

Andrew G. Hill
interview with Rudy Lafreniere

me: My name is Andy Hill and what is your name?

Mr L. My name is Rudolph Lafreniere.

me: When and where were you born?

Mr. L. I was born in Ishpeming and I was born on the 8th month 9th day in 1931.

me: What are the names of your parents?

Mr L. My dad's name is Clarence, my mothers name is Lempi.

me: What did your parents do for a living?

Mr L. My dad worked for CCI for 40 years and my mom worked at the HW Gossard Company.

me: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Mr. L. I have no brothers or sisters.

me: Are you married?

Mr. L. Yes, I am married.

me: What is the name of your wife?

Mr. L. My wifes name is ^{Patricia} Petrusha

me: Do you have any children?

Mr. L. I have three children.

me: What are their names?

Mr. L. I have Peter, Karen, and Bradley

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

Mr. L. I've been working in the iron industry for 39 years and 4 ~~months~~ months.

me: How old were you when you ~~started~~ started?

Mr. L. I believe I was 18 and a half.

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

Mr. L. Well at that time that was about the best paying job around in this area. *possible quote*

me: Did you have any relatives that worked in the mine?

Mr. L. Yes, my father worked in the mine.

me: What were the names of the various mines or buildings you have worked in.

Mr. L. Well I worked in two of them I worked in the ^{Mather A} Mathera underground and then from there I was laid off and when I was called back to work I ~~was~~ worked at the Empire mine.

me: over the years what kinds of duties or jobs did you do at C.C.F.

Mr. L. Well underground I was a motor man and a timber hoister then I filled in as a part time miner. And then at the Empire mine I worked as a automotive mechanic helper as a ^{conveyor} repair man.

me: In as much detail please describe the duties of your job which you held?

Mr. L. Well the most important job was the conveyor repairman. And what we did at that time is we repaired all of the conveyors, and at the Empire Mine I worked in a concentrator building and I believe we had something like a 142 conveyors ~~to repair~~ and we had to repair belts and rollers head pulleys and tail pulleys.

me: Did this job require any special training?

Mr. L. Yes it did, in order to get on the job to from when you started as a starter then to an intermediate and then to a regular repair man it takes a 1,040 hours like a starter it would take 1,040 hr. and that ~~is like~~ ^{comes to be} 6 months at 40 hours ^{include + quote}

me: Please describe any special machinery or equipment you used on the job?

Mr. L. Well we use quite a bit for the belts and that and a we had coffin hoists and pulleys and we had all different kinds of tools like wrenches ect.

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

Mr. L. Well the conveyor if you worked on that, that is a long belt and to keep it on the conveyor when you had a train you had to keep it center and if it went off the head or tail pulley ~~or~~ well then it would rip the belt and if it ripped it would stop ^{production} and that a great cost if that happened

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

Mr. L. Well I've always liked conveyor ~~repair~~ repair work because you weren't always in the same place. We were all over the concentrator either repairing something or fixing a troubled spot that would come up. And they would call you over to come and repair ^{one} ^{spot} this or repair that so you weren't in ~~the~~ ~~place~~ all the ~~time~~ day.

include
+ quote

me: What are the biggest responsibilities of your job?

Mr. L. The biggest responsibility of your job was to keep the conveyor belts and the ore moving. You had ~~to~~ to keep the belts and ore moving or else the plant would go down. The mill needed ~~so~~ so much iron ore to crush so you needed to keep the conveyor belt moving.

conclude

me: Describe any dangerous situations you have been in.

Mr. L. Well ~~the~~ dangerous situations on there with these conveyors there are rollers and you could get your finger stuck in there or an arm ~~or even get pulled in~~ and you could be pulled in ~~the~~ conveyor so you had to be very careful that to make sure all the guards and safety factors were working and if that did happen the ^{conveyor} ~~factor~~ could shut down immediately or you could lose a finger because there are pinch points on these conveyors ~~as they~~ and there are rollers and to keep them going you could get your finger in there or get pulled in

include

me: Have you been involved or witnessed any accidents?

Mr L: [No I never ~~been~~ ~~around~~ ~~at~~ was around were there has been any serious accidents.

me: Did you have any friends or relatives that got in any accidents?

