Excerpt from Upton Sinclair’s
The Jungle, 1906

The steelworks were fifteen miles away, and as usual it was so contrived
that one had to pay two fares to get there. Far and wide the sky was flaring
with the red glare that leaped from rows of towering chimneys—for it was
pitch dark when Jurgis arrived. The vast works, a city in themselves, were
surrounded by a stockade; and already a full hundred men were waiting
at the gate where new hands were taken on. Soon after daybreak whistles
began to blow, and then suddenly thousands of men appeared, streaming
from saloons and boarding-houses across the way, leaping from trolley
cars that passed—it seemed as if they rose out of the ground, in the dim
gray light. A river of them poured in through the gate—and then gradually
ebbed away again, until there were only a few late ones running, and the
watchman pacing up and down, and the hungry strangers stamping and
shivering....He wondered if ever he could get used to working in a place
like this, where the air shook with deafening thunder, and whistle shrieked
warnings on all sides of him at once, where miniature steam engines
came rushing at him, and sizzling, quivering, white-hot masses of metal
sped past him, and explosions of fire and flaming sparks dazzled him and
scorched his face. The men in these mills were all black with soot, and
hollow-eyed and gaunt; they worked with fierce intensity, rushing here
and there, and never lifting their eyes from their tasks. Jurgis clung to
his guide like a scared child to his nurse, and while the latter hailed one
foreman after another to ask if they could use another unskilled man, he
stared about him and marvelled.

It took him two hours to get to this place every day and cost him a dollar
and twenty cents a week. As this was out of the question, he wrapped
his bedding in a bundle and took it with him, and one of his fellow
workingmen introduced him to a Polish lodging house, where he might
have the privilege of sleeping on the floor for ten cents a night. He got his
meals at free-lunch counters, and every Saturday night he went home-
bedding and all—and took the greater part of the money to his family.
It was wonderful, when one came to think of it, that these men should
have taken an interest in the work they did; they had no share in it—they
were paid by the hour, and paid no more for being interested. Also they
knew that if they were hurt they would be flung aside and forgotten—and
still they would hurry to their task by dangerous short-cuts, would use
methods that were quicker and more effective in spite of the fact that
they were also risky.

In 2014, at the unveiling of Roman Villarreal’s Steelworkers Statue at the park,
guest speakers shared their personal stories connected to the mill. Perhaps,
you would like to share yours...

Kevin’s story: My family left Ireland to work at a gigantic steel mill along the East
Coast of England. My grandfather was a union steward, who looked after his men.
His Murphy gates protected them from falling into vats of molten steel.

Joann’s story: Family members in millwork: father, two uncles, one brother,
three brothers-in-law, one sister (clerical), two nephews, one nephew-in-law,
multiple cousins and cousins-in-law including cousin Josephine, who after her
husband died of tuberculosis, worked for many years on the plant floor along side
the men.

For additional information, visit:
www.calumetregionsites.com
www.spotlightingsoutheastchicagoandnorthwestindiana.site

For videos with interviews at sites go to:
YouTube.com/KayanbdJay6383

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