
Well Mr. Armanesco, what year were you born?

DA: I was born in 1877, in Italy.

MB: What did your father do?

DA: If I was to tell as far as my father, it would be a long story. He left home to come to America when I was only 18 year old, and we never heard since. But we had sort of, you know, small farm. Little bit of land.

MB: How old were you when you came then?

DA: I was 22.

MB: What made you feel like coming?

DA: Well I dunno, I sort of feel like coming. I don't really have the intention, but things were going rather bad there and I have lots of relations here, lots of uncle. And my mother used to do the writing, you know, for my grandpeople. And I just mention to her, I said, ask them if they would send for me. And right away without any story, about three weeks they send me the ticket, and the paper, you know, so that I could come. So that's how I come.

MB: Were they here?

DA: Yes, here.

MB: And when did they come?

DA: Oh, they come long time ago. Well, her husband was the last one to come, he come the same year as I did. Like I had one uncle that he come here in 1894. And one he come in 1907. And one he come in 1909, but he come from Australia. He had been to Australia, previous to that.

MB: Well what was their name?

DA: Senini. They were all Senini. Well, the oldest one was Jim, and then Johnnie, and Tony.

MB: Gee, 1894, they would see a lot. Did they live here, I wonder where they lived?
DA: Oh, at that time, they lived in Wellington. And then the oldest one. And from Wellington they moved back here in Extension for a little while, and they had to move to Ladysmith. They lived in Ladysmith. Until 1916. And then since 1916 they moved up here.

MB: They would have been up here when that big explosion took place.

DA: Yes! They were here, yes. Specially the oldest uncle of mine, he seen quite a few explosions. I think this mine, it start up full capacity was around the 19th century. But Wellington was going. Wellington and Nanaimo. My uncle used to work at Wellington, that's when he came then, live at Wellington.

(Mentioning John Baloni, over 90, lives at Occidental Hotel)

I know another guy I think his memory is good, he's not quite old though. They call him Bill Loudon. He run a small mine, one of the last. Her husband (Delphina Senini) used to work for him.

MB: Yes, and his cousin Joe White...

DA: Yes, Joe White, another guy, he used to work here at the same mine that I was working, and he took sick, he was off, and after that, you know, he worked in different mines. He had a small mine out that way too.

MB: Yes, he is around 80, he told me the other day.

DA: Yes, something like that. He's around my age.

MB: So what year was it when you came?

DA: 1921.

MB: And where did you go to work?

DA: Right at this mine over here. (Extension).

MB: You had never been in a mine before?

DA: No. Never seen a mine before.

MB: What month of the year did you come?
DA: I come close to Christmas.
MB: Well how did it seem? Did you have somebody to meet you?
DA: Oh yes, they come to Vancouver, two uncles of mine. But I had a long, long trip -- it was a cheap boat, you know. That they used to transport animals in that time -- and then the boat was coming here, a few passenger, and then they used to bring loads of coal back. And somehow, it was a long story, when they got more than half way, they find out that they didn't have enough fuel. And they have to go back to an island that they call the Azores. To get coal, and that way, you know, it pull us way out of the track! It took us over 16 days on the boat! And then another six days on the train.
MB: So they came to Vancouver to meet you?
DA: Oh yes, the two! Two uncles.
MB: That was nice. So they brought you all the way over here, I guess?
DA: Oh yes!
MB: I can imagine that meeting!
Mrs. S: --And see all trees!
DA: (laughs.) Yes! --And then you know what happened? When we got half way before we went to Chase River, that time the road was Haliburton, you know, was the highway, -- the car broke down! An axle broke! And it was close to the road/-- if we tip over, you know, we go down in the bay! So, all right -- I got an aunt of mine, two from Ladysmith, that she was on my father's side, in Nanaimo, to meet us. So, we were five of us in the car, and they decided, two of the uncles -- they got a car that come past, they went to town and get a mechanic to fix the car. And the rest, we decided to start to walk. So they would pick us up. And we got home before -- they come home quite a while after we got home. It seems to me, you know, it was a long walk from the other side of Chase River and as soon as we come above Starks Crossing, you couldn't even see the road, you know, trees -- they were so close to the road -- a-all the way!
And then when we got up here it was snow on the ground, and was a couple of houses on top of the hill, just with a small coal oil lamp, it seems funny. (Chuckling from the three of us).

MB: And then it was dark by that time, eh?

DA: Oh, dark! Sure!

MB: How many hours did it take you to walk from there?

DA: Oh we must have took about two hours, you know, walking too slow, and talking.

MB: So two houses and then ...

DA: And then we come down the hill and you see a few more houses then. But on top of the hill there was only about two houses at that time. --It wasn't a house, you know, from the Starks Crossing until you come up on top here (at Extension) -- not a single house! (distance of about 5 miles, now residential)

Mrs. S: Wasn't very many house in that direction either, that time. Past the Finn Hall wasn't very many.