Mr L: [Well I had a friend ~~that~~ ^{was} a conveyor repair man at the Humbolt mine where I ~~first~~ ~~started~~ he was a buddy of mine ^{who} ~~when~~ I grew up with and there was a chunk of rock stuck in the head pulley on one of the conveyors and he tried to get that chunk out with a hook and his arm got caught and went over the head pulley and it cut his arm right off *include*

me: Was he a close friend?

Mr L: Well we just went to school together and grow up together.

me: What were the working conditions?

Mr L: [The working conditions at the Emperor Mine were good. There is good ventilation at the Emperor Mine and there are guards *include* between the company and the Union and the safety committees they take pretty good care of their ^{safety} factors that have to be done in order to make it a safe place to work

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

Mr L. Well the safety standards are changing all the time.

include quote

Like right now in Marquette County UMDM it is health and safety act that the federal government has and they require safety meeting once a month and they have an annual refresher meeting once a year and usually the company has a policy that they get all the workers and have a meeting once a month to discuss safety factors. [The standards are always being improved] like dust and air, chemicals and stuff like that, so there changing all the time and between the Union and the company they take pretty good care of that.

Me: How have the duties of your job changed over the years?

Mr L. Well the duties of the job changed quite abit because all the time the company is ~~changing~~ getting trying to reduce the amount that are working there so they ~~it~~ just keep ~~adding on the duties on to your job~~ or adding duties to on ~~to~~ job that is close by and is related close ~~to~~ to the one you are performing and that is changing all the time

Me: What were the co-workers like?

Mr. L. The co-workers I've worked with through the whole 39 years and 4 months I have always had good cooperation between my co-worker. We always got along good together, we were pretty good friends.

me. During the years were you involved in any special projects?

Mr. L. Well a lot of special projects I was involved with was as a union officer and representative we had to go around and collect money for the hospitals, the Bell Hospital, we worked on special funds, and the United Way I used to have to contact. I went on the United Way about 4 or 5 time during my career. We had to get donations, and that is quite a choir ~~trying to get money from them trying to donate~~ ^{talking to them & trying to get money from them to donate.}

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

Mr. L. Well we got awards for the years of service like special tie pins and wrist watches that they gave us for special awards

me. At any time have you thought of changing your job or career?

Mr. L. No, once I started working in the mine then I went 4 years in the service and when I came back we went from under ground to the Empiror Mine which is on the surface. When I was at the mine as conveyor repair man I enjoyed that job and I never thought of changing it.

me: So you worked under ground to.

Mr. L. Yes,

me: Did you like working underground?

Mr. L. Well at that time I didn't mind I thought in was a pretty good job at that time when we were underground but after working in the open pit I would never want to go back underground.] possible quote

me: What did you do underground?

Mr. L. I was a motor man and than a scrapper man and like a timber hoister. What we would used to as a motorist from the mining contracts we would fill up 5 to 8 with ore and we had to get that to the shaft and then from out shaft and you would dump that and it would go down into the skips and then the hoisting engineer on the surface would hoist these skips up. So we were moving the ore from the mining contracts to the shaft

Me: Are you now or have you ever been a member of the steel workers union?

Mr. L: Yes, I was a member of the local union 4950 and I was an officer about 30 years.

Me: Have you ever experienced being on ~~the~~ strike?

Mr. L: Yes, we were on strike in 77 and in 1980.

Me: What was the strike about?

Mr. L: Well at that time we were looking for more money and top grade our benefits that we had. And in 77 we were looking for ^{incentive clause} incentives clause that was a hard one to get. Then ^{possible quote} we got the incentives and it made a difference to our pay.

Me: What were the wages before the strike?

Mr. L: I think it was 11 dollar an hour and by the time we got the ^{include} incentives and that it went up quite abit it started with 75¢ and hour and when I left there in 92 it was averaging \$1.25 to \$1.40 an hour that we made on the incentives.

Me: How does a strike actually begin?

Mr. L. Well the strike actually begins between the company and the union, ~~and~~ the negotiators getting together and that could start any time within the last year of the contract. It usually starts 6 months before ~~where~~ you have meetings to get together and then 3 months before than end that a strike deadline well then you have to get together and all of they issues are on the table. That's where everything really begins. You always start off with a lot of issues, but you only end up with a few of them in the end of it. *include*

Me. How many employees does a strike usually involve?

