This is Myrtle Bergren interviewing Donald "Dusty" Greenwell on April 23, 1979, for the Coal Tyee History Project.

MB: I was wondering what your impressions were -- what you can first remember as a child, in your house, about all this background of your family, because it is quite a family in Nanaimo history.

DG: (long pause). Well do you want to know about history period, or about the coal mine part, or what?

MB: You can't very well separate it in your family, can you?

DG: Well not really, but there is the thing that most people remember as kids, the question that with the mines always shut down in the summer, they worked in the winter because they were coal burning -- it was a household fuel, it wasn't so much for an export market, it was as domestic fuel. In the summer time, July and August, there was always unemployment in the family.

MB: How many did you have in your family?

DG: Three. George, myself, and Ruth. Ruth though, is seven years later than us.

MB: And then you had a lot of relations?

DG: Yes. Well, we all lived within a couple of miles of one another, and in our family, three brothers married three sisters. So we were more like brothers and sisters rather than cousins.

MB: Where was this at?

DG: South Wellington and Extension.

MB: You moved from Extension to South Wellington?

DG: And then we moved back to Extension, and back to South Wellington.

MB: Well those houses -- somebody's house burned down, didn't it?

DG: Archie's. (Greenwell).

MB: But where did you end up at?

DG: At South Wellington. 1930, about 1928 or 30, we moved back to Extension for a few months. I was in Grade 4 or 5 in school, I remember.

MB: Do you remember why you moved back?

DG: Yes, Dad was a hoistman at No. 5 mine in South Wellington, and it closed down. In them days there was no cars or transportation between South Wellington and Extension, so they told us there was a job in Extension running motor for him if he would move there.

MB: Well, and your father wasn't blacklisted from before?
DG: Oh he was blacklisted from 1933 to 1935.
MB: Well how come he wasn't blacklisted in 1928 too?
DG: Well there was not much blacklisting in 1928.
MB: Not after the strike?
DG: No, the strike was 1912.
MB: Yes, I know.
DG: Well, Dad had to go to Coalhurst in Alberta in 1912, but that was before my time.
MB: Yes, but there were some people who were blacklisted for years and years, walking around Nanaimo.
DG: Yes, well he left for Coalhurst Alberta, so the story goes, and they were there a few months and he come back to Nanaimo and -- they weren't married yet, Mum and Dad. They got married I think in 1916, and he started I think work again in 1916.
MB: Yes, we've got that tape where your mother tells about when she was a girl, she was 19, and I think the police came to the door in the strike. But there was one story that Ruth told me, and I wondered about this, and that is that one of your relations, who was a boy at the time, was taken by the police, and was accused of setting fire to --
DG: Yes, Uncle Bill.
MB: Yes, and what was that story?  
DG: Well the story was that he was supposed to have set fire to the company boss' house, over in the townsite of Extension, and he was arrested and sent to jail, and he was released on bail for Christmas, 1913, I guess, '12, or '13. On fifty thousand dollars bail. Half had to be cash, and half in land security, and when his trial come up, he was of course proven innocent. Because he had nothing to do with it. He's dead now.
MB: Do you mean to say that fifty thousand dollars was raised?
DG: Yep.
MB: How?
DG: I don't know. I know my uncle put up his farm, and miners put up their property, and -- well I just forgot now how the cash was raised, but half had to be cash, and half had to be land property.
MB: It's just like wanting a million dollars today. -- Was he sick at the time?
DG: No.

MB: Oh, then it was another one, your mother said that the police took one of her relations that was not even well. I think he was only a boy. It's in your mother's interview.

DG: That I don't remember. But my Uncle Don, you know -- they arrested the whole Greenwell family -- that's my Uncle Arch, Uncle Ike, and Dad. And at that time they used to sleep in bed with skull caps, you know, these night gowns on? And they thought he was a woman in bed, so they never arrested him. --And Uncle Don never was arrested. The one I'm named after. That was up in the hills, their house was up on the hill, just before you go down the valley into Extension.

MB: You know where Scotty Sutherland lives? The entrance to the mine is close by there, isn't it?

DG: Well his is closed in. It's closer to the store.

MB: Where did you live from there?

DG: You know where Auntie Phoebe lives? (Phoebe Arbuthnot) -- well we lived about half a mile towards the main entrance of Extension. Bramleys old house.

