

# Nicole LaChapell's interview with William Rowe

Me: I'm Nicole LaChapell and the date of the-  
my interview is November 27, 1993. I'm  
interviewing my grandpa, William Rowe,  
and the purpose of this interview is  
for Red Dust which we're doing on  
iron mining. The location is at his house  
in Negaunee, Michigan.

Me: When and where were you born?

Gramp: I'm Ironwood Michigan, July 22, 1932.

Me: What are the names of your parents?

Gramp: Sidney, Edward Sidney Rowe is my dad,  
came from England right after World  
War I. My mother was born in the  
 Soo Michigan right after her mother  
came from Finland.

Me: What did your parents do for a  
living?

Gramp: My dad was a contract miner and my  
mother was a sales clerk in a shoe store.

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

Gramp: I don't have any.

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

Gramp: I am currently married and my wife's

name is Melvina.

Me: What are the names of your children?

Gramp: Robert, Jo Ellen, Rodney, and Janene.

Me: How long have you been working in the Iron Industry?

Gramp: Well, I've worked in the iron industry for a thirty years.

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

Gramp: To start with, when I was first married, it was the easiest job to get with the most pay in the area in which I was living. I quite

Me: Please name those relatives who have worked in the Iron Industry.

Gramp: My dad, like I said, worked all his life in the iron industry and I have a son who worked in the iron industry.

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

Gramp: Well, the first mine was called the Newport Mine. It was located in Ironwood Michigan and after that I worked in the Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company and that was in Ishpeming, Michigan.

Me: Over the years, what kind of duties have you performed for CCI?

Gramp: For CCI, I was a instrumentation technologist and I supported several engineers and making the process better and doing labor saving devices on all of the equipment that's located in the mines.

Me : What was that first job you said - what was that? - The first one you said?

Dramp: Instrumentation Technologist?

Me : Gya

Dramp: Ok - that's basically taking care of instrumentation. Mainly, my job was to install new types of instrumentation that would make the process easier and more efficient.

Possible quote

Me : In as much detail as possible, describe the main duties of your current job. (If retired, describe the duties of the job you had.)

Dramp: The last job I held with CCI, like I said was instrumentation technologist and that job was varied. It not only included doing instrumentation work. It a - included - ing doing work on castings for their Dato machine, trying to better, better life out of em. I did dust control for the different mines, collecting dust samples out of the stacks and out of the immediate area. Basically, that was my job.

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

Dramp: Yes, it did. I went to school for two years after High School to get a Associate Degree in electronics.

include

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

Dramp: Well, on this job the equipment and machinery would be associated with electrical type, meters, and such we would have to use.

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

Dramp: That would probably getting along with people because I worked out of the main office. You had to go to different properties and work with different people and you had to get along with these people to get work done.

+ include facts

Me: Thinking back over the years, what was the most challenging duty you had to perform and explain why.

Dramp: I can't think of any that were extremely challenging or difficult

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

Dramp: The money. Period.

Me: Nothing was exciting?

Dramp: That's the reason I worked <sup>for</sup> the money. I can't think of any real satisfaction I got out of working other than money and vacation.

Me: What are the biggest responsibilities of your job?

Gramp: *include* Oh boy, well at one time when natural gas was short, at a short supply, and we had five mines working. My job entailed me to distribute gas to each of the properties in whatever request was given to us by the gas company and this had to be split out to different properties on a 24 hour basis. This was a 24 hour job.

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

Gramp: *include* Well, I was an underground miner. That was very, very dangerous job. I guess in one of these next questions I'll tell you more about it.

Me: Have you been involved in ~~any~~ <sup>or</sup> have you witnessed any accidents? If so, please describe them.

Gramp: *include* I was in an accident. When I first started working in a underground mine, I was involved in a cage accident. The reason this accident happened was there was the hoist or cage that brought the miners up. It happened on a New Year's Eve that the company decided to change the air flow from an updraft to a down draft.

Stamp: and what happened was that it was a very cold night and the down draft caused ice to form on the cage route that the cage would take from underground and when we got to the cage in the mor - after midnight shift as the cage got to, to take us up, we could hear the cage starting to break through ice, which had formed in the shaft, and one fella got on the radio and called, but the batteries were dead in the radio so it couldn't stop the cage. We got about 1500 feet up and the cage stuck in the ice and the engineer that was pulling the cage up, realized that something was happening and he stopped the rope dead right there and after a moment all the slack was gone out of the rope and all of a sudden the cage broke loose from that ice that was stopping it and we went straight up in the air about 150 feet and then dropped 150 feet. One minute you were on the roof and on the next minute you were on the floor. There was 44 of us in that cage. About - about twenty two on each level and all of a sudden the rope that had gathered on the divider between the two shaft routes fell off and hit our cage and crushed the top of the cage down to about four feet and after this 6