Mr. L. Well all of the hourly employees are on strike at the same time + the salery, the ones that work for salery are company men so they ~~keep~~ keep working, but all of the hourly go out. *include*

Me. So not all of the people go on strike.

Mr. L. No, the ones that are salery working stay working all all of the union member that are hourly employees they go on strike. At the Emprior there are probly a 1000 people working now and probly 800 are hourly and 200 are salery. *include*

me: What is the purpose of the picket line and describe what happens there?

Mr. L. Well the purpose of the picket line is to show no agreement and that you are on strike and you want all of those members to honor that picket line because if the mine can't operate you have better bargaining power. And the picket line usually goes up right on the outside of the companies property at a gate or an ^{entrance} entrance way and from there it is usually manned by the hourly employees that are on strike and they liked to have everyone to honor it so nobody goes in. ^{include}

me: Do you know any interesting stories about the picket line?

Mr. L. Well most of the I was on the negotiating committee so I wasn't involved to much with the picket line all we would do is go down there to visit or that and see if there was any problems and we never had to many problems there was a ~~couple~~ couple of times they were just starting to build the Emperor Mine and then we ran into forces between the iron workers and the steel workers.

^{include} The iron workers were putting up buildings and getting the Emperor Mine ready, but we went at the gate and picket them and they wouldn't cross the gate because we had a picket line set up there. And we had cars outside of Palmer at the Emperor Mine that were backed up about 2 or 3 miles. And they never came in for about 4 or 5 days (11)

Mr L. cont. Until the steelworkers and the iron workers got together and we made an agreement that they can go in so we can get the Emiror Mine up and start production.

Me: What takes place at the union meeting or union rally?

Mr. L. Well at the union meeting you have 5 top officers in the steelworkers and the president is the chairman of the meeting so he conducts the meeting and usually it is a special once a month they have there regular union meeting and then during a strike they would have a union rally, but usually at union meeting the president when he conducts it they have a procedure that they go through and they have laws that they need to follow that any new projects that are coming up, the financial statements have to be read. anything that is transpired in the last month the officers in grievance ^{committee} ~~and~~ + safety committee all have to make reports. So theres reports made and if theres any decisions that have to be made it isn't the officers that make them it's the members attending the meeting that have to make the decisions of what is going to happen with ether a special project or what ever they are trying to do. And at a rally is to bring the members up during a strike and that is to keep the members with you so the officers and the negotiating team is got backing. If they see the members at the rally aren't with the negotiators well they are going to have to take a different avenue, but the members in the steel workers (12)

Excellent - include

Mr. L. cont union are the ones that do the business. You always here that it's the officers that do it, but it's the members that controll it at that meeting.

Me: In your opinion why is the steel workers union so important to the workers?

Mr. L. Well the steel workers always had the best union that I've always liked procedure and formula they always followed and they always good to servise all the areas you have staff represenatives in this area and then you have the officers and the steelworkers in my outfit is an very important part of the safty and all the programmes that are conducted at the mine they have been taking pretty good care of the members that they serve.

Me: So then the safety is pretty good at the mines.

Mr. L. ~~The~~ The safety yes at the mines around here is pretty good and a everythings they have that is brought up that is unsafe is always looked into and most part it is taken ~~care~~ care of if they can see a problem with it.

Me: What do you think the future holds for the Tilden + Emperor Mine?

Mr. L. Well the future for the Emperor + Tilden Mine I don't know what they have. At the Emperor Mine when I was there I have heard in recent years, but they figure they have 15 or 20 years that they could operate the Emperor Mine. The Tilden I have no idea what they have at the Tilden Mine, but it seems to me that if you look from here all the way to Republic there is somekind of ore all the way through and if there was a demand for iron ore I think there is some way they can process it + make it available. The C.C.I. have plans for the Mine + from what I understand that's on the east side of Palmer + they have all plans drawn up on that, but there's no demand for it to put an amount of money involved in it to start up a new mine, but they are talking now with seeing that pig iron is running out that the Republic Mine could be started ~~it~~ might not be until 1996, but the Republic Mine looks it's ready to go.