MB: It's called Virosko Road.

DG: Yes, well we lived on Virosko Road, about half a mile from Auntie Phoebe down the road.

MB: So you remember the Bramleys too?

DG: Oh, I remember the Bramleys! I know them all!

MB: Tell me of the Bramleys that you remember.

DG: George, Cap, Ted, -- there were two girls too, I've forgotten their names. These are the fathers and the uncles of kids my age. Mrs. Dora Hamilton was a Bramley -- she's still alive. She lives in Extension yet. Mrs. Cosier. (Kosher?).

MB: Did she marry a Croatian? There were quite a few Croatians, but only one lived up there, and that was Bodovinicks.

DG: Yes, Bodovinick, and I know them too, Danny and George and Alex, and Mr. and Mrs. Bodovinick. I was in their house lots of times.

MB: Yes. Mr. Bodovinick was killed two days before Christmas one year.

DG: These are the things we want to know, anything about their social composition and leisure time --

DG: Well Dad was a good baseball player. He played baseball for Nanaimo, Wellington, and for Extension. He played for many years baseball in Nanaimo. He was one of the best catchers in Nanaimo at that time, so the story goes.
MB: And how old was he when he died?
DG: Oh he died of a heart attack when he was fifty 59.
MB: And he mined right up to the last?
DG: Yes.
MB: What was he, a digger?
DG: Yes, he'd do almost anything. He was on the haulage, he was digging, and he on the hoist most of the time, running the hoist most of the time. But in later years he was digging and then --
MB: Those Greenwells, where did they originate? Back east?
DG: Well, Gramma Greenwell come from Nova Scotia, and they originally come from Scotland and the Bowaters come from West Bromwich and Tipton in England.
MB: What we were wondering was --
DG: There were certain families who took the lead in fighting for better conditions, for the miners. And what was it that gave them that idea of how to get organized?
DG: I don't know, my grandfather always was a good community -- good social convener, worker, a good neighbour to -- and I think that had a lot to do with political development. And the struggles they seen in 1912 they brought some of their old country upbringing here and just passed it on. Because I think it's true that Nanaimo has probably had the longest election of any socialist -- or that area. Ladysmith, Nanaimo, of any probably place in Canada. And I think it's the history of the miners themselves that done that.
MB: So they would be in England, say, about the time of -- well, some of those revolutionary movements --
DG: Well Gramp started in the mine when he was seven years old, my grandfather. I got a copy there, I just looked the other day, and he died when he was 86, and he worked till he was 70 in the mines. So he worked from he was 7 to he was 70. (Hands interviewer/clipping.)
That's when he died.
MB: I should just read this. William Bowater, aged 86, Extension Pioneer, Dies. At his home in Extension on Monday, William Bowater, 86, one of the most picturesque pioneers of this section, passed away. For the past 44 years he had been one of the outstanding citizens of that area, and by virtue of an abundant good nature and cheerful outlook on life in general, he was an extremely popular figure. He was representative of that characteristic figure, the coal miner, in every respect. At 7 years of age he was a pit boy in the Old Country mines.
DG: That would be 1944. And this here -- he learned us kids. He talked
to us. He talked to my father, and my mother, about the -- I think
that's why they became so active in -- and I don't think there's many
of these around Nanaimo. That's the first agreement that was signed
between the Miners' Union and the Company in 1938. And the wage scale
is inside that they got, and everything.

ME: That's great. I'd better put the date down so I can look it up.

DG: No, I don't think you'll find it anywhere. That was printed by the
Union, and I bet you that's the only copy in existence.

ME: Well, you read out what it is and the date,

DG: I suspect this is the only copy in existence. This is the first
Agreement, a copy of the Island Miner, 1st edition, put out by the Official
Organ of sub-District 18, United Mine Workers of America, that covered
Cumberlnd and Nanaimo. And the main item in the paper is the question
of the official signing of the Agreement on November the 18th, 1936
between the Company and the Union, and it gives the -- the heading in the
paper is that "it is mutually understood and agreed that the following
conditions and rates shall cover the parties hereto from June 15th
that year and no time be specified but that it is hereby provided
that either party may terminate this Agreement on the 30th of March in
any year by giving at least one month's notice. It is signed by District
18, United Mine Workers, and on the front there is a picture of the
negotiating team, both the Union and the Company.

