

## UNCLE BOB'S GLASSES FROM THE MILL

My Uncle Bob started working in the steel mill right out of high school in 1969. He actually worked for three different mills in the Valley. He got his first job at Republic Steel. He worked in the coke plant there for a few years before he got offered a better position at U.S. Steel. My Uncle Bob started working in the trimming and pickling department at U.S. Steel. My Uncle worked there for only a few years and then found work in another plant, Youngstown Sheet and Tube. All three of his positions required strict safety precautions that included the use of proper eyewear, gloves, thermal undergarments, and a hardhat. The picture below shows what workers were required to wear in the steel mills.



The glasses that are pictured above were the actual pair that he used in all three mills. The glasses have an extremely dark tint and glass adjustable side guards. The frames are made out of some type of plastic/rubber coated aluminum and the rest is made of glass. The tint is actually so dark that it is hard to see in the natural light, but in the steel furnaces my uncle said that you would still squint when wearing them. The guards on the side of the glasses helped to create a seal around his eyes. The guards stopped all loose particles and bits of steel, that were airborne, from getting into his eyes. The story of the glasses is deeper than that though. The glasses were given to my Uncle Bob, whose Uncle Walter originally used them in the steel mills. I guess you can say they were an heirloom of some sort. My great Uncle Walter used the glasses in the steel mills for over 10 years (I'm not sure which mill he worked in but it was during the 1940's-1950's). After Uncle Walter worked in the mill for ten years he decided to open his own business and leave the mill. When my Uncle Bob got his first job in the mill Uncle Walter gave him the glasses to use. His Uncle Walter past away shortly after. My Uncle Bob used these glasses for his eleven years in the mill. He used them up until the doors were shut for good at Youngstown Sheet and Tube(1977). When my Uncle Bob lost his job, he found new work, but the legacy of the glasses was over and so was the steel industry in Youngstown. My Uncle kept the glasses as a memory of his work in the mill and as a memory of his late Uncle's hard work in the mill.



Pictured above are scenes from inside a modern steel mill. To the left is a picture of a ladle pouring hot, liquid forming steel into mold. The photo on the right is a photo of two hot steel slabs coming off the end of the trimming line.

I asked my Uncle what the glasses meant to him, he said, "They protected my eyes for almost eleven years from all that smoke and garbage in the air. I should have replaced them with a newer pair, but I wore them out of respect to my uncle. They really mean a lot to me though there are so many memories that those glasses bring back. I wish the times would have never changed." I also asked him about the closing of the mills in Youngstown, he replied in almost a sniffling response, "It's a real shame that the mills closed, but it was an interesting experience for me as it was for anyone who worked there. I learned more and got paid great but I also busted my ass. I guess I'm happy now, but it was hard to get over losing my job. It's just a shame though, Youngstown had so much going for it when the mills were around, it really was the heart and soul of this community." I guess the glasses protected my uncle from many accidents that could have occurred to him, but I'm sure that they could never have protected him from losing his job.

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