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

Mr. L. In general for the iron industry right now I was of said about four or five years ago that it was looking bad but now that all the pig iron these little mini mills were taking up + crushing old steel frames + old cars + they were melting all of these down that it was bad for us but it seem right now the U.S. is running out of all this kind of steel + that is why they have to go down to a lower grade steel

include quote

Mr. L. cont. and that's at the Republic Mine they figure they can reduce this + get it going.

Me: What do you think must be done in the future for C.C.I. to remain competitive.

Mr. L. Well C.C.I. to remain competitive they have to have X partners that are using steel. C.C.I. know is an independent company + they don't have their own boundaries or that like lot of steel companies do + so they have to sell on the open market + if they ~~can~~ ^{can} ~~get~~ ^{get} companies that come in + are partners in these mines that ~~do~~ have boundaries well then I think they can stay real competitive if they can get everything done on it.

include + quote

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

Mr. L. Well I think the success for C.C.I. is that they own the land. There's only so many places that have iron ore + C.C.I. was smart enough years ago + they had the engineers that knew + the geologists + them that knew where the iron ore was and they bought up the land + now they control it.

include + quote

Me: So they own the land.

Mr. L And the mineral rights. See + they went through + know were the ore is. Like you have ore on the Marquette range up here and then in the Minnesota range and that looks ~~like~~ like the two biggest ore deposits are + C.C.I. is controlling all of them.

Me: Looking far into the future how do you think the people will remember C.C.I. + its workers?

Mr. L. C.C.I. has always been involved with iron ore and they've made + we've made a pretty good living here in the Marquette area with ^{Cleveland} ~~Cleveland~~ Cliffs. If it wasn't for Cleveland Cliffs and the iron ore I don't think that there would be much around the Ishpening, Negaunee, Republic, National Mine or any other areas. [So everyone been making a fair living it hasn't been a good living, but its a very comfortable one.] *include + guide*

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

Mr. L. Well the women coming into the mines only started a few years ago and I don't see that there's going to be too much change. The women can do a lot of the jobs that are at the mine they might not be able to do all of them, but they have worked right in + the jobs that they have been doing and the women that have been working at the mine are you don't see no difference between the men doing the work or the women doing the work.

include

Me. So the women fit right in.

Mr. L. The women fit just right in. They probable can fit into every job, but if you a rule from 1 to 10 I bet you they can perform 6 or 7 out of the 10 jobs that are there.

Me: What skills ~~of~~ people of today need to develop if they plan to work for C.C.I. someday?

Mr. L Well ^{younger} ~~younger~~ people of today if they planned to go to work for C.C.I is to get training in welding or repair work. Maintenance mechanics and then there is a lot of computers that are coming in, a lot of the work that is done down there now is all done by computers. There more + more computers ~~that~~ coming on for office work there even starting to computerize the trucks. The most skills are if you are going to get in would be welding and repair training. I don't think that they have enough of it around in this area today because you are always going to need repairman + welders. include

me. In a related question what advise could you give in general could you give to the students of today?

Mr. L Well the best thing if they decide to go into mining is to get all of the knowledge they can get. The first thing is to get an education, you need the education now before you can do (18)

Mr L. cont. almost any of them jobs and before the company is going to hire you today they are ~~going~~ ^{looking} to see if you completed your education of the 12 grades and if you graduated from highschool and any special that they can pick up any of it is going to be good whether it's welding, repair work, carpenter, mechine shop or any of them are good related grafts to get into.

include

Me : Going back to number 15 do you remember any?

Mr. L. On the humorous side, one that sticks out in mind on April ~~1st~~ ^{2 Foods} Day we all gathered into the lunch room to have lunch and usually we have lunch at 9:00 and dinner at 12:00. At 9:00 when we went in there everybody sat down at the tables they all opened their pails and this one guy sitting across from me we all sat down and took out our sandwiches ^{and} and coffee and he took his sandwich out and nobody knew what was happening all of a sudden he went to bite into it and when he bit into it he started looking kind of funny and the guys across the table all started laughing because there was suposed to be (19)

Mr. L. cont. just a bologna sandwich but they had put rubber inside of his sandwich and when he went to bite he could not get through on the rubber and he didn't want anybody else to know so he starts looking at everybody and then he figures what happened here whats this all about and then everybody just cracked up, it was rubber instead of bologna, *include*

Me: Who did that to him?