ME: Does it say who they are?

DG: Yes. You seen that picture we were looking at, at the last gathering
of the union? This is the same picture, but they didn't have the names.
This one has got the names on it. The names are, on the picture,
starting from left to right, on the front row, is Ed Boyd, Secretary,
Nanaimo Local; Dick Cole, President of the Cumberland Local; John Hunt,
General Manager of Western Fuel Corporation; Pat Conroy, Vice-President
District 18 UMW of A.; and chairman of the meeting. P.S. Pagan,
secretary Canadian Collieries Dunsmuir Ltd.; Ed Webb, President of the
Nanaimo Local, and H.R. Plummer, General Manager Canadian Collieries,
and Managing Director, Western Fuel Corporation. Second row, is
Don Armand, Nanaimo; William S. Atkinson, District Representative
U.M.W. of A.; John Pollock, Union Bay; John Doney Stockand, Cumberland;
Third row: James Robertson, Secretary of the Cumberland Local; John
Atkinson, Nanaimo; Tom Foley, Bevan; and William Lowe, Nanaimo.
MB: Yes, some of those people are still living.
DG: All of them are. No, Atkinson is dead. Ed Webb is dead. Boyd is dead. But Don Armand is still alive.
MB: Oh, I've interviewed Steve Armand.
DG: No, this is a different family, lives in Lantzville. And Billie Lowe is still alive, I think. And Doney Stockand just died.
MB: I didn't even know about that paper. (The Island Miner).
DG: I just run across it by chance. I was looking through some of Dad's old stuff for this interview, and he had that in the box.
MB: Well really that is something, the way they describe your grandfather's character there. This is what caused him to be so concerned then with the conditions of the people around, because he was just inclined that way.
DG: But out of the family, I suppose, my mother and father themselves, was probably the leaders of the family in fighting for better conditions, for the miners. Dad was first secretary, underground, of the Miners' Union. And the meeting to form the first local in South Wellington was held at our house, with Tommy Shore, who was the District organizer. And old Ed Pearce. And I remember that meeting very plainly. We were all going to go to a dance. I was about 16, 15 years old. And George was teaching school in the Peace River by this time, and Mum and Dad and myself, Gronell, Archie and Frank, and George Tillie, and Jake Godrey had an orchestra and they were put on a dance in South Wellington. And we were all going to the dance. And Tommy Shore and Ed Pearce drove up at 5 o'clock.
And said they were going to have a little meeting. We waited, and the dance started at 9 o'clock, and Mum and me waited until 11, and they were still meeting, so we went off to the dance by herself. And Mother was so mad! She didn't know what the meeting was all about. She was so mad that she could have shot dad!
MB: It was that secret.
DG: Well yes! Because they (laughter) -- we know now what it was about, but we didn't know then.
MB: And you also told me once who were putting out the We Too. Because Jack Atkinson said that he didn't know. He said he was the leader of the cell in Ladysmith, but he didn't know who put it out. Do you know who they were?
DG: Oh, I have ideas. No, I know them actually, I guess. Tommy Lawrence was the editor. He got deported later in 1941 from Ontario. But he was the Miners' Union of Canada organizer on Vancouver Island. And I used to deliver them around on my bike to the cell leaders.
MB: I don't know if there's anyone of the people I know who know who did put it out. Because they talk about it, and are really proud of it, but --

DG: Yeah. Well, that's who. Well, I suppose some of the stories they told, I guess if it was ever known who put it out, they probably were ... (hearty laughter, but no definite finish).

MB: I wanted to go back a little about the why's of these things. Everybody know it's a very sensitive area in Nanaimo history, the strike. And it's still there, you know. So we're very careful the way we handle it. So there was a big split within the community between the strikers and the scabs, so-called.

DG: But when the second union came into effect in 1937, some of those people who scabbed in 1912, played quite an active role in reorganizing the Mine Workers' Union in 1937 and '38. And I could name some, but I won't.

MB: No, we don't want any names.

DG: But that's a fact of life.

MB: Yes, it is, and we have to deal with it in this history. We wouldn't be getting under the surface if we didn't.

MB: I delivered Wee Too's to some of their homes, and I remember my father telling me Well that person scabbed in 1912, so don't you say nothing.

