him another job for a day or two then maybe they'd give somebody else a job, they switch around quite a bit.

INT: So you got a little bit of relief from shoveling.

LS: Right.

INT: Then after you got through mucking the ditches, what did you do next?

LS: Next they put us on midnight shift, hoisting timber. The hoist lagging up and the timbers set up to the miners are drifting, all your lagging, whatever they needed.

INT: Can you describe what lagging is?

LS: Lagging is cedar splint so its about 3" in diameter.

INT: Is that put in as a support for the

LS: Its put in as a cushion, so when the ore comes down it compresses a little bit without breaking. Maybe they'll put 2 feet behind a set as it comes down it compresses down quite a bit.

INT: The wood compresses down.

LS: Yes.

INT: When you were doing the work with the timbers, again how many people would their be in a crew, and would you have to go a long distance from one point to another to transport the wood?

LS: There was most of the time their was three or four of us on a crew. We'd go in, the motor man would bring the timber trucks in and we'd go to different spots in the drift and hoist it up to the different mining crews up above. Sometimes you had to hoist it up 200 feet maybe you were lucky some nights you'd only have to hoist a couple 50 footers. It was work, you had to keep busy to get your allotted hoisting done.

INT: So they would have a set amount of timber for you to hoist?

LS: Yes, they'd give us maybe 15 trucks of stuff to hoist and then

INT: Can you describe how long the timbers were, how heavy they were?

LS: The big timbers were hardwood, generally maple, some birch, but they were the majority were 8' long and the cap was 12' long. They were at least a foot in diameter.

INT: You said you had to do 15 trucks, can you describe what the truck looked like, was that a train car more than a truck?

LS: It was a little flat car with the four wheels, post on the side to hold the timbers on, the engine or the motorman pushed them in for us. They were hooked together with little chains.

INT: What was used to hoist the timbers up?

LS: An air tugger with a big steel cable at least a 1/2 inch cable. They put that down the raise they called it the timber road. It was just a 4 x 4 raise going up and we used that just for hoisting timber. The men didn't travel in that section. Because sometimes timber gets stuck and it has to go up the ladder road and bar them over sometimes they'd fall down again on the track, you'd have to start over, most of the time it worked pretty good.

INT: So the timber road was not used for shoveling ^eor_A back down it was just used for timber.

LS: Just for timber.

INT: There was another word that you used when you were talking about sliding the wood, I can't remember what that word is . . . the word we wanted to get a little definition on is barring them over.

LS: We'd have a long bar about 6-8 feet long and in between the timbers on the timber road there is a space maybe 2-3 inches you put your bar in there and get the timbers to move and they'd either go up or they'd fall down again.

INT: I saw a gesture with your hands there that we can't see on the tape, when the timbers were put on the cars were there spacers in between so you could get them off there more easily?

LS: Sometimes they were put pretty close together you had to bar them a little bit to get our cable hooked on to them.

INT: So barring was kind of like using a lever?

LS: Yes, like a wrecking bar.

INT: Then, you went from mucking to doing timber, and basically that involved delivering the timber into the raises?

LS: The raises and the drifts where the miners were working.

INT: And what would the miners use the wood for?

LS: To hold the back up or to hold the ore up, if you might say, if you know what the back was, its the roof of the drift.

INT: That's what I was going to ask you to define what the back is.

INT: After you did that job, you would of done that for about how long? Months, or years?

LS: Oh, I'd say I was on that about six months.

INT: Then what after that?

LS: Then I went off and on with some of the miners, if one of the miners were home they'd take one of us and put us with a miner for a day or two.

INT: So that was how you learned what the miners did?

LS: Yes.

INT: Can you describe what the actual, the person with the job description of miner did?

LS: Start off with a straight face in the morning we'd go in

INT: Wait a second, I want to stop you for a moment and tell me what a straight face is?

LS: O.k. That's the end of the drift and then we'd go in and we'd drill and we'd put the dynamite in to blast get all set to blast generally they'd blast around dinner time.

INT: Why was that?

LS: So the smoke could clear out while we were eating, and after the smoke cleared out and got through eating go back in and scrape that dirt out and when we got it all cleaned out we put the set up again the two likes of timber and the top timber and put the lag behind the sets and start all over again, drill again and blast, scrape it out.

INT: When you say scrape the dirt out do you mean scrape the ore out?

LS: Sometimes it was rock, sometimes we worked in rock too, it all depends what we were in ore or rock.