Mr. L. It would of had to been his wife at home that was playing a joke on him and he figured there was more sandwiches there and then he had to check everyone real close, but the top one was rubber.

Me: Do you remember any more?

Mr. L. Ah, and then another time we were all kidding around where they ~~had~~ ^{repair} ~~at~~ motors and there is a bench there and they have a crane up above and one of the guys that were wright there slipped a hook from a crane into this guys belt and I don't no what that T.V. program is where them angels are flying, but that guy started to take off and going in the ain they had the hook caught ^{on} ~~bet~~ his

Mr L. cont. belt, it could of been a serious injury, but the crane stops right away but soon as his feet started to land and he started to take off in the air he was like a flying angel.

include

Me. Please describe what you do in your own time?

Mr. L. Right now I am a Marquette ~~mine~~ County Mine inspector. That takes care of most of the day I usually got maybe between 6 ~~00~~ 8 hours a day. I usually try to get out and inspect the mine property the fences and that to see if they are secure. I work a 40 hour week on there and then if I have any spare time I like to go and bowl I love bowling and play cribbage.

Empire
Rudolph

Me. So when you go and inspect to you use any machines?

Mr L Yes, when I am Marquette County Mine inspection job I have to and check the Empiror Mine, the Tilden Mine, and the general shops why their working we ~~are~~ usually have an inspection twice a year at both properties usually once every six months, Empiror it could take 6 days to inspect and it could take 5 to 6 days to inspect the Tilded and usually

(21)

Mr. L cont. at the central shops I can usually get done in 2 to 3 days and that includes the Republic Mine and the ore improvement plant

me: Does anyone else go with you or are you by yourself?

Mr. L. I'm by myself there is the Marquette County doesn't have no helper or any part time it's only one Marquette county mine inspector they don't have no helpers.

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

Mr. L. Well if I had to do it all over again I think I would get an education and would try something else rather work in the mine.

me: What would you do?

Mr. L. Well I thought about it alot, I would like to be mixed in more where there's people, to work around people. It seems that I always loved working with people and I think I would get some kind of career where I got meet the public or be with the public because it seems the time goes by so much when you are on something else like that. (22)

Me: Looking back over the years what impressions stand out most in your mind concerning the association with C.C.I.?

Mr. L. Well when I look back over the years the impressions that would stand out mostly is that I seen a great change in the mining industry and it's making it a lot better and safer working place years ago. Being associated with C.C.I. the pension they have now a days + the working conditions I think it's ^{very} good, *industry*

Me: Well before we end the interview is there anything else you would like to add?

Mr. L. No, I think the most important thing that I could see that could be added is that the history of the mining I'm glad that National Mine School is taking an intrest in this outfit like with the Red Dust program ~~the~~ the programs that they had + a few years back the had another program I don't know if it was Red Dust or what it was called but I think they took 1st place or something in the state or somewhere. It's just to bad that years ~~ago~~ of this couldn't of been done for the history sake of it because now ~~the~~ as Marquette County Mine inspector when I go to look at these old pits and shafts and theirs so many that haven't be charted and if they would of had

Mr L cont. history of some schools would of took an intrest in it at that time there could be a lot more history and it would of made it a lot more easier for the people who are following it to have something to aget onto the history part of it + I think this is a very good program the you are doing right now Andy it is very good. I don't think there could be any more I could add to it but it nice to see you taking your time and then even coming out on a Saturday + that is very good

me ; O.K, thank-you.

Mr. L. Thank you for your time to Andy you sure did a good job + I hope you keep it up + everything comes out + these are programs we need + I think it will benefit you + years to come to look back on what you are doing right now.

ME Thanks again.

Mr. L. Yeh.

easy to read!

You need more details about his role as a union negotiator. This can be a super story!

Safety - green

training / schools - yellow

working conditions - blue

dangers - black

duties of the job - orange

wages - purple

strikes - pink

From working in the mines,
to inspecting them.