MB: Tommy MacDonald said he thinks the children of some of those people suffered the most and became some of the most militant people in the organization of the lumber industry later on.

DG: I guess they did! Because I know some of their kids. And some of their kids that I know were always good union men.

MB: And also, like Tom said, some of the families were split. For instance, some of his family --

DG: Well I know one family where -- so my mother told the story, that two families lived in the same house, two brothers. And them days they had two beds in one room. And one guy put a curtain down the middle of his room, he put Scab on one side, and Union Man on the other side! (laughter).

MB: Well Tom was telling me about -- some of his people were religious, as you know. That they really thought that they were going by the Bible. That they were doing right according to the Bible. Of course he can look at it objectively now, but he didn't then. I mean he wasn't born, but as the years went by. xxx
DG: But you see, the question of the militancy of the miners, also when they went when the fight for their mines became closed down and they fought for relief in the '30's. They had some very militant struggles in Nanaimo and Ladysmith, South Wellington, Extension, for relief and shoes for their kids, and everything. One thing they did -- I guess they learnt it from the struggles for their own conditions, they always, in a lot of cases, included the whole family in their struggle. It wasn't just the men. Their wives and the kids wanted shoes, they bundled the kids with them and away the kids went.

MB: And you can remember this?

DG: Oh, I remember going to Ladysmith two or three times, for shoes! Oh, sure, I remember them, clear as a --

MB: Where did you go?

DG: To buy it was the Provincial police, and he was also the relief officer. You had to go to the police station, for, I guess it was the City of -- it was down by the E&N railway track. And I suppose it was the city government building. I remember one time they were fighting for unemployed insurance, or relief for the single unemployed, like anybody they said that had to move away from home, would go to the relief camps. So they -- it was raining like hell, and they walked or hitch hiked to Ladysmith and then when they got there, my father, Joe Malbon, and Pete Wilkinson were leading the delegation. So after they finished talking and they asked the how to get home, in that rain, Well, he says, Get on the train. He didn't mean it, of course, because at that time the passenger train still run between Victoria and Nanaimo. So when the passenger train come along, they all got on the passenger train.

They (according to ) he intended them to get on the engine, not on the cushions. They went on the car, and rode inside. And when the conductor come along to get the two-bit fare, nobody had any money. So he took all their names, and about a couple of months or a month later, they were all summonsed to appear in court. So they all appeared in court, and got a year's suspended sentence, for riding on CPR property for nothing.

MB: And what did that entail, having a year's suspended sentence?

DG: Nothing! It was (laughter)...

MB: It was a warning?

DG: That's all. (laughter)
MB: Do you remember too, when the unemployed used to come over from Vancouver, and go to Victoria?

DG: Oh, I remember two marches. To Victoria. One they slept in the old Fishermen's hall in Nanaimo, used to be on Front Street, in front of the CCF Hall, you know. The Fishermen's Hall used to be there. And they marched in from Green Timbers in Parksville, and then the National Unemployed Council had the Elite Hall in Nanaimo -- that's up where the old fire hall used to be, and it later became the U.M.W. of A. hall. Later after that it became the Unemployment Insurance Office. They some slept up there.

MB: Did you say they marched all the way from Parksville?

DG: Yes. They had a camp at Parksville. Parksville, or Qualicum. Parksville, I think.

MB: What part did the miners play in all this?

DG: Not much, the miners. The mines were all closed in that -- except Western Fuel. Nanaimo was not very -- you know the miners were very scared of their -- you see the union was not out in the open yet, then. That was before the union came out in the open in 38 37. And they were scared of their shadows. --Not because they wanted to be! They had no choice. Those who did, were out! (End of Side 1).

(Side 2) signed by Bill Lee and Tommy Harrison. I remember them two very well.

And it says The Western Fuel Sick and Accident Fund. This organization was born as a result of a determined effort from the workers to resist a wage cut, and maintain an organization which had served a useful purpose for many years past, namely, the Accident Fund. The spirit of the workers at that time was one of determination that if the employers closed one door, the workers would seek another one to open. Hence we have this organization that the workers have supported for 13 years. (He adds: That was before 1938.) --Appealing to you who are without protection against sickness and accident to become a member now. No doubt you will recall the days when some unfortunate worker was hard up against it and an appeal would be made through the pit committee or accident fund and the men were selected to collect at the bank to aid such a cause. (That was every second Saturday morning, was payday at the bank, and somebody would line up at the bank collecting /few dimes for somebody who was off sick.)