INT: Can you describe what was used to do the scraping?

LS: That's going to be a hard scraper. Like a teaspoon would bent at a right angle, only most of them were 4 feet wide, 2 feet high and the arms came out to a point in the front, we had a cable hooked on the front and a cable hooked on the back, pulled it back in and then pulled it out.

INT: You might say its like a triangular shape device that has a blade on the back end of it so it was being towed and that flat blade came with the ore.

LS: Yeh.

INT: What is a set?

LS: A set is a set of timber two legs they call them and a cap on top. Sometimes it took 8-10 men to put the cap on because they were generally pretty heavy and it would be pretty strong to hold that back up, the roof up.

INT: That was all done by hand, did they have jacks or anything like that to put the

LS: All done by hand.

INT: So was the cross piece put up first and then the supports?

LS: No the two legs were put up first then we made like a staging cross so you could stand on that to lift your cap up. Some of those caps took all you had.

INT: So the when the cap was put on you were literally pushing up against the ore body?

LS: Just about yes. Maple, big maple and birch logs.

INT: I think we talked about the size of those but can you reiterate the size, the diameter and the length.

LS: Well most of the caps were roughly 12 feet long and anywhere from 18-26" in diameter.

INT: So as I understand the process it would be basically a fresh face of ore that would be set with charges and blasted and lifted out and then some supports put up again and the process would repeat again.

LS: Yes, that would be about it, unless when you blast ^{ed} it somebody didn't watch to ^{to} close and they blasted four or five sets down there when you put the charge up. That was very bad.

INT: Why was that very bad?

LS: Well then you had to go in and put the sets back up and clean your way in again and put a set up and clean your way and put a set up, it didn't happen too often, because you didn't make no money when that happened you just got company count.

INT: What is company count?

LS: Well they pay you so much a foot, whether you get anything done or not they just go by the footage. When your getting paid by the foot, you want to get lots done.

INT: So you got paid a basic hourly wage, and then a footage rate besides?

LS: Yes.

INT: So then, the sets being those sets of timbers, if you took out if you blasted out of five sets of timbers you lost quite a bit of yardage didn't you?

LS: You did you lost quite a bit of money.

INT: What would you estimate the distance between the sets?

LS: I'd say 8 feet.

INT: Would you be willing to say, give ^b us an approximate figure on what the hourly wage would be when you first started as an ^o laborer then when you were doing the timbers and then when you became a miner and what that bonus would ^{have} of been the distance bonus you would of gotten?

LS: It wouldn't be accurate because its too long ago, I think when I first started I started at \$2 something an hour and I gradually worked up timber hoisting was a little more, say, \$2.75 hour then mining you made quite a bit more I'd say \$5.00 an hour.

INT: What would be the additional rate be then for the distance, what did you call that?

LS: Footage.

INT: What was the footage rate? Can you remember at all?

LS: No I can't.

INT: And who accounted for the footage was that the shift boss responsibility?

LS: The shift boss came in and measured everyday.

INT: So you really wanted to put some pressure on your co workers for doing a really good job.

LS: Produce.

INT: Was there a real strong sense of teamwork among the men underground?

LS: Oh Yes, each bunch of men wanted to keep their end of the cycle up. Sometimes we got a partner that doesn't want to work very good. But the majority of the men worked together, the harder you worked the more money you make, that's what it boils down to.

INT: Did they ever try to set quotas or little competitions, anything like that?

LS: They tried sometimes like the opposite crew would say we made 8 ft today, got it all drilled for you see what you can do, so they, like that they kept working.

INT: Was 8 ft. considered pretty good days work or what was the benchmark for that?

LS: I'd say 8 ft. was a good's day work. Like sometimes you ran into hard ore or hard rock, took you longer to drill, maybe the blast didn't clean it out like you should.

TAPE 1 SIDE B

INT: Good footage for a days work, anything else you can add about mining the task of a miner that you think that you might have not thought about yet?

LS: Well, sometimes they had it rough you know, they the set would come down, or the back would cave in, in other words the roof would come down unexpectedly you'd have to clean that out again, new poles above the set, fill that space up with wood so to hold the back up.

INT: So sometimes if there was a soft ceiling then, you would end up putting in a wood ceiling in?

LS: You hit the nail on the head right there, you'd put a lot of lag, first you'd put poles up then you put lagging on top of them and keep putting up as much as you can so when the dirt did fall it could only fall maybe 8" 10" and the cedar would take care of it.

