

Derek Lawson's
interview with
Robert Byykkonen

me: To get us started, when and where were you born?

Mr. Byykk: I was born July 23, 1929 in Tri Mountain, Michigan.

me: Where is Tri Mountain located?

Mr. Byykk: Approximately 10 miles west of Houghton on M26.

me: What were your parents names?

Mr. Byykk: Abel and Lillian Pyykkonen

me: When and where were they born?

Mr. Byykk: Dad was born in 1907. Mother was born in 1912. Both were born in the Copper Country Areas.

me: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. Byykk: Yes, 2 sisters and 4 brothers

me: Can you tell me the names?

Mr. Byykk: Gertude and Eeva. Donald, Roy, David, and Bruce.

me: Were you married?

Mr. Byykk: Yes, I am.

me: When and where did you get married?

Mr. Byykk: We got married February 17, 1951 at Laurium, Michigan.

me: What is your spouse's name and what was her maiden name?

Mr. Byykk: Irene. Maiden name was Kohtala.

me: What did your parents do for a living?

Mr. Byykk: Dad was a miner and farmer. Mother was a house wife.

me: Can you remember any specific mines that your dad worked at?

Mr. Byykk: Dad worked the various copper mines in Copper Country. Its been so long ago I don't remember or recall names of the mines but he did work biggest part of the time for the Heckla Mining Company.

me: Where did you go school?

Mr. Byykk: I went to Lair Township school.

me: And where was that located?

Mr. Byykk: Alston, Michigan.

me: Did you graduate from this school?

Mr. Byykk: No. I graduated from the community schools in Ishpeming in the early 70's. I might add that I did when I did started school I went to a one room school from the first grade to the sixth in the same room.

me: What special memories do you have of growing up in this area?

Mr. Byykk: Participating in different sports.

me: Can you describe what sports you participated in?

Mr. Byykk: Cross-Country skiing and ski jumping. Hunting and fishing.

me: Moving on to jobs, How old were you when you found your first job, and where did you work?

Mr. Byykk: I was 15 years old summer job. Worked at the Pelki Cheesed Factory.

me: What types of duties did you perform on your job?

Mr. Byykk: Weighing the milk as the farmers brought it in, and also helping and making cheese and butter and cleaning up afterwards.

me: What stands out in your mind about your first job?

Mr. Byykk: Learning the responsibilities for working for someone else and also earning my own money.

me: Can you remember the total years that you worked in your life time?

Mr. Byykk: Yeah. 43 years.

me: Can you list the jobs and the years

Mr. Byykk: I started working when I was 18 years old sailing the Great Lakes until 1950 when I got a job at the Mather B mine for Cleveland Cliffs. I worked there from 1950 to 1958. Got laid off and worked at the Tracy mine for 59 to 60. Got laid off and worked for the Copper Range Mining company at White Pine from 1960 to 1961. Got back with the Cleveland Cliffs at the Humbolt Mine from 1962 to 1964 where I was transferred to the Mather B and work there until 1979 and when the mine closed I was transferred over to Tilden and worked there until 84'.

me: When did you retire?

Mr. Byykk: Retired in 84'

me: During your life where were you employed the longest?

Mr. Byykk: At the Cleveland Cliffs Mining Company for 33 years.

me: How or why did you chose this career?

Mr. Byykk: I was planning on getting married and my wife to be said you will not be sailing so I decided that I got to chose another career so Cleveland Cliffs was hiring so I applied and I got hired.

me: Did this job require any special training. If so, can you please describe the training?

Mr. Byykk: Yeh. It took years of training on the job training different types of mining.

What me: What special equipment or clothing did this job require?

Mr. Byykk: Just regular clothes with hard toe boots and mining helmet.

me: Did this job have any special rules or regulations to follow?

Mr. Byykk: Yes. Various regulations but safety came first.

me: What was the most rewarding part of your career?

Mr. Byykk: Most rewarding was being with a fine bunch of guys and to learn more responsibilities over the years.

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

Mr. Byykk: I would say the most challenging job was a hoistman at the Ropes Gold Mine.

me: Did any other family members worked for the same company?

Mr. Byykk: Yes. My dad and three brothers Donald, Roy, and David. Two son-in-laws Fred Nault and Bruce Lawson.

me : Did your job put you in any dangerous situations?

Mr. Bykk: Yes. One dangerous situation was when I was a shaft miner at the Mather A. I was building concrete forms from a 100 feet from the bottom when I slipped and fell grabbing on to a support which should of been nailed down by small nails but just prior to that I had ran out of small nails so I used a big one. Lucky I did because I wouldn't be here today.

me: Please describe what your co-workers were like?

Mr. Bykk: They're very pleasant to be with and easy to get along with.

me: At any time, did you feel like changing careers?

Mr. Bykk: No. I never thought of changing careers because as the old saying goes Rolling stone gathers no moss and also this way when you stay with the same company you get a peñtion to look forward to.

me: What were your biggest responsibilities on the job?

Mr. Bykk: To see that everyone works safely.

me: Did you receive any special awards from your employer, and were you recognized in any way by your job performance?

Mr. Bykk: After 25 years of service, I received a gold watch. And after 30 years I received a diamond tie pin.

me: During your employment days and beyond, what have been your favorite hobbies or leisurer activities?

Mr. Bykk: My favorite hobbies were hunting and fishing with my son Steven, and later on with my grandchildren.

me: Do you have any special memories about them?

Mr. Bykk: Yes, I have a special story a my youngest grandson, Griffin, who is 4 years old. We were going to the downtown one day in Ishpeming, When I found out he had no gloves on. I asked him where they were he answered and said, " Papa, I don't need mittens I got pockets." It was so funny, that we all had a laugh.

me: Were you a member of a union?

Mr. Byykk: Yes. I was.

me: Which one was it?

Mr. Byykk: CIO.

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

Mr. Byykk: No I wouldn't. I would have gone to college. My desire has always been to be a ~~mortition~~ mortition.

me: In closing, is there anything else you ^{would} like to add?

Mr. Byykk: No. I don't think. I have answered your questions to the best of my ability and to my memory.

me: Thank you for letting me interview you

Mr. Byykk: Thank you.