DA: Oh, was quite a few down there, was mostly Finn round Chase River. But on this side of the railroad was no houses, not one!

when you came over the hill,

MB: So then, could you see in Extension, many lights?

DA: They were there when you came! (laugh).

MB: So then you had a good party, I guess, when you came home?

DA: Well, not that much, that night. But the next day, o-o-oh! they got me with there, my uncles my aunt, and they got a fellow that could play guitar, little bit, and he had a car, and he took us to Ladysmith, where I had this aunt of mine, and oh! we had a big celebration!
MB: Were there many Italians in Ladysmith?

DA: Lots! Lots. At that time.

MB: And this was near Christmas, you say?

DA: Yes, near Christmas.

MB: So you got a really good Christmas that year, I guess. So then when did you get a job?

DA: Well, it was about a month after. That I got a job. In this mine at Extension. There was two of my uncles working together, and was hard for me to get a job, because you know, I couldn't speak English, and then supposed to have a mine certificate. So they decided one of my uncles told the boss that he would quit, and he give me a job. Along with the other uncle. And he say, "Why do you wanna quit?" He told him that he was sick. So - oh! - he told him the reason - Oh well, the boss says, I guess you're gonna have to quit. So he give him another job, and I got his job.

MB: So where did you live then?

DA: Well, I live over on the other side, with one of the oldest uncle of mine, I live with him for over a year, and then I went batching along with another uncle.

MB: Were there many young children? in your family?

DA: Oh yes! Oh, was lots.

MB: They were raising another generation then?

DA: Yes, my oldest uncle, he had six. Course, one got married a year or two after. He had six. Two of them they were born after I was here. One is the dentist, you probably heard. Dentist Senini. Doctor Senini. He is one of the cousin. He was born after I come over. And another sister too.

MB: Now they have another generation yet.

DA: Yes! I see that one of his son's wife (had a boy?) two or three weeks ago. (Laugh) —Multiplying...

MB: Yes, right. --So then, what was your job in the mine?
DA: Oh, just helper. You know, the way they used to do until you were there maybe a year, and then you learned the language, and had to get a miners certificate. Otherwise you could not work alone. You had to work with somebody else. And they just call you helper, they don't pay you the same.

MB: I didn't know that you had to have a miner's certificate.

At that time what kind of lamps did they have?

DA: Oh, they had those electric, the same as they have now. But I think before my time, they used to have those oil lamp.

MB: You had a battery in your pocket did you?

DA: Yes, not in the pocket, we hang 'em on the belt. Quite a big battery. I see they still got the same, as far as the lamp that I see, they still got the same.

MB: So how did you feel when you first went down the mine?

DA: Well, I didn't know then just what to think. I didn't know the difference between coal, or rock, or -- the only thing, like, some of the rock was black, the same as the coal. Some was white, and then I could tell the difference.

MB: Could you walk in? Was it level?

DA: Yes, well, we could walk, or it was the car, the mine, that bring the coal out, that they used to take us in, with the electric motor.

But sometime, we walk. Specially coming out, we walk.

MB: How far was that?

RA: Oh, was probably two miles. Some places was more.

EMB: So you'd all be coming at once, all the miners?

DA: Yes. But when you're in the mine, and then you know, you branch off, some to be doing up, some to be going down. Because the coal seam, it wasn't level. Used to be little bit on a pitch, you know. And they had the railroad, the road going in, about the middle of the mine. And then you know, some come down, from the top, and the other come up. They got different hoist, to pull the coal.
MB: Sometimes they call it a different level.

DA: Oh, well -- different level, is like anything else. They all have a name, or number. And then even the place, they call 'em room, or stall, or they call it by number, too. So you know, if something happen, or when they used to be a fire-boss, like when he go and inspect them every night before the men go in, well you just ask him, you know, the number so and so. And they have everything like that.

MB: What did you feel it would smell like, in there? di'nt

DA: Well, some place you can smell, if you had good air it smells much. But places where, like, they had to work before, and was rotten you know, even mules, timber, and they even used to tell me/animals that die and they leave 'em there, -- and gas, and then it would smell. Or even some place, you know, where the water is too high, you get that smell, you know, of water.

MB: Were there many rats?

DA: Oh yes, was quite a few rats. Quite a few rats.

MB: Do you think the rats were good or bad in the mine?

DA: A-ah, I don't like em. But I don't know, but some claim, you know, that is good sign if you see rat, because they say, if k is gas, you know, too much gas, like, the rat they disappear. It seem that animal, they know too.

MB: Did they ever have to use canaries in the mine, where you saw?

DA: No. They never did. I never seen. But I used to see them when they had a team, and they were practising. And they used to have a canary, to use. It was only one that I know that they use 'em was at Cumberland, that they had sort of a small explosion -- about '22, and was miner went up even from here, up, and helped them. I believe was four or five men that got killed.

MB: That was after you came? 

DA: Has been one in South Wellington that they call Number 'Ten mine. But I believe was