INT: Was there very much of the area that you worked that needed to have reinforcement in to keep the back up like that?

LS: Not where I worked personally, no.

INT: Lets talk about lunch, what did you typically have for lunch and how did you ~~care~~ ^{carry} it into work with you?

LS: Well, I carried my steel dinner pail with a thermos bottle in it.

INT: Can you describe your steel dinner pail, what kind of shape was it, approximately?

LS: A foot long roughly, four inches wide, eight inches high. Had a thermos bottle in there, it had generally carried two sandwiches, a piece of fruit, and a piece of ~~twinkie~~ ^{twinkie} or something on that order.

INT: something sweet.

LS: sweet.

INT: Then was it pretty much rectangular in shape or did it have a little kinda of a tunnel type on the top to accommodate the thermos?

LS: It was real round on the top yes, to hold the thermos up there.

INT: So it was almost like the shape of a cylinder on top of a rectangular ~~only~~ ^e only with the sides smoothed out.

LS: Yeh.

INT: Was this the type of lunch pail that everybody had, and were there any restrictions that you had on the size of your dinner pail, based on what your job was or ~~carrying~~ ^{carrying} it down the cage or anything like that?

LS: No, you could carry whatever you wanted to carry your food in. Some people only carried paper bags. Some people didn't even take a lunch. Got into the habit of not eating when they were working so didn't take a lunch.

INT: When it got to be time for dinner break or the lunch break did you just kind of sit down in the tunnel, where did you have lunch?

LS: Generally by the tugger, that's the machinery that pulled the scraper in and out, we generally had poles or something there dry to sit on. Maybe the miners on the next drift would come over and we'd all eat in that one spot. Sometimes you ate alone, because if you were scraping dirt nobody else was around you and sat and ate was time.

INT: There was usually a set time for the lunch break?

LS: No, generally when you were mining you got so far in and if you were all set to blast and you blasted then you'd go and eat.

INT: So the job sometimes dictated when you would have your lunch time?

LS: Right, go according to the job.

INT: When a group of guys would sit down and have lunch together, were there typical topics of conversation?

LS: Well not so much mostly about the work and stuff like that.

INT: Did you get the chance to get to know many of your co workers that might have been working in nearby sections?

LS: Sometimes yes, we'd go visit at lunch time or they'd come over, you'd get to know them.

INT: I've been dying to ask this question, Where did you go to the bathroom underground?

LS: Just about anywhere's you felt like, no they had honey boxes every so often, they were the stinking ^{rest} things going. Yeh that's what they called them (honey box) and the guys that's all they did was go down different levels and pick these boxes up and send them up to surface clean them up and send them down again.

INT: Can you describe what a honey box looked like?

LS: Its a box about 2 1/2 feet square and a board across the top for you to sit on that was it.

INT: It wasn't even a one holer was it?

LS: Well, it was one hole but it was a big hole. And you didn't bring your own toilet paper and their was very little there.

INT: I think we'll just let that comment go!

LS: Yes.

INT: I want to back track it too, when you mentioned lunch break, you said you would find a place to sit down and if there was a log or something by the tigger it was a dry spot was the bottom of the shaft not the shaft but the help me out the passageway.

LS: The floor of the drift.

INT: Was it wet?

LS: Sometimes you had a wet spot and you had to really look for a dry place to sit to eat.

INT: So was it kind of the nature that the Mather A that the ore was a little bit soft and sometimes it was a little dampest and a little cool that was just general working conditions?

LS: Yes, that would be about it.

INT: Do you remember having to pay any particular attention to noise and stuff with blasting was that a concern to the miners at all?

LS: Not when we worked, we just blasted, now a days they won't allow that, you have to have ear plugs in and so far away from it.

INT: Do you remember when you were doing mining, did you personally set charges, or was there was a regular blasting crew that did that?

LS: The regular miners did it, I never did it because, I helped charge but the more qualified man he did the lighting of the fuses. Because he cut certain length and he'd light them all and then he'd you know

INT: Can you describe from the beginning from drilling a hole to the blast itself and how that whole process went?

LS: Well you went in with a if you were drilling an ore you went in with a dry machine and you drilled your hole into the ore.

INT: And how deep would the hole be?

LS: Roughly eight feet. You'd start off with a 2 foot rod then a 4 foot rod, then you'd put your 8 feet rod in

INT: So was this like a big drill bit when you say rod?