Steel  
Cable  
Rope

Stamp: we ended up finally getting ~~the~~  
door ajar enough so that we  
could climb out of this cage and  
we had to either ladder up or  
ladder down and I chose to ladder  
down and this was a very difficult  
because the rungs on the ladder  
adjacent to the cage were solid ice.  
There was like a ring of ice an inch  
and a half in diameter and we had  
to ladder down that 1500 ft <sup>to get</sup> down to  
the bottom and there were quite a  
few people hurt in this cage accident.  
Many of em with back injuries which  
I sustained - a back injury at that  
time and the cage hit my head so  
hard that it took my hard hat  
and folded up the sides just like  
a cowboy hat. It took a piece of  
skin off the top of my head  
about the size of a silver dollar  
and I had a very difficult time  
climbing down that ladder. I spent  
several weeks in the hospital  
and I spent almost a year recover-  
ing from that accident. No one  
was killed at the time, but several  
of the guys died within six months  
after that cage accident.

include this  
incident - with detail

Me: Was it - did they die from that?


Me : accident-or?

Gramp: Pardon?

Me : Did they die because of the accident?

Gramp: I would say that that was a very much a self-contributing factor that caused them to die. Many with many many cuts. One fella had his scalp cut above his eyes and peeled back over the top of his head. Whuu.

Me : Could you describe either the most unique or perhaps humorous situations you've seen over the years?

Gramp: Well, I thought about that one and I can't really think about anything humorous about working. 

Me : Please describe your working conditions

Gramp: Well, with CCI it was a very nice environment. The people I worked with were pleasant to work with and I guess you might say working conditions for Cleveland Cliffs was a nice place to work.

Me : How have safety standards changed and ~~how~~ what improvements <sup>do you see</sup> are yet to be made?



Gramp: Of course where I worked, cause I worked in an office safety was not really. I don't know. I would say safety was not a thing to be considered where I worked. I had, I had so little to do with the properties that I, I can't really say that, that or really comment on what needs to be changed as far as standards for safety.

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

Gramp: Well, for me I can't say that the job changed any other than the fact that in 1982 there was a big downturn in the iron industry and at that time I got laid off and of course the jobs that were available at that time were eliminated.

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

Gramp: Like I say, the people that I worked were very easy to work with. I can't think of anything that was special about any of them other than that they were fine to get along with.

Me: O.K. During your career, were you involved in any special projects or have you implemented any new programs? If so, please describe them. 9

Gramp: No, not really.

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

Gramp: Nope.

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

Gramp: No I can't say I ever, other than when I was working in the underground mine I felt that I needed some more education so that I could better myself which I did and of course the reason that I left the mine was because of the injury I received in the - in that cage accident.

Me: O.K. What do you think the future holds for the Tilden and Empire?

Gramp: Well, I think its a limited future, there's only so much ore to be had and I. I wouldn't know how many years were left for the Tilden and Empire. I would - I would think a substantial number of years would its still in the future you can look forward to it them ending both their properties.

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

Gramp: Well, reasonably good. I think a lot of the ore in the future is gonna be coming from other countries. A lot of things now are being made out of plastic and lighter materials and so there is gonna be a decreased demand for ore in the future. I don't know how far down the future, but in the future.

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

Gramp: Well, they have to keep doing what they've been doing. They gonna have to eliminate people and make jobs more done by machinery than by people and just like everybody else they'll have to eliminate the jobs that aren't essential. ~~What do you think has been the key to~~

Me: What do you think has been the key to success of CCI, when other companies have failed?

Gramp: Well, Cleveland Cliffs, of course owns very little of the actual properties that they work, so they get, they get a fee from these other places <sup>who are</sup> operating these companies and they have an arrangement with these other companies that actually own the properties to take the pellets off their hands so they have more or less a ready place to send their product!

Include

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

Pramp: Looking into the future, I guess one guess is as good as another and, and I guess living in the area we are living Cleveland Cliffs of course is a quite a high-paying company and the workers I think should be quite well satisfied with the the money that they're making and Cleveland Cliffs has tried to keep up with safety standards with company paid programs and teaching workers new skills and I think they will probably be listed quite high as far as what they did for, for the area and for the workers.

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

Pramp: Well, I - I personally don't think there is any room for women to be working in industry that requires heavy lifting and in any iron industry it does require a lot of heavy lifting. Maybe, something like truck driver or something like that,

Gramp: and of course there are always some women that are more mechanical lowered <sup>upstairs</sup> ~~probably~~, probably would fit in there. I don't know.

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

Gramp: Well, of course the skills will be required at as much as they are today and that trade schools teach em how to be welders and get along with people, and electricians and this type of specialized people.

Mo: Kay, I'm a related question, what advice could you give in general to the students of today?

Gramp: Study. Quit goofin off. Do the very best you can while you have the chance and the future will take care of itself.

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

Gramp: Hunting and fishing.

Me: If you had to do it all over again, <sup>13</sup> would you make the same career choice.

Me : Why or why not?

Dramp: No, I would not have goofed off in High School and I would have gone immediately to school after high school and probably been an engineer instead of a technician.

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





Dramp: The fact that I got laid off.

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

Dramp: Nothing that I can think of Nile.

Me : O.K. Thanks

Dramp: um hum

job duties   
accidents   
of future  *of future*  
education   
opinions 