Barbara Graves interviewing George Munro, Lantzville, for the Coal Tyee Project, some time in Bahnm February or March, 1979. Transcribed by Kyrile Bergren.

I was born in 1896 in Wellington, and what they used to call Number Three bluff. (or block?). From there we moved to Ladysmith. No, it was Extension. I hope I'm not wrong, I'll make some mistakes too. We moved to Extension and then I stayed in Extension about a year.

My father went to Alaska in 1896. Or '98.

When I went to work in the mines I was about 13 years old. And I only worked in there for about 6 months. I was working what they used to say, a "trapper" in a door. And they had a big door in the mine, that a kid used to sit there. When he heard the cars coming, the driver, (you could check him by the rails?) you'd open the door to let him go, with the car, and then you closed the door. See. And when you closed, that forced the air to go round to the other places. You had to have that closed. That's the only time you opened the door, when he was going in with empty cars, and then when he picked up the load of cars and he brought 'em out, then you closed the door after that, see. That was my job in the mine.

Barbara G: How many hours.

CN: Altogether it was supposed to be 8 hours. We left Ladysmith 6 o'clock in the morning, company train -- no, no cars, no busses in those days. I don't know whether there was any cars at all in those days. And you went on the company train, I don't know who the hell - I think it was Dunsmauir Limited that time. (Paper rattling). And the train left at six. You got into Extension at 7, and you got into the little coal cars, they'd only hold a ton of coal, and the motor 'd take you underground. Maybe about a mile, half a mile, right there under the ground. And each one got off at his places, where he had to get off, see. And you stayed there, and worked.

Well like I say, a coal mine is pretty cool. And you came out you quit about half past two, so you'd be outside by three. And then you went down and you caught the train again, and the trainman, engineer, would hit signal, blow some whistles. So everybody would know in time to get on it. And we'd get back into Ladysmith by four o'clock. That was your -- from six, you might as well say, till four.

BG: How much did you earn, do you remember?
GN: Dollar ten cents a day. That's what I got, yeh. And the highest wage for a man driving a mule or a horse in the mines, he got $2.86 a day. And a man that was digging coal, not being on contract, he got $3.30 a day. That was the wages then, of course it was different with machinists and stuff like that, engineers outside there, they never got much more, maybe less than that too. I think a coal miner was the highest. That was in Ladysmith.

But after that when I grew up, you know, well I went to school too, you see. I went to school till I was about 15. After I went out of the mines I went back to school again. And I went to the convent, in Ladysmith. Then I got a job working for a Jack Russell, feed man, driving a horse, delivering feed.

BG: Did you go back in the mines at all?

GN: Didn't go back in the mines at all. But after that. --In 1912, '98 was the big explosion. I'll write that one down.

BG: Where?

GN: In Extension mine. I think there was 40 or 44 men killed, in that wasn't And I was working in the mine then.

BG: You were very small then.

GN: Mind you I went up to the train/to see then bringing out the dead people. Course you couldn't see them 'cause they were all burnt black, you know. Yeh, the men was all burnt, killed in the explosion. And the mules and everything, they brought everything out, see. Course you know how lids are. They want to go and see what's doing. And then, after that, they got everything all cleaned up and went back to work again. Then they had a big strike.

BG: When was that?

GN: 1912.

BG: And was your dad working in the mine then?

GN: Well he was, but he didn't work when they went on strike. Practically everybody that lived in Ladysmith and round Extension the majority of them they all went on strike.

So they got some strike breakers in from down -- oh, way down in the States. And a lot of them were Italians. Mostly Italians. And Negros, and stuff like that. So a lot of the people never went back to work in the mines either, after that strike.

BG: Why?

GN: Well they couldn't get their job back. (door bell rings, few words) -- Like I say, menfolks, they got $4 a month. Strike pay. And his wife got $2, and if they had a child, each child got $2.00.
So it was pretty tough on 'em. So a lot of them, after that, they had a
call, after the strike was won by the strike breakers, a lot of the men
didn't get back to work. So then there was a mine down in -- 7 miles this
side of Lethbridge, Kip (?) and a lot of the men, they sent the boss over
here, cause they knew there were a lot of good coal miners here, and they
collected a whole bunch of these old strikers, and they all went down to this
mine in Kip, 7 miles outa Lethbridge. In fact I went down there after myself.

And we stayed one winter. And it was cold down around Alberta,
you know. And I got my leg, cracked, the bone cracked in it, that's why
I was on a crutch all the time I was there.

EG: Were you working in the mine?

CH: Yes, working in the mine then. And then we started coming back home.

They were hiring a lot of men back again. So we came back home, and I couldn't
get a job. On account of my leg was too weak. And I went up to Anyox.

And I got a job up in Anyox, that was in 1915. I stayed there for a whole
year. And I got about 1½ men, friends of mine, jobs up there. And as they
were hollering for men, back down in Ladysmith, they kep on quitting, going
back home again, to get a job down there again, in the mine. And I stayed
on in that mine myself up there.

EG: Where is that?

CH: Anyox. A hundred miles north of Prince Rupert. It's not too far from
Stuart. Just below Stuart. There was a big copper mine there, and a bit
smelter. In fact after that, they bought a -- down at Cassidy, that was
the Granby mine. They had a coal mine down there, and they used to send all
the coal up to Anyox, and they made coke out of it for the smelter, to melt
the iron ore. So then I came home after that, see.