--Experience of these cases proved /the committee after investigating that some were too old to join /a fraternal order, some could not pass a medical examination, some could not pay the fee to join these movements, therefore it was resolved by the workers to start an organization that would
that would overcome these difficulties, **the only test of good health and desire to pay your contribution.** We therefore appeal to you young and old to get behind this workers' movement and make some provision against the hour of need. This fund is open to all workers living within a radius of four miles of the Nanaimo Post Office. --William Lee, President, Tom Harrison, Secretary.

**MB:** Well that's a pretty historic document. --And then we wanted something on race relations in terms of fellow miners. Did you ever hear of any racial discrimination amongst the miners?

**DG:** Well, you see when I went to work in the mines, the union was already in existence for one year. I was 18. I was a year off after I come from school before I got a job, at Number 10. And the pretty well racial discrimination between the Yugoslavs and the English speaking, if you want to put it that way, had been pretty well broke down. But because the minority Yugoslavs, particularly because they were the biggest group at that particular time, played a leading role in organization of the Miners' Union. Or some of them did. But before that, the company used to import the same people in in order to keep the English speaking people from getting the jobs. So it was built up, but it broke down, and now there's no more race discrimination or feeling between the people when I started work. Everybody was equal.

**MB:** I've been told that some racial groups were imported as strike breakers, and maybe some of them didn't know what they were coming into.

**DG:** I said, the company imported some Yugoslavs, I know who they were, to come to work, but they weren't as strike breakers. They were to come to work, but they took the jobs of other -- they didn't hire any local residents. But they hired those people, but they weren't actually strike breakers. In my time. Far as I was concerned there was never any racism. I got on well with all people.

**MB:** And they're all inter married now anyway. That's Canadian anyway.

--And what about housing?

**DG:** Well, if you look around -- I think, if I go to Nanaimo today, I can pick out the miners' homes, now, that were then. In a lot of cases, they were unpainted, they were well kept, but you could just pick them out. They had a thing all by themselves as -- and they was all single family dwellings. In Nanaimo and South Wellington and Extension where I was raised mostly, or knew about, there was very few company houses. Up in Cumberland there were a lot of company houses.

**MB:** Is there a difference then? Oh you mean company owned houses--
for the men who worked.

DG: Company houses, they paid rent to the company. In my time in Nanaimo and Extension and South Wellington, the company/had pretty well went out of existence. Each owned their own home.

MB: And what do you think caused this? (Pause) What was the rental?

DG: Oh I don’t know what the rents of the company houses were. But you see, the men became, with this seasonal occupation as it was in a lot of cases, the men built their own, like a lot of them changed industries during the lay-off period.

MB: But there were only the two industries, eh?

DG: Logging and mining. Well I know some people, maybe not a lot, that worked in the logging camps in the summer, and the mines in the winter.

MB: Would you say that the miners were more exploited than the loggers?

DG: Oh, I don’t know! I’d say exploitation is the same in all... because the loggers lived right on the job. In the bunkhouses, in them days.

MB: But they were moving, forever.

DG: Yes, but they were blacklisted. They were paying for room and board to the companies, something the miners where I worked didn’t. No, exploitation is exploitation, no matter where it is. (chuckle).

MB: You didn’t have too much skilled labour in the mines, eh?

DG: No, not much.

MB: So education wouldn’t do very much good to a man in those days.

DG: But it depends on what you classify skilled labour, you see. A miner himself has got to be very skilled, the same as a faller in the woods has got to be very skilled. It depends on the classification of skilled labour. Because he doesn’t have education in school doesn’t mean that he wasn’t skilled labour. For instance my grandfather never went to school after he was seven years old. But there never was a skilled-er miner anywhere around than him.

MB: What did he become?

DG: Just a coal miner, that’s all. Digger.

MB: You have to have a paper --

DG: Yes, I had one. You had to sit an exam.

MB: What did you have to know to get that basic paper?

DG: Well, you have to know some safety precautions, you’d worked in a mine a couple of years, that was the biggest thing. Experience was the biggest thing.

