This is Myrtle Bergren interviewing Mr. George Mitchell of Ladysmith, for the Coal Tyee project, April 7, 1979.

GM: The only way I could describe a coal mine is Ladysmith. Coal miners worked the same at Extension. You have your first avenue, second avenue, third avenue, fourth avenue, and then you have your streets going up. And then you have your alleyways, and then you have your crosscuts. You have to drive your crosscuts to conduct the air, you see. To get all around the places where the men were working. And outside of that I couldn't describe it any other way.

(a few words re in my husband - asking him in - MB)

MB: Must have jumped out the window and put their foot on a rod, and jumped up when the train was going to try and get off as quick as they could, you see. Well when they built the wash house, the day they built the wash house, they got the electric lights. Before that we used to use a safety lamp and hang it on our belt, you know. And after the men started to wash, you see, they took these slide windows out and put glass windows in. (showing a picture of men on train) -- You'll notice if you look there you see some of the men with the pitlamps on their head? See when I come to Ladysmith it was all open light. But they had to do away with the open light you see, and put it all on safety lamps. In 1909 was the big explosion, you see. It killed them 36 --

MB: What was that open light called?

GM: It was the pitlamp.

MB: And the next one, what was that called?

GM: Well, the electric light. You hooked the battery on your belt and it sat on your thigh here, you know. And the cord come right over your neck, you see, right down to the front of your --

MB: Oh, that one that was this high, it had a ring on the top, --

GM: No, you're thinking of a safety lamp. No, you couldn't unscrew it. They were all locked in a -- locked by electricity. Magnet. Well when we got our light in the morning, we had to take it to the fire boss. And he blew in it, and if that thing showed any signs of that light flickering at all, you had to take it right back. And then of course the electric light when you held it up, and if there was any gas you see, the light enlarged and then it went into a blue flame.

MB: And that's what they called a cap?

GM: A gas cap, yes. And of course that told ye if there was any gas there. When I was driving a mule, you know, aw they were terrible things to use, You had to lift them up, put them down, hang them on your belt, you know, and three quarters of the things you done was done in the dark!
GM: It was an awful improvement these electric lights you know. You could put them on your head and your hands were free, you see.

MB: When were you born, did you say?

GM: '98.

MB: How old were you when you came out here?

GM: Eleven.

MB: Did you come with your parents?

GM: No, my father come here in 1904, and he come for a year, and he liked it well he stayed and he brought us all out. There was six of us.

MB: And what was he doing then?

GM: Coal mining. At Extension. He liked it that well, instead of coming home he brought the whole bunch of us out you know.

MB: So you went to school here then?

GM: Oh yes. I went to school here, I quit school when I was 14.

MB: And then what did you do?

GM: I went down -- you know Dave Gourlay down here? Well I started to work with him. When I was 14 years old, in a place called Simon Leiser's. And there are three survivors. There's a woman, they took her to an institution in Nanaimo about a couple of weeks ago. It was Mrs. Allister, you know. She's still living. And Dave Gourlay's still living, and I'm still living. All the rest have passed on.

MB: How old would Dave Gourlay be?

GM: Dave's about five years older than I am. He's pretty good. He's working in his yard every day. And Mrs. Allister's mind is starting to go, and they were scared she might get burned or something. So they took her up to Nanaimo.

MB: So when you started, what did you start as?

GM: Oh, doing everything. Driving a single wagon, you know. When there was an overflow of orders or anything, I hitched up the wagon and done the delivery. And then I cleaned up, and oh, I done everything!

MB: Were there many people here then?

GM: Oh, there'd be about two and a half thousand, I guess.

MB: That would be about 1912.

GM: Yes, I started about 1912. I was there 3½ years.

MB: Yes, you'd remember the strike!

GM: Oh yes! I remember the strike. I was working in Simon Leiser's when the strike was on, yes.

MB: What kind of things can you remember about that?
\[\text{GM: I remember the riots. They going around breakin all the windows.} \]

\[\text{you know. Blew off his arm. I remember it all.} \]

\[\text{MB: There was a lot of feeling in those days, wasn't there?} \]

\[\text{GM: Yes, there were. Yeh, well it was kind of a mix-up too, you know.} \]

\[\text{See, half the men were in the union, and half weren't. And a lot of} \]

\[\text{them went to work, and some of them of course didn't work. And then} \]

\[\text{they -- what really caused the trouble you see, the company started to bring} \]

\[\text{in strike breakers. That really caused the trouble. A lot of Italians} \]

\[\text{and things like that came in. Strangers. Everything was quiet and} \]

\[\text{peaceable as long as the men that was working around here, you know,} \]

\[\text{there was nothing, belonged to Ladysmith, but when they started to bring in these men that} \]

\[\text{-- that really caused the trouble.} \]

\[\text{MB: That was Canadian Collieries then?} \]

\[\text{GM: Oh yes.} \]