LS: Yeh just like a big drill bit.

INT: And the diameter of the bit would be what?

LS: The diameter of the bit would be approximately 2" and you'd put roughly 30 holes in if it was ore.

INT: About how far apart?

LS: Roughly 2 feet.

INT: So you kind of created a grid?

LS: Yes. The head miner was more experienced he'd tell us where to put the holes.

INT: After the holes were drilled, then what?

LS: Then you'd get a wooden stick and you'd help the miner and he'd put the fuse in the cap and one stick and you'd push that way in and you'd mark the stick pull it out and maybe you put three sticks in push them in after you got the hole almost filled to the end.

INT: You said mark the stick and pull it out what does that mean?

LS: Well you'd hold onto the stick after how far you got it in so you would know you were in all the way with your powder.

INT: O.k.

LS: Because sometimes the powder would stick and it would break and you'd have a heck of a job getting it in again.

INT: So then, about, you would put sticks of dynamite in?

LS: Yes, sticks of dynamite. Inch and inch and a half in diameter and 8 inches long.

INT: How many sticks would fill a hole?

LS: Roughly eight, then on the end you'd tamp some sand, we called it sand, but it would be ore or rock, because if you didn't sometimes it blow right out of the hole it wouldn't break the dirt but put the dirt in and tamp it tight the ~~conclusion~~ ^{^concussion} would go inwards.

INT: That makes sense. And the fuse would come out where you tamp the dirt in?

LS: Right.

INT: On some old mining shows that I've seen they say fire in the hole, did they say that when they would ignite the dynamite or when you had

LS: Yes, when we lit the fuse we'd holler fire in the hole, just before we even lit we went around and told the miners that were close to us that were going to blast at a certain time and then when we lit the fuse we'd holler fire in the hole.

INT: You would tell the miners within approximately how close to where you were setting charges?

LS: Roughly 100 feet.

INT: So would they be within in ear shot when you said fire in the hole, they would stay where they were or would they go some place else too?

LS: They would stay where they were.

INT: And you'd have to be how far away from the blast when it went off?

LS: Oh about 100 feet, roughly.

INT: Then would there be dust and debris and stuff like that?

LS: Oh yeh, there would be a lot of dust and a lot of smoke from the powder.

INT: You mentioned that people would have their dinner during the time that was clearing, so that was 20 minutes for the smoke?

LS: Roughly 20 minutes. Sometimes the smoke didn't get out in time and then you'd take a air hose and blow smoke around. Then it would eventually go out.

INT: What were the air hoses used for other then blowing the smoke out after a blast?

LS: For your drill machine they were air operated.

INT: Did you ever have an occasion to use a drilling machine?

LS: Yes, I used a drilling machine.

INT: And was that used for drilling the holes for the charges?

LS: Yes.

INT: So that would of been forced air, electrically powered?

LS: Forced air. Pumped down from the surface.

INT: Do you think we've covered everything about the mining part of the job that you've did underground, is there anything that you would like to add to that?

LS: There was one day that they put me with a miner, he was, they called him a long-hole driller. I was going to be his partner for the day. And he took me in a place that I never knew existed in the mine, it was a dogdrift. A dogdrift is almost like it means just room for dog to go through it was maybe 2 feet wide, 18" wide, it varied, maybe 3 feet high all the way in. And you'd crawl in a couple hundred feet like that and then there's a kinda bigger opening at the end and he'd drill long holes maybe 50-60 feet then they'd charge them and blast them. I never got in on the blasting on that but I got in on some of the drilling with him. I didn't like that in there, that was too close.

INT: What did that feel like having to go 200 feet in a space just big enough for your body to go through?

LS: It was scary a little bit, because when your used to 8ft square maybe 9ft square drift, then go into this little place you didn't know what was at the end, the first time especially.

INT: How many times did you have to do that?

LS: I only worked in their 3 days, that was enough I was glad to get out of there.

INT: Do you think that it was pretty typical of this more experienced guy to just take somebody in there just two or three times because that was all they could take of it do you think?

LS: No, generally they have a regular crew that did this, but for a couple days his partner was off sick, so they left me (holding up it(??? can't make it out) We got our work done but, it was fun in a way but it was scary.

INT: Do you think maybe knowing that you didn't have to do it all the time, made it a little more fun?

LS: Yes.