MB: For a man though, leaving school at the age of nine --

DG: Yes, but he had worked how many years in the mines -- And maybe when he started digging, maybe they didn’t have to get a paper,
I don't know.
MB: I opened up those books in the museum and to look at it and see what a person had to know to become a fire boss, it's fantastic. About air pressure, mathematics,
DG: Airways...
MB: Yes, this is just what Mike/Krall said. He said they looked down upon the miners, they thought they didn't know anything, but it was just the opposite,
DG: Yes, it depends on what you call experience, you know, or rather trade.
MB: Yes, because you could go down and get killed.
DG: And get your whole shift killed, if you didn't know what you were doing. With an explosion.
MB: Wasn't there some trouble with the Chinese being in the mines, they couldn't understand...?
DG: Well, that was before my time, but I heard my grandfather tell the story about he was one of those that went on strike against the Chinese, and Indians, because they were paying the Chinese and Indians -- I've forgot the amount -- less than what they were paying the white miners, so the white miners went on strike against the Indians, to get them out the mines so that they wouldn't be cutting their wages. Instead of going against the company to raise the Chinese and Indian wages up, and the strike ended with them saying no more Native or Indian people would work underground.
MB: I think Hawthornethwaite was in then --
DG: I don't know. I heard my grandfather tell the story many times, how stupid he was (laugh). didn't understand and they
MB: And I've been told too how many times the Chinese/lit their pipes, and they had matches on them.
DG: Well I don't know. My grandfather never told that story.
MB: It could have been one of the reasons given.
DG: But the biggest reason was he said that the companies were paying them less than -- and they were a threat to the white miners' wages.
MB: Did you ever hear about the Chinese going on strike?
DG: No.
MB: I read about it -- in Extension.
DG: I read somewhere about them going on strike, but I never heard my grandfather tell the story. They went on strike on a tipple, or something.
MB: I'll have to look that up.
Comparative experience between the miners and the mine-owners.

Did the mine owners go to the pubs? to the same pubs that the miners went to?

DG: Maybe -- not the owners. We never ever saw the owners of the mines. They were Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir) Limited. They were the Dunsmuir family. And you know the record of the Dunsmuir family. And I'm damn sure John Hunt I never ever saw him in a pub. I saw the fire bosses. The underlings. Oh yes, some of them were around once in a while.

MB: And do you know about the health and life expectancy of the miners?

DG: No, I don't know what it was.

MB: Of course some of them are still living, today, that were there in those early days.

DG: Not very many, but some are. The ones I know have lived to a damn good age! (laugh). 

MB: Now tell me some of the things you can remember yourself. We've touched on some of the major things.

DG: Well you see, you talk about what went on on the Island, why the Greenwells knew so much, our house, it was sort of the half-way house between Victoria and Cumberland. And my father was a member of the Workers' Unity League, which was carrying the organization of the miners' and loggers' out on Vancouver Island. And he was the secretary, and it used to be the stopping-off point for all the organizers going north or south either for the loggers or for the -- anything they were organizing, longshoremen, or -- it didn't matter.

MB: That's what Bergie said, that's how he got to know you, because he went to the houses of the people who were doing the leading work in organizing.

DG: Yes, that's how Bergie came, and Bill MacDonald -- I think they just come there and stayed overnight, or something.

MB: It was the place to go, naturally. And also he said neighbours and people who were -- think alike -- gathered there, you see. Well, Extension had such a big role to play in the development of

DG: Well, South Wellington -- you see, Nanaimo itself, for the role of the organization itself, of the miners, and loggers too, the outskirts done more, had more activity to play than even the city itself. The Western Fuel Company was much harder to deal with than -- or much -- I guess the company had more pressure. Or they had more stool pigeons, or --

MB: Oh, I heard it was a better company to work for as far as -- conditions, and wages too.
DG: Well that may be the reason. But it was tougher to work around than the other.

MB: What about paternalism? For instance I've heard somebody say he wasn't paid for working a long shift on Christmas eve, so they took the complaint to John Hunt, and John Hunt got them paid for it, so they ended up being paid more than usual.

DG: Well I don't know about that.

MB: Now here is a question I am going to ask Dave Stupich too. We all know about the split, the political split there, in the left, amongst the working class of Nanaimo. Where did it originate? Hal Griffin has this theory in his book, that some wanted reforms, and others wanted socialism immediately. And they thought that reforms were an obstacle.