EG: And in 1915. During the war. I came back to Ladysmith. And I didn't
like going in the mines any more, you know. So I got busy -- and then I
went to Britannia mines. Just across over here. Do you know where Britannia
is? Do you know where Squamish is? Well just this side of Squamish.

So I went in therd, and I got a good job in there sharpening steel,
cause I contracted to be a blacksmith up in Anyox, see.

So when I came home I stayed home for a while. And a fellow
wrote to me from Anyox. He was at Britannia, to come up there, he had a
job for me. His name was Johnnie Popovitch. So I went up there, and by
gosh I got a job right away, and I was sharpening steel. So I stayed
there for a whole year. But I could always come back home, after three
months or so, just for a few days. You see, or a week. It only used to be
a dollar from there to Vancouver, and then another dollar from Vancouver to
home, see. So then everybody was gone, by friends had quit there too,
gone back to the Old country, and the war was getting pretty well over in 1918. So anyhow I came back home. And came up here. My father was home and they wanted some men up here. So we came up here and we got a job up here, all of us.

DG: Which mine?

GM: Well that was the one they called Lantz mine first. That was 1917 in February.

So we got a job here then at Grant's mine. We called it Grant's mine then, and a fellow by name of Johnnie John was the manager. And we all knew him, in fact, from the old Wellington days: He was boss then in the Wellington mine, for quite a few years, see. And the Mitchiks, and ourselves, and the Slogars here, we all got jobs here. And we stayed here ever sine!

DG: How long did you work in the mine?

GM: Oh I think we worked about two years. I dug coal, and looked after the shaft, the bottom of the shaft, putting the cars on the cage,

DG: How many men worked here?

GM: There'd be about a hundred men, on each shift. That would be morning shift and afternoon shift. So there'd be around two hundred, or maybe 250 men altogether, see. And then there's the ones that's working outside. See there'd be maybe about 30 men working outside. On top of the mine. So you might as well say close to around 300 men. And well we stayed here, --oh Grant sold the mine after, to a company from Seattle. You see this was called Grant's mine, and after they bought it, there was a fellow one of the directors, his name was Lantz. Some he changed the name from Grant's mine, to Lantzville. That's how it got the name of Lantzville. And then there was another fellow, Coleman, he was the general manager. He was a director too. He had a picture of his two sons, I'll tell you about that after.

But anyhow, there was one more fellow, he was a German fellow. And they used to come here from Seattle. And they run that until the mine started to peter out.

DG: How long was it mined.

GM: Till round about 1923. And then after 1924 they shut it down, see. And the Canadian Collieries took it over. And they never started up again. But why they shut it down, they were going too far out under the sea. And they gave 'em permission to go out there and just have one tunnel, like one level, one slope, and just have a single room, what they call a room. Single stalls to go off that. Then they'd take a single stall out of it and they'd take a little bit more off, little bit more off...
First thing you know, the inspector came round, they had a great big place. And just post on it. And they were scared, they didn't know how much rock they had up above the roof, see, that thing could've break in. And flooded and drowned everybody, never get 'em out any more. So that's why they shut it down. But there's still lots of coal left in the mine. Oh, lots of coal! That mine was only about 111 feet deep. That's not a very deep -- I could Holler from the bottom. If you were at the top I could Holler to you and talk to you from the bottom up.

But these in Nanaimo, and those places, 600 some odd feet deep! When you looked up from there you couldn't even see daylight! So there's a big difference here, you see.

2Q: Was there ever an accident, or anything like that?

Oh; Well, just like any other place, you know, the ordinary accidents, but no big accidents. I don't remember about anybody getting killed in the mine. Maybe they broke a leg or something like that. Hurt their arm or something. And then you see, they sunk a slope after, for getting air, and then they could take them before, they put a mule down the cage, and put him down, and it took a long time to get them up every day, see. Gotta be fed in the barn. They had no stable down below. Like any other place. So then they made a slope, and they started it - I think it's right alongside Dickinson Road. It's still there, only it's filled in, see. And this went down on the slope, about 2 or 300 feet. And then you could walk out of the mine, you didn't have to take the cage, see. The men used to walk out. And the mules they used to walk out too, every night.

Like I say, I can go there, and show where that tipple was, where the shaft was, where the powder house was, and all that. Because it's still right up in there. The ground hasn't changed that much. Only where the shaft was, there's nice big flower gardens there now. But Mr. Smith he was telling us it still caves in, still sinks down.

They used to ship the coal by scow. It would come up out of the mine, up the shaft, and dumped into a bunker. & The bunker didn't have to be full, see. But when the scow would come in, as a rule, the bunker would be full, and they'd just open the bunkers underneath, and put in other cars, and run these cars out and pull them out on the wharf. And I think the pilings are still out there, out in the water there. The scow would be out there, and they would just take and had a kind of a dump, the car would go into it and dump in the chute. And that would load those scows. And then when they had the scow full, the tugboat just put a phone call you know, the scow was loaded, and they'd just come and pick it up, tow it to Vancouver.
CH: The buses, the Whizbang, they had two buses, and they brought men to work in the morning, and if there's any night shift, it goes back 9 o'clock in the morning -- they worked all night. It would pick them up and take 'em back to Nanaimo. And then for the afternoon shift, pick all those up on the way back from Nanaimo, and bring 'em up and let them off to go to work afternoon shift. And take the morning shift back. And then they would bring the night shift out, and take the afternoon shift back. So the buses were always full. They were never idle, you know. Three shifts. Yeh.

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