

Hell in a Steel Mill

Maury Kleinman

I worked at Inland Steel for 31 years as an electrician. We did everything from changing light bulbs to major rewiring. I loved being an electrician, but there was one job I hated: changing the hot rail shoes on the cranes.

The conditions on the hot rails were not pleasant. We worked in a repair basket, which was cramped and dirty and everything was covered with grease. Since the basket was open, you felt the heat and smelled the fumes from the mill. Sometimes it was over 150 degrees in the summer.

If it wasn't the heat making life miserable then it was gas fumes from the furnaces which accumulated under the ceiling of the mill. Everything was always covered in iron dust and you were wading in grease which would get all over you and ruin your clothes. Many times after repairing crane shoes, we'd throw out our clothes rather than try to clean them. It was almost impossible to get the grease out.

The worst crane to work on was 42 Crane in the main mill. Its repair area was almost directly over the furnaces so it was always hotter there than the other cranes. Sometimes the flames from the furnaces would shoot up to the crane rails, and it looked like a set of hands was trying to grab you and pull you down to hell. The hot metal burned you with no remorse. Changing the hot rail shoes on the cranes is definitely the worst job I ever had to do.

Maury Kleinman is a student at Joblink 2000 at Acer Mittal Steel in East Chicago, IN. He retired after 31 years at Inland Steel (now part of Acer Mittal Steel). The course he recently finished was "Everyone Has A Story."