\[\text{MB: Well I've seen they have Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir) in brackets,} \]

\[\text{and I've read somewhere that he sold it to Canadian Collieries ut then} \]

\[\text{he must have kept some interest in it too, actually?} \]

\[\text{GM: Very likely. He built that castle down at Victoria, you know. And} \]

\[\text{yes, Dunsmuir he had control of the whole thing when we come here.} \]

\[\text{MB: Did you ever see him?} \]

\[\text{GM: No. No I never seen Dunsmuir, no.} \]

\[\text{MB: That would be James Dunsmuir?} \]

\[\text{GM: Yes, James Dunsmuir, yes.} \]

\[\text{MB: And I heard he had a boat? It used to come in here sometimes.} \]

\[\text{GM: I don't remember that. But he had boats of his own for taking the} \]

\[\text{coal down to Frisco though. One of the names of the boats was the} \]

\[\text{Wellington. He used to call in here and take about 2000 tons down to} \]

\[\text{Frisco.} \]

\[\text{MB: Was it a sailing ship?} \]

\[\text{GM: Well yes it was, yes.} \]

\[\text{MB: So you remember them?} \]

\[\text{GM: Oh yes, yes. Well there weren't too many of them. The sailing boats} \]

\[\text{were beginning to drop off after we come here and that then of course they} \]

\[\text{started to get coal engines, you see. You see that tug on the transfer} \]

\[\text{there, one of them pictures, that's how it was when we come here. The} \]

\[\text{that's the wharf, the transfer wharf transfer used to come, and/that's where we used to swim, we were swimming} \]

\[\text{in here. This was the first} \text{tug} \text{that come into Ladysmith. It} \]

\[\text{caught fire here on the beach here. And that's how it was when we come} \]

\[\text{here.} \]
And the tug that they took the Transfer to Vancouver, there it is right there. They're gettin' coke. And this is coke for the smelter. These cars were filled with coke and they were taken up to the smelter.

MB: Where was the smelter?

GM: Down where them two mills are. (Indicates on picture).

MB: I've just found out what coke was used for.

GM: Well there's a greater excess of heat in coke than what there is in coal. The way it's treated, you see. There's something taken out of it. I don't know whether it's some of the gas or not. But they had they coke ovens up at Union Bay, you know. A lot of coke ovens up there. Well they put the coal into the ovens and they seal the ovens off, and I don't know, the gas escapes I think, and then the coal seems to so long and then its transformed into coke. Now the coke seems to give out -- see they use the coke for the -- a lot of coke for Japan, you know. For the steel mills. It seems to give out a greater heat than the actual coal.

MB: So okay then, what happened in the smelter?

GM: Oh, it petered out. When we come here they used to get a lot of ore from Mount Sicker up here. And oh, different places, you know. They weren't too many men working, I don't know how many men worked in the smelter. There weren't too many.

MB: What were they smelting?

GM: Oh, anything at all, lead, zinc. Copper, things like that. But most of it, they done so much refining, and then they sent it over to that place in the States. Tacoma.

MB: Was that smelter a Canadian Collieries business?

GM: No. I think it belonged to Mount Sicker, I'm not sure, but that's where they used to get a lot of their ore, you know. It used to come in in small boats. And they had the wharf and they loaded up into the cars and then they had the big winch on top and pulled it up, you see.

MB: Then you might say the both industries in Ladysmith when you came?

GM: Oh yes, and the shingle mill too. It was before Beban's time. To tell the truth, I don't know who owned the shingle mill. But there was only about five white men working in it, it'd be all the rest were Chinamen, you know. We used to swim down there when we were kids because the refuse that used to come out on the conveyor belt you know, there was always a fire, and of course when we come out the water we stood by the fire.

MB: I see the railroad was there.

GM: On the transfer wharf, yes. The train, when the transfer come in,
the train went down. Canadian Collieries at that time they handled all the freight cars. And they put them on that back switch, took them off there, put them on the backswitch, and then they eventually they brought them up to the main rail. the main line.

MB: Well, then when did you go to work in the mine?

GM: Oh, it'd be the latter part of 1917. I was 17. I started what they call as a pusher. See there was two drivers, and where I started, I worked down what they call dips, it dipped right down you see, and the faces (places?) was all here. Well the driver went and pulled a loaded car out of this place, he took the empty down, backswitched it and took the load down, but when he pulled up the load I took the empty and put it down to the digger, you see. And I was called a pusher. That's when I went driving a mule myself. In them days I got $2.50 and drove a mule and got $2.36, and eventually got $3.00 for driving a mule.

MB: It's quite a job, driving that mule!

GM: (chuckle) There were some dandies. Oh we had to work pretty hard them days.

MB: Well, how do you learn to drive a mule?

GM: Oh swear! They seem to understand that better! (hearty laugh).

MB: Did you have any kicks or anything like that?