INT: Any other things along that line, like when you were doing the timber job earlier, did you every find that you were feeling a little precarious when you were doing climbing and stuff like that did they have like wooden ladders to climb or what?

LS: Well, the only other time I was scared, one of the main drifts on fifth level, in fact, we went in to get some ore and part of the side of the drift was gone, We noticed it was gone so we pulled the train out and we went back in with our lights and we shined them in and their was a big hole there, the hole you could never see the top anymore no matter how powerful the light they brought down so it must of went up 500 feet at least then it went down maybe 200 feet, so you got a hole in the Mather A there, that I know of 7 feet high, you might say. Of course, its full of water now

INT: What would of accounted for the hole, was their a sudden cave in or what?

LS: No, they figure when they were taking ore out of the bottom they figured it was coming from somewhere else, but it had shifted over and it was coming from this particular spot and then finally it broke through the side of the drift there, and that's how they noticed where they were. Even the engineers didn't know where they were.

INT: So that's one of the once in a lifetime things, that you just happened to be close enough to witness?

LS: Witness, right.

INT: Was the hole in the drift was it real close to where the cars were?

LS: Right beside the track maybe six feet off of the track.

INT: So it was pretty fortunate then that you were close enough that you could pull the cars and everything. In your opinion was it a fortunate thing with the cars being at risk for going into the hole too?

LS: No they wouldn't of went down, but you never knew how far that hole would cave over afterwards.

INT: I see.

LS: So once they knew about it they cut that drift off they blocked it off.

INT: Do you have any idea approximately what year that might of been?

LS: 56, 57 somewhere in there.

INT: Lets go on to after you worked as a miner, and this would of been, you worked in the mine how long when you were done as a miner and went on to the next job?

LS: Maybe a year, then I went skip tending, that's working out in the shaft. You load the measuring pocket with ore and the skip would come and you open the door and load the skip. Then you ring the bell and the hoist man would hoist the dirt up.

INT: Can you define a skip for me?

LS: Well a skip is a second cousin to the cage, you might say. It's six feet square, roughly 20 feet long and it carries 12 tons. Sometimes you open the door and the dirt wouldn't go down and you try blowing and blowing it and it wouldn't go. Then you went down in the shaft and you stood on top of the skip and you poked the dirt and the dirt came down and filled the skip. Then you rang three slow bells who ever was on top and the skip would come up high enough so the man that was standing on the top could get out the door and come back up.

INT: So the skip was the actual hoisting device to get the ore out?

LS: That was a hoisting device yes.

INT: One of the things I realize that I didn't ask you is, what color was everything underground. As you looked around what did you see when you were underground?

LS: Generally black. Mostly everything was black, dark gray, you had lights on but they weren't that good.

INT: And even the color of the ore body itself was black?

LS: No that was reddish, the ore body itself.

INT: What about all the equipment, obviously mostly made of metal, but was it mostly reddish color from the ore?

LS: Yes they were generally reddish from the ore. Sometimes when they were hauling a lot of rock it changed to grayish.

INT: And I suppose most of the men were about that color too?

LS: Right, pretty dirty sometimes.

INT: When you were a skip tender was your job then to make sure that the ore got from what into the skip?

LS: They called it a trench, a big long drift and track was right beside it and the cars would come out and they had a little wheel on the side of the car and then they'd go on the camel back they called it, that was like a big hump on the side of the track part of the car would go under this to hold it down and the other part with the wheel the fifth wheel would go over this camel back and dump the car and go down the other side and close. When you ran roughly ten cars through then you'd pull them back and the motor man would take his motor and take them inside again. Load them again.

INT: So then the little camel back spot on the track was located exactly next to the skip and it would dump it into the skip?

LS: It would dump it into the trench and then we would scrape it into the measuring pocket so that when the skip came down we'd open the door. It was air operated big cylinder and open the door and the dirt would fall down into the skip, shut the door and give the engineer the signal to hoist it to surface.

INT: So, I'm trying to get a feel from the proximity of each to the other, the I know a lot of this is documented elsewhere but just so I understand it, the measuring pocket would of been something that had a slant to it and a door that would lift at the bottom?

LS: Yes, you got it right there. Slanted on two sides the other two sides were straight, and it was a pretty good slant. The ore went out good most of the time.

INT: So the measuring pocket would hold the same volume of ore as the

LS: Yes, 12 tons.

INT: And then was it a trap door that would lift?