DG: Well neither. You see, my father was one of the original charter members of the Socialist Party of Canada in Nanaimo. And the split took place, the left walked out of the Socialist Party of Canada, and the right stayed in the Socialist Party of Canada. You know, when the Socialist Party split? --And the people who left were the people who believed in socialism.

MB: Was there hostility there at this time?

DG: Well, I wasn't born, but it would only be stories I would be telling. But my understanding is that they fought for those things that they thought was right. And you know, there's been no hostility -- like our family is considered one of the left families. And we have principally fought for our principle that we believe in socialism. And at the same time we've probably fought for every reform/that was ever got. We fought for the telephones, the first people that fought for the telephones in South Wellington. For the water rights in South Wellington. My mother was on the school board for umpteen years. So to say that one believed in socialism now, and didn't believe in reforms, is not true. But you see, it's like -- you know and I don't want to be critical, I'm of the left, but I think the majority of the rank and file of the people of Nanaimo who always believed in socialism, and always voted for the NDP or the CCF before the NDP, and not for the LPP or the Communist party, because they thought the CCF would lead them to socialism. Which in my opinion I don't think they will, but that's another question. And I don't think it's reforms they split over, they split over the principle question of socialism. Which party is going to lead to socialism. And whether the working class wants socialism, that's the other point.
MB: Yes. It's some kind of a concept that people have of what they want, I guess.

DG: Maybe the working class of Canada doesn't want socialism. Maybe they want reforms. I don't know. --But they will build a socialist Canada. It's inevitable.

.... DG: (after a pause) Archie's father? I remember when I was just a little punker. And I didn't know what they were talking about, but I remember them gathering and talking about the way things should be. You know, I don't remember what they -- but I knew it was a big discussion about something.

ME: And then there were the Finns.

DG: Yes, there was Happala, and Hieta, and Hamala, and Kitolla, and MB: Yes, Kitolla told me that Sam Guthrie and his dad used to sit on the porch and all the time and talk. Politics.


ME: Eino Kitolla.

DG: Yes, Albert was his dad. He worked with me in the mines, Albert. And Victor Nurmi, Victor Nurmi and Albert Kitolla were partners for years in the mines.

ME ME: So they used to talk about politics --

DG: Oh, sure they were talking about politics! It didn't mean nothing to me then, but now I know what they were talking politics.

ME: And trying to put their theories into practice and I suppose bring about better conditions of life for people.

DG: You know now what they were doing, but you know a kid didn't know then what the heck they were doing. I remember them all, inky used to meet and they'd talk. (chuckle).

ME: Yes, well that's what I wanted to get into, the underlying differences between people, you see. Why there was so much enmity afterwards, after the strike. Of course, people tell me it was because it was such a long strike, that it was so bitter.

DG: Oh, it was a bitter bugger of a strike too! And by the way did you go down to --maybe there's none of them alive -- to Ladysmith -- Mairs.

ME: Oh yes, Joseph Mairs, he was the one that died in jail.

DG: My mother knew him very well. My mother, last Christmas, Betty's got it wrote down, the poem. Somewhere. She ain't home tonight. That there was a composed poem by a miner for his funeral, and my mother said it at the graveyard. She had never said it again from that time to that day, in our place, I think it was a year before the Miners do, not this last one, but the year before that. And she said it word for word, and never missed a word of it. Then Betty got a copy of it. Betty got her to write it out
for her. It's about Joe Mairs. Betty has a copy. You should have it in the book. But I don't know, see, she ain't home so I can't give you it. And in fact I'm not sure that she didn't give a copy to the museum, but I'm not sure. The day we were interviewed at the Nanaimo museum.

MB: Who interviewed you?

DG: A girl. (MB: probably Claudia Cole). A girl interviewed me. See, Betty and Auntie Kate Bowater is the only two members of the Womens' Auxiliary of the Miners' Union left alive.

MB: George Mitchell told me he was 8 years old when that 32 men were killed in Extension.

DG: Well, did you interview Bill McLellan yet? Well his father was killed in that explosion. That's, he's my cousin. He lives on Morden Road.

MB: And George Mitchell said that the funeral went on for two days. They'd bury one, and the silver cornet band of Ladysmith would march the slow march, and bury them, and back again they'd go and get the next one. For two days it went on. He lived close by. He was 8 years old, and he will always remember that. He even sang me a little bit of the song, he said, the tune plays in my ears even yet.