GM: I sure did. I was 16 weeks off work. I was driving a big -- not a winch, it was gravity, you see. Great big drum, you know. With a rope on it. The incline was longer than the doctor's hill. Longer than that. And steeper. And two loads going down, brought the two loads coming up. And the brake was in the middle you see. When I let the loads go I had to put - Ihad a kid with me you see, and he pushed them over when ever it went over the knuckle. I sat on the brake like this, you see. It was all done by sound. I could tell just exactly where the trip was by sound, you see. And then this fellow was driving mule. Fellow he looked down here. George was his name, and he wasn't very greedy, he was a kind of a poor worker. Well he started lookin for a place up here, and they wanted to start up here, --well to start in here they had to take an empty up, you see, so's to load that, to bring up an empty with gravity you see, you had to push the empty up. So -- he couldn't drive it anyhow, so he told the pusher boss For the love of Mike, Don, I wouldn't drive that mule. So I went up to the mule and I grabbed it by the collar
you know, and I says Come on Kip, and I gave him a bit of a poke, you know, and it jerked, and it stumbled, you know, and pushed me out the road. We straightened out, and we started again, and by golly it stumbled again. I pushed me up against the rib, you know, what we call the rib in the mine.

And when it let go, it squeezed me here when it let go, it let drive, and it got me right here. He gave me a dandy. (laugh). Well I was under two doctors' care and none of the two, they couldn't tell me just exactly what to do, you know. And I got really scared. My leg was getting weaker all the time and I demanded they put my leg through the X-ray and of course them days the doctor had to run the X-ray himself. So there happened to be a different doctor who was there that night, he told me he says I'll be there in half an hour I'll be with you, so when I went in he says to me Take down your pants and let me have a look at your leg. He looked at me, he says to me You know what's the trouble with your leg? No, but there's one thing I do know, I says, it's getting weaker. I'm beginning to drag it. My goodness man, he says, the muscles of your leg are gone! Now, you take the muscle of your leg right there, you see, it was about half, I'd say. But when I started to use that machine with the two handles, I put one on my knee and one there, and that jumped the muscles. And the muscle here wasn't any bigger than about a fifty cent piece. He told me he says about another week and you wouldn't have got that leg to come back. And since I started to use that electricity it picked right up.

MB: It must have been the nerves that were injured.
GM: I don't know, but I got scared, I thought maybe it was the bone, you see.

MB: Well how old were you then?
GM: Oh, about 18.

MB: So you were playing soccer about that time?
GM: No, I didn't play soccer. I played one year soccer and that was in 1920. No, I went to work down in Victoria. I went to work on the diamond drill when it closed down. And they had to bring the machine down here. To pump water up to the washroom because there was no water in the reservoir, you see. So this Bill (R ) who just died, who was buried yesterday, he went to Vancouver to look for a job, and he left me. I crossed over to Victoria and I got a job there and I worked in the drydock for about 6 months.

MB: Well you say that reservoir was dry. How come?
GM: Well, no water, no rain. And there wasn't enough to wash -- see the Canadian Collieries had their own reservoir, the first Creek of (Holland?) creek. The reservoir used to be up there, and of course the overflow come right down here.

MB: And I always thought that they had it here because it was close to the
ocean, that the water was there.

GM: No, no. They use fresh water. That's the only time they ever used salt water, that time of the -- otherwise the mine would have had to close down, you see.

MB: I guess the salt would have done something to the coal.

GM: Yes, it's not good for the coal.

MB: But where did you pump the water from then?

GM: They didn't pump. It was all gravity. See it come from Holland Creek and it come in a flume. We used to walk out there every Sunday to the falls you know. Ladysmith falls. Now they had the reservoir right up here. You see. And that come down in a big pipe. And the overflow whenever there was too much water the overflow passed right down at the back of this house here. -- It used to be a lovely walk up to the falls, you know. You walked on the flume, you see. And the canyon. The canyon was right straight down, you know. Course them days it was all virgin timber. The Hindus they come along and put a mill down here, cut it all. What a mess they made of it, you know.

MB: Things look different today. Well, were you -- let's see, there was an explosion in Extension in 1909. Were you here?

GM: Yes, I was here. I was in Ladysmith. I come here, we landed here the 17th of June, and the explosion was on the (5th) of October. And it rained so much it washed out two or three of the bridges. We thought it was an awful country. Just coming here and seeing 36 men getting buried, you know.

MB: And your father was working there?

GM: He was afternoon shift that day.

MB: What shift was that then?

GM: The morning shift. Happened on the morning shift. And Dad was af'noon shift.

MB: I've been down to the graveyard there several times and seen a lot of the gravestones. I can't imagine the funerals up there. They would be all on foot, the people?

GM: That's right. The band -- as I said Ladysmith had a band when I come here, and the band played to every funeral. But it was all done by hand, of course.