LS: It was on the side more or less, you could call it a trap door but it was on the side and it would lift up.

INT: Kind of like a guillotine going up?

LS: Right, it would go up and the dirt would go down most of the time. When the pocket was empty you'd shut the door and fill it up again, scrap her.

INT: On those occasions when the ore would get stuck in the measuring pocket then what would you have to do?

LS: Well we'd try to bar it down from up on top, either bar it or use water pipe but sometimes even that failed then we'd have to go down and stand on top of the skip and bar it from down there.

INT: Whats a water pipe?

LS: A pipe that you can put water through.

INT: High pressure?

LS: Yes high pressure, its about 60 lbs, I'd say.

INT: So sometimes then that force water under pressure would be enough to knock the rock loose?

LS: Yes, it would wash the dirt around the rocks and then they'd start moving and then they'd go down.

INT: I think I understand this a little bit better now, if that still didn't work was there like a ladder of some sort that you would go down and stand up on edge of the skip and work from below with the bar to push to prod, and make the ore come out of the measuring pocket?

LS: Well we'd go on the skip side of the blinding and between the skip and the cage theres a ladder road its roughly 4 feet wide. We'd have ladders to go down then we'd have to go down maybe 20 feet and open a little trap door and go in and stand on top of the skip and bar it down.

INT: O.k. I think I understand that pretty clearly now. The skip and the cage were pretty much side by side in the shaft?

LS: They were separated roughly four feet by the ladder ^{road} rope.

INT: Then were the skips ever operate at the same time that the men were going up and down in the cage?

LS: No, generally they stopped the skip when they were hoisting the men.

INT: We've talked about how the skip and the cage went up side by side with the ladder ^{road} out in between, was their any other difference between the way the two were set up?

LS: Well the skip road was all sheeted in and ironed. Between the sets their was iron all the way to the surface. So there was no chance of dirt going to the skip over into the cage room.

INT: Is there anything else about, so we went from being a miner to being a, what was that job called a skip operator?

LS: A skip tender.

INT: How long did you do that? Approximately.

LS: Approximately couple years. Then one day they were sinking shaft from 6 1/2 level down I say, and they were working down there and they had a small hoist on the side of the shaft, in a little drift they'd hoist the rock up from the bottom of the shaft loading the pocket then they'd bring their big skip down and load that hoist up, but the engineer they had was sick or something so they took me down there and said heres a job for you for a few days. Well that lasted roughly I'd say 4 months, then they needed a engineer up in the big engine house, then I went up to the big engine house.

INT: Can you describe for me what the engineers job is?

LS: The engineer's job is, if your on the skip hoist, you get the signal from the skip tender to hoist or lower the skip, whether its dirt or rock or ore rather. You hoist it up and you dump it, spot the other one and get that one filled up and down up and down all day long, answering signals.

INT: The first engine house that you were in, I'm presuming it was an engine house, where was that was that underground?

LS: Yes, it was underground. It was a small hoist, it wasn't a big one like the one on the surface, we hoisted the dirt that they were breaking up in the bottom of the shaft, brought it up and hoisted it to the surface.

INT: So that was a separate hoist set up, when they were sinking shaft?

LS: Yes, that was a separate hoist.

INT: Now, I'm getting the impression that there was more than one skip in the shaft, how many skips were there altogether?

LS: Two skips, one counterbalancing the other.

INT: How many skip loads an hour, or how many skip loads a shift would there have been?

LS: Oh roughly, a 100 skips a shift.

INT: You did, you ran the engine underground for about 4 months underground, you said, any idea what the size of the engine would be?

LS: That was about a 500 horsepower electric motor on that one.

INT: How did you operate it was it levers or buttons or how did that work.

LS: A bunch of levers, one for the brake, one for going down, and one for coming up.

INT: How did you tell where in the shaft the actual skip was?

LS: We had a mark on our drum to tell you where you were roughly. Then you went by so many revolutions when you were in the small engine house on the (slope???)

INT: So the drum had cable wrapped around it that was connected to the skip?

LS: Yes. Then the big engine house we had a big dial, like a clock piece and that would tell us wherever the pointer was at where it was in the shaft.

INT: Was there any kind of a communication system of where the skip was in the shaft and a look out below type of a thing that you would tell people?

LS: Well, not really because there shouldn't be anyone in the shaft when were hoisting dirt, and just the operators down below, the skip tender he's the only one that had control down on the bottom you might say.

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B