DG: That verse, I think Betty copied it. -- No, but you see, there's something that I don't know if anybody else would touch on your paper, or your book. But I think it should be touched. And that's the question of the existence between the miners and the woodworkers on Vancouver Island. In the early organization days. Like, Archie was a miner. He's only one, but there was lots. In '34 when they went on strike in Cowichan Lake, they went down on the picket line. And then they called on the miners to take a line up to Campbell River, and a bunch went up. And there was a very close --- aaa--- thingummy -- between the miners and the loggers on all the organizational activities on Vancouver Island.

MB: A lot of the miners after the mines closed down went into the woods.

DG: Oh yes, a lot of them!

MB: And Bergie said they were easy to organize because they had had the experience.

DG: Most of them had, I guess.

MB: He said there were quite a lot at NanOOSE, around.

DG: And quite a lot at Ladysmith and Comox too, I guess.

MB: Yes, Archie came straight from Nanaimo up to the picket camp at Lake Cowichan.

DG: So you know, I think that question of how one another helped one another -- you talked about exploitation. I think they both understood exploitation. And they fought it out on the basis of exploitation.

MB: I had asked Bergie and he said he thought the miners in the Old country
and of course out here when they first came, the miners were the most
exploited, more than people that worked in the factories even. Because
he thought in factories you needed some skilled --

DG: Yes, I say it depends on what you called skilled. You know, I was
talking about loggers and miners, they both understood exploitation. They
both understood who was the boss and who was a worker. I think that's
ingrained in them.

MB: Well anybody who has to go in there under the ground and lie in a
little space in the dark, 14 inches high was the last place that Tom Terry
worked. In the wet.

DG: I never worked -- the most I worked in was 4 feet. But -- I mean
the speed-up in the woods. The speed-up wasn't quite in the
mines. You know, when you look at it --

MB: But you had such huge explosions ...

DG: Well we were in one in 1939, but there was only four lost their lives.
In Number 10 at South Wellington. Jock Gilmour will tell you that
story. He was on the Draeger team. They got them out. Jock and Jack
Williams, Young Frew, and Ralphie Maun (?) -- they were on
the Draeger team, there was M oliver Warren (?) Chris Mills, oh I forgot
the Yugoslav's name -- there was three that were killed. An airway caved
in and an electric bell set off gas. But Jock was in the Draeger team.

MB: We were in the mine when the explosion took place, but we were not
in that district, like. We were down -- (End of tape).
Notes taken when we visited Dusty Greenwell.

Joe Armitage would come to visit. (Ellen Greenwell) Mum would be scrubbing clothes for hours and hours on a scrub board, and Joe said, when I come back from Spain, the first thing I'm going to do is buy you an electric washing machine! And he never came back.

The police came looking for Joe Armitage. He came here and he helped with the organizing of the miners. Tom Lawrence was one of the first. Fred Wilson. He married Eva Patterson.

Dad's got Number 1 Union Card. UMWA. Those last 10 days she (Ellen Greenwell) went over a lot. I would do it all over again. (This is Ruth Week speaking)

Rusty when she asked them what they would like of here, Dusty said, There is one thing I would like; and that's my dad's union card. So she gave it to him. But before she died she asked for it back for some reason. Maybe someone who came to interview her might have borrowed it. But we haven't been able to find it yet.

Dusty: Hugh Gilmour is No. 3. (or is it Jock Gilmour?) Either Elaine Tellier or Elaine Hamilton has the old pictures. Phillipson, Jackson, and Ochendall. (Who are they?) Webb, Fred & Jack Wilson. Eddie Boyd, Dominic Armand. Willie Moore has a picture of the first negotiating committee for Donnelly from Cumberland.


The first time Dusty ever slept in a hotel. In the Globe Hotel in Nanaimo. That was the night Bill McDonald was leaving to go to Spain. That was the night Bergie and them hauled him down to Chemainus the night the police ... Bergie drove to Ladysmith from the picket camp in Lake Cowichan in 55 minutes and on a bloody gravel road, and in the morning they (went back?) because Bill had to catch the 8 o'clock boat. And they put him me to sleep in the Globe Hotel in Nanaimo. And Mum nearly went crazy. No telephone. 16 years old.