MB: Well did they have them separately, or --

GM: Yes. They buried one and then went back and got the other one. Yes. We knew it wouldn't be all in the one day. It was at least two days anyhow. Course where we was living there, it was right where the school is now, and we used to watch the funerals processions.
MR: What a sad thing it would be.
GM: Oh yes it was! Cast a kind of a pall over the town, you know.
MR: And that Mairs, the gravestone in there, I guess that wasn't built until some time later, oh?
GM: He died in jail, time of the strike, after the riots. Oh I knew him.
MR: Wasn't he a -- I heard he was a champion cyclist.
GM: Well he did go in for that, you know. More so in the old country than what he did here. He was always a fellow -- well, he was a kind of a loner, you know. He kept much to himself, you know.
MR: Well what was your impression of the mine when you went then. Were you glad to get working in the mine, or --
GM: Well the first day was long, oh I thought I'd been in there for a week, you know. But they -- oh I used to like to work in the mines. I used to like to dig coal. I had a good roof and a good floor, you know. But it was a pleasure. You see, nobody bothered you. You was on contract there, the boss come around maybe about oh, once a week. He'd come and talk to you, ask you how were things going, you see. But it was entirely up to you whether you loaded five cars, six cars, or seven cars. It didn't mean nothing to him. And I was going to say, if you had a fairly good roof and a good floor to shovel off of, it was a pleasure.
MR: And that was -- was that in Number 10?
GM: No, that was in Extension. I went to Number 10. Number 10 was the last mine I worked in. That was in South Wellington.
Extension was a tunnel. And Number 8 was slope. Number 10 was a Just like Granby.
slope. Going down, you know./ But in Extension you went in by motor. You went in about three quarters of a mile by the electric motor. And then there three mines, see you went in so far. There was two sets of rails, a set here and you went in. And Number One went that way, and Number Two went away down that way, down towards the Nanaimo river. And Number Three went away up this way towards Mount Benson. It took in quite an area. I'd say the area altogether was around 7 mile. All of 7 mile.
MR: I remember George Edwards telling me he saw the smoke come out of the fan shaft in 1901 when they had that fire. He was just a boy then. But he was staying up there and he saw this black smoke come out. That would be the fan bringing out.
GM: Yes, that wasn't Extension. That was a mine behind Extension. Which was later opened, you know. They flooded it, you see. And after Number Three and them was finished, they opened that, they pumped it out and re-opened it. To take the coal out of it, you see. That's where the fire was.
MB: What was the name of it then?

GM: I don't know. I'm not sure. But that didn't work. It didn't work all the time I was in Extension. But they worked it after Extension finished.

MB: Was it the company that worked it, or was it --

GM: Oh yes. Canadian Collieries, yes.

MB: Because afterwards I know some of them went and worked a mine up there for a few years. A few people, you know. --That was up above then, it wasn't --

GM: Yes, well Extension was here, you see, and this mine was here, and they used to bring down the coal on a small gauge. But that was before my time. And as I say it caught fire, you see, the coal was combustible, and they closed it down, they flooded it, you see. And of course they concentrated all the workings in here. After all this was finished, they re-opened this, (Some irrelevant conversation here).

...This was one of the first places that worked, you see. And they abandoned it. It was giving them trouble because of the fire, you see. Well eventually they did go into it and get the coal out of it, you know. And where I worked, I worked on the place they called incline, and the diggers, they kept a long drill, about 30 feet, going ahead, you see. They drove a narrow, oh just for about six feet, you know, just for a man to be able to work in, and they kept the 30 feet drill going ahead. To this mine I'm telling you, caught fire. And then they have to leave a certain amount of coal between where we were working there, to stop the water. Well Billie Wilson that was him that was boss of the South Wellington he told me that where I was working was where Pete Wafo, the mayor of Nanaimo, well he was one of them that worked there with Mike Galaso (?) and he told me that on the map on the surveyor's map, showed 30 feet. And actually, when they broke through, there was only 8 feet. Now if they'd a broke through there, they would have drowned all these men in the mine I worked, you know. --Yes, just almost on the point of a disaster, you know. But it was the surveyors map that was at fault, you see.

MB: That's what they have told me so many times, that the early maps aren't reliable.

BM: Well lots of times, you see, the surveyor would go in and survey a place, you know and when he come out he would put it down on the map, maybe a hundred feet of coal by fifty, --well when they got the surveyor out the road they went and took it out -- took so much out, ye see. That's what caused the disaster in South Wellington. They kept goin in and goin in, surveyor's marks was faulty, and they started stealin' the coal. And of course they broke through into this old abandoned mine and killed
oh, about 15, I think, drowned.

MB: What mine did they break into.

GM: I don’t know what they called these old mines. But it was in South Wellington anyhow.

MB: And 19, I think, were drowned. & (Concert.)

That company -- I think it was the Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company, at the time.

GM: Well it was the same in Granby. They started to steal some of the Canadian Collierées coal, you know. And of course, the Canadian Collieries sent their surveyors and that down, and they had to make retribution, you know. They stole so much of the coal. And I worked right in Number 10, right on the border where they stole the coal. Gee, it was beautiful coal! About 15 feet of solid coal.

MB: And I heard they had to pay a million dollars fine for that.

GM: I don’t know how much they had to pay. They had to pay something, I think. They would measure the ground and they multiplied by tonnage, you see.

MB: And they were just making an example of them, because I imagine it was a common practice.

GM: It was sure a good piece of coal, I know that. I guess it was kinda tempting to steal it, you know. (End of Side 1)

(Side 2.)

MB: Were you ever in any of these disasters, or did you ever see any?

GM: No. The only one I was in, I was in a blow-out. When I was workin in Number 10 when we was getting towards Grandy mine. And the place I was workin in was about 6½ feet high. And it was begin to show signs of bein very gassy, you know. When we went down the mine, you see, we was inspected by the fire boss. He told me now, he says, Look, he says, you got to drill two shots in the place today, and one shot hasn’t got to be dependent upon the other, you see. --And fire them both at one time. Well I says, you’re breakin' the law! Well he says, the inspectors are here today, and they’re tryin something new. To see if they can stop these blow-outs, y’see. And they were beginnin to get a little bit scared, you know, where I was workin. /To tell the truth, I was beginnin to feel kinda myself, you know. You know, you go in and you fire a shot and you see the coal goin' like this you know (waves hand). And anyhow I was on af’noon shift and I told my partner you go back on the ribbin and see if you can get a car of coal and I’ll drill two shots. I drilled one this way and one that way d’ye see, it come to a Vee. Well the fire boss come in with an extra cable. There was two cables, and he had an
extra one. And he attached it to the other two and he stood back. So we fired them two shots, and he says to me Now just stand here, and if anything happens he says, run down there and warn the other men, and you run up here and run the men that's up there, y' see. Okay. We stood there about half a minute I guess and woof! My partner says I hope it blows enough so we don't have to shoot no more. I says, We're gonna get more than that, I says, before this is finished. So Boof! it went again. So we stood there, y' know, and hboy! oh boy! I thought the world had come to an end. It knocked out 14 sets o' timber, kokked out all the brattish boards, that for conducting the air, you know, and it lifted me up off my feet (indicates about 2 feet), and the roof cracked above my head, I thought the world was comin' to an end, you know. And we run, and I grabbed my coat, but I didn't grab my bucket. But my partner, he didn't grab anything. So we run down and warned the other men and got them out, you know, and the gas kept crawlin' and then of course it come right out to the main slope, and they had to board it off and chalk it up, you know, Danger, Keep Out, you see. And we went back there two days after, there was about 700 tons of that blew out. It was terrifyin', you know. The crack all the brattish boards bein' blown out, and the timber. And the roof held. As we took out the coal we put the timber back up. You see the thing was compacted that hard you know, it held the roof, you see. (smacks fist into other hand.)

MB: What do you mean, compacted ...?
CM: Well the blow-out come from the right side. It come down this way and it blew up against the left rib. This way, just like that, you know. And it was that tight, it held the roof and everything up, you know.

MB: It must have been a very strong formation too, of the roof.
CM: Yeh, it was a pretty good roof. But oh man, there's tremendous power in that gas, you know.

MB: Well then you just got out by the skin of your teeth, by the sound of that...
CM: Well I thought the world was comin to an end. It was terrifyin', you know, to hear the roof crackin above me, you know. I thought everything was just comin in around me. And when it blew, you see, the air -- it pushed the air, and I guess it lifted me off my feet about that far. About two feet, I'd say. I felt myself just bein lifted up. So they stopped it after that. After we got that coal out instead of goin ahead any more they held everything back.

MB: Wasn't it the government that finally closed it down? Because of the blow-outs?
CM: No. Granby was the worst for blow-outs. But they didn't shoot in
Granby, it was all pick work. This is what they were trying in our place, you see. The inspectors was trying to shoot, to see if it would release, instead of this pick, pick, pick, you see? No, I think Granby hit the boundary. --I had a brother killed in Granby. Only 20 years of age.

MB: What was that from then?

GM: Well, he quit Extension, you know, and my mother and father asked us -- we was livin over there, and my mother was kinda sick and it was throwing quite a burden on my sister, and they asked us if we would go out for the summer, you know, and give her a rest. Well my brother and I went out to the old Abbotsford Hotel and we stayed there. Well he told me I'm kinda scared of that job xxxxxx. He was taking the xxxxx after the trip passed, it had two timber trucks on it. They would have about six cars of coal, two timber trucks. Well he used to take the rope across to the other workin you see, the other parts (?) as we called it. So he says I don't like them timber trucks, he says, No look, I says, if you're scared of your job, I says, you quit, I'll keep ye. You go back to Extension I says, and get a job xxxxxx. Well he says, as soon as I -- he bought a suit, and he says as soon as I get my suit paid up, he says, I will. And by golly, the very thing that he was scared of and he told my sister and he told my brother too, just like havin premonition, you know. The very thing he talked about, happened. His last timber truck, the thing broke, when he had the rope on his shoulder and it come down, and the undertaker told me there weren't a whole bone in his body. It carried him about a hundred feet down the slope. When they picked him up his light was still burnin' of course, and he was dead. He was only twenty.

MB: I've seen those cars in the museum, and what a weight, what are they, a ton?

GM: Yes, quite a weight, I'd say about 1500 pound. But these timber trucks, you see, they used to take the timbert down on these timber trucks, and they're about that high, and then when they emptied them they brought them up by the coal cars. And they couldn't use a drag on them. The coal cars they had to use a drag. See in case the rope broke, you see. They xxxxxx drag could throw the cars off the track (?). But the timber cars they couldn't use it. And of course when the chain broke, you see, she was pretty steep. (?)

MB: When you were saying before about the sound, that you could tell about where the trip was by sound, was that because it was dark and ...

GM: Yeh, you couldn't see. You had to go by sound. Then you went -- sound -- and the car was on your rope -- you watched your rope too, you know. You knew if you was comin near the bottom or near the top by the coils on your rope. But it was mostly done by sound. You could hear the cars comin you see,
after the loads would pass the empties. Well after the loads passed the
empties you -- the sound would be more clear. And then you would stand up
you know, and hold on to the brake like this, you see, and watch the slack trip
comin over the knuckle. The cars comin over the knuckle.
MB: And what about the smell of the mine? You had to rely on your senses,
I'm sure.
GM: Oh there was no smell to it. It was just as clear down there as what
it is here.
MB: Not damp, or anything like that?
GM: No. You could smell it of course, if you was in a gassy place, you
could smell the gas, you know.
MB: You could, eh?
GM: Oh yes, you could smell it! See, gas comes out the coal is pure. And
it won't ignite, it won't explode. But the minute it gets mixed up with
oxygen, that's when it gets lethal, you see. And you go up and stick your
nose in it and boy, you're down like that.
MB: But you can smell it?
GM: Oh yes, you can smell it, once it gets mixed with the oxygen, you see.
(Conversation here re seeing gas -- adds nothing to interview.)
MB: So how many brothers and sisters did you have in your family?
GM: I had four brothers and two sisters.
MB: Did the brothers all work in the mines?
GM: Yes. My oldest brother he worked in the mine and then he quit and then
he went down to Victoria, and he worked (there) and then he joined the forces,
you know. He was overseas until 1919. He got wounded at Ypres. (Epree).
MB: And what did he do when he came back?
GM: He went into the coal mine. And he got his leg broke wherever he was
wounded, and shortened his leg. He was over a year in the hospital. He
got married when he was in the old country, and his oldest girl was born on
Armistice Day, you know. And of course when he come back from the forces he
lived with us over there. Got a house of his own and went to the mine and
got his leg broke. And it broke right where he was wounded, shortened his
leg.
MB: So did he have compensation or anything like that?
GM: Oh he got compensation, yes. Course them days it wasn't too much,
you know. About 62 percent then.
MB: Yes, the union wasn't very strong then, was it?
GM: Well, when they started organized, when they started, I was workin in
Number Ten. That's when they organized the union.
MB: And you say they had a band here. And did they have a choir?

GM: No, they had no choir, just, outside of the church. Actually there was no other choir here.

MB: But the band, you used to have parades and things?

GM: Oh yes! They had a band, oh yes! A pretty good band, you know.

MB: They must have been pretty active.

GM: And then later on that band dissolved, you know, and then they re-organized and got another band, and they lifted first prize in British Columbia for about two years straight. They had a good band, yes.

MB: And I was just thinking -- Johnnie Pecnik showed me a badge that his father had for the first 8-hour day, union badge. The United Mine Workers of America. And on the back was a black ribbon which they used when there was a funeral. Did they have such things here? Like black ribbons or anything?

GM: No. Ever since I been born it's been the 8-hour day.

MB: But when they had a funeral did they have any special arm bands or badges?

GM: No. Well, the immediate family of course, wore a black band around their arm. But outside of that, no.

MB: And you say when this disaster happened in 1909 the band played --

GM: Every funeral, yes. They picked up one and took it to the graveyard and then went back and picked up --

MB: Played hymns, I suppose?

GM: Yes. I still know the tune.

MB: What was it?

GM: Well I don't know the name of the tune, but what I mean to say, I can sit and hum it to myself, you know.

MB: Can you hum it now?

GM: (hums a few bars.) --It was a kind of an eerie tune, you know. Sometimes it rings in my ears even yet.

MB: Well that's an experience that not very many people go through, you know. Having that -- two days of funerals going.

Well then about entertainments that you had. Soccer, for instance, what about the team, they used to say Ladysmith had a good team here.

GM: In 1921 to about 1925 they had a real good team. Now when I come here they had one of the best teams in Canada. That was in 1908, 1909 and 10.

MB: Did you say there was a team came over from England?

GM: The Corinthians. They were an amateur team. But they were good men in it, you know. And they played Ladysmith. Ladysmith was ahead 2 - 1, and they shot a goal in the last 2 minutes, and they admitted after the game
that Ladysmith was the best team they'd met. On the tour.

MB: Can you remember any of your star players?

GM: In Ladysmith? I remember them all! W

MB: All right - let's have some of the names.

GM: Well when I come here there was Jack Rogers, and I could tell you every player on the team that was say when I come here, but you wouldn't know what I was talkin about.'

MB: No, but people could go and look back, and if any students wanted to make a study of these things they would know what name to look up, ad things like that.

GM: Well when I come here there was David Dougan in goal, and there was Jack Rogers and Bob Cosier on the fullback, course them days there was no such a thing as striker, mid-fielders. And then on the half back line there was Jimmie Strang, there was Fred Warburton, I forget the other one. On the other side right there was little Billie McLeod, no, McDougall, and then McGuire, big Jimmie Adams, he run the store here, and then there was Jack Grass, and McLeod on the outside left. That was the team.

MB: Were most of them miners?

GM: Most of them. Well there were some of them - Jimmie Adams he run the store here. He was centre forward, you know. Yeh, most of them were miners.

MB: Can you remember, were any of them ever killed in accidents?

GM: No, I don't think so.

MB: I'm thinking about Daisy Waugh in Nanaimo.

GM: Oh well that's a different thing. He was killed in Protection yes. Of course that's later on again. Yes. I think he was electrocuted.

(a few words re this accident which is covered on other tapes). Mike Plecas tape.)

MB: I worked about 35 years for the coal mines, there's always a lot of things happen, you know.

MB: There were lots of beer parlors here, eh?

GM: When I come here there was 15 hotels, and a boarding house. Yeh. And every one of them were doin' business. And between Ladysmith and the Diamond there used to be the UBC Brewery there, you know. And then there was another place up on the hill here so they where like a wholesale liquor place, you know.

MB: What was beer in those days?

GM: A dozen of big quarts was $1.50. When I worked in Simon Leiser's. And a bottle of Scotch, Club, you know, that was $1.25.

Beer was all five cents. The man who was manager in the grocery department where I worked, every day in the week I went for a bottle of whiskey for him. And it was this Canadian Club, you know. And of course it suited me to go, I got outside. You know, and got a smoke, you see, when I was out there.
And I used to go and rap on the door of the old Frank Hotel, and he'd come you know, and he'd bring me out a shandy, that was a little well, beer and soda water, and of course I used to down that, you know. I was quite willing to go for the whiskey you know, it didn't bother me.

MB: He must have been pickled, that man.

GM: No. You know, it's a funny thing. Dave Gourlay down here, and myself, we never yet smelled drink on that man!

MB: And how old did he live to be?

GM: He lived to be a pretty good age.

MB: It would kill some people.

GM: I don't know. Probably him and his wife drunk it, I don't know. Every day. I used to go in Gorfield's (?) store, make no bones about it, put it in his pocket, inside of his coat, and that was it.

MB: Some have told me about the miners who would bring their buckets and go and get some beer --

GM: Yes. Oh yes. Well when I was driving in Number One, you see, the digger was one of the digger's would say to me, he'd give me two bits you see. And we used to walk out with the mules, you see. Before the trip come with the diggers, you see. We had to walk out with the mules. Well when we walked out, you see, we just popped over the hill to the bar, and got the two bits bucket of beer. By that time, by the time you got down, the trip was out, when I used to go along the bars, they used to have a salt jar there, if you wanted make to put salt in your beer you done it, but most of the people just ignored it, you know. You'd take salt if you wanted it.

MB: Did the miners ever have any fights?

GM: Oh yes. There was always a fight now and again, you know. I had a couple myself when I was up there.

MB: You mean actually on the job?

GM: No, you can't fight in the mine! No, you'd get put in jail, you're fined heavy if you fight in the mine. If you had a difference you settled it when you come outside.

(Says to listener: I guess this is all boring to you, is it? --No, no.)

MB: Did you have any funny incidents with the mules?

GM: The mules? Oh well you had to show them who was boss. If they ever done anything and they persisted in doing it, you just got their halter then and tied them up to the stringer, and tied them up tight and got what we call the lagging, about four feet, and let them have it. And it done good. Oh, you couldn't let a mule get the best of you.

MB: And then they came to horses, didn't they?

GM: Oh very few. Not in Number Three. They had a few in Number Two.
Towards the latter end, you know. Put outside of that it was mostly all mules. Some of the mules I drove was good. And others again were treacherous, you know. And you had to watch 'em.

MB: Yes, I heard that they bite and they kick and they.

GM: I was drivin one one time, he was a good mule too when he was workin. double, and I went down one time and he was feedin on some hay in there. And I put my hand on his rump, I must have scared him. By golly he chased me from about here to Ryan's house, with the harness rattlin and the chains rattlin on him. I was scared that day too.

MB: They can be that vicious, eh?

GM: Well I don't know what that mule would've done, you know! And then I drove another, oh he was an erratic old thing. He wouldn't hold the car, you know, he'd go up so far and the brake wasn't good, he wouldn't hold, he'd let the thing come back. Well I let it come back two or three times and at the finish up I got mad and I jumped off the car altogether, and pulled the harness over his head, and when I went down there was a piece of wood, what we call a cog, stickin up over that, he was just like a dog, you know, he had that in his mouth, shakin it. I thought, I'll let you cool down for a little while 'fore I'll go near ya.

GB: Gee, they could be man killers then.

GM: Yes, some of them try and bite you, you know. I drove this big Blacko one day, he was a kind of an erratic mule. In fact when I was workin anybody else they couldn't drive him. He just wouldn't do anything for them. He'd just stand and shake his head. But anyhow I got him to work all right. And he wouldn't back up very good, and I was pulling on the tail chain, you know, and I got mad and I went and kicked him in the hoof. Boy, as soon as I kicked him in the hoof he let drive, right between my legs! Just about got me! --And then I drove another one by the name of Major. He was an erratic big son of a gun too. He would pull when he shouldn't have pulled, you know. Wx We pushed him in the mules in the morning, and of course as I said the drivers went in before the diggers, and I went and put my hand on his rump, and oh boy, he let me have it! And he got me between my legs, and he lifted me, oh, I guess he lifted me the length of this kitchen. Sailed me right through the air! And the diggers was in, and I landed at one of them's feet, and he said What's goin on here! I told him I said that doggone mule, I said, (laugh) and When I took down my pants I was red raw from my knees right up, you know -- took the skin right off my leg!

MB: That's a distance of about 20 feet!

GM: Oh, he let me have it with both feet! He just stood on his front feet, you know, and he let me have it with both of them!
If he'd a hit me he'd a maybe broke my leg. But you see he got me between my legs. And I was red raw, you know. (laugh).

ME: So when you approached him again I guess you were pretty careful.

CH: Oh yes, I watched him after that! Yes.

ME: Would you do it all over again, if you had to?

CH: Sure! Sure, I'd do it all over again.

ME: It's a hard life.

CH: We had our good times too, you know. Some places I had a good job, and other times I was pretty well heavy worked, you know. And as I say, I had some good mules and I had some tough ones. And I liked digging coal. Not when the place was wet, and you was getting wet every day. You know. I didn't like that, but if you had a pretty good place, with a fairly good amount of coal, had a good roof and a good floor, it was pleasant work. I liked it all right. I know when I went down to Victoria and worked at some of the jobs down there, I thought boy oh boy, they talk about coal mine, I wouldn't work down here! Some of the men used to go down there, you know.

ME: So you feel that people had a good life, or a hard life in those days, or compared with now, I mean.

CH: Oh Ladysmith was a nice little place. There was a good feeling in town, you know. I think most of the men enjoyed it all right. I never heard none of them complain.

ME: No, it's just that I think the generation today don't really understand, realize how hard their parents and that had to work for what they've got today, you know. I made they were the ones who really made these towns what they are.

If it hadn't been for the coal and the coal miners, what would there be? And it was very very hard work. It was harder work than what most people realize today.

CH: Oh when the mines were slack we never got no money. We just got what we earned at the mine, that's all. Had to get along, in the depression there. I only got $32 a month to keep a wife and two kids in the time of the depression. But I was fortunate enough to get a day here and there, you know.

ME: Yes, I can see that living here would be a blessing, because you had the hunting and the fishing, and --

CH: Yeh, well I never bothered that much, but I got a few days helping some of the fellows on a building, you know, mixing cement, and that, you know. Digging ditches, for sewers, and stuff like that you know. I was fortunate enough always to get a few days, you know. But it was pretty tough going. Then I went to the Overwaitea and I worked there for 3½ year, and I got $3 a day. That's $18 a week. And then after they struck the coal in South Wellington I quit the Overwaitea and went back to the mine. And when I started I got $5.25 a day. Then it jumped to $6 and eventually I went on contract. /over
they were and by that time organized. And we went on contract then and jumped from about $6 a day to about $10 a day.

MB: Do you remember when South Wellington got burnt out?

GM: Well I think that was before we came here.

(a few more words which add nothing to interview)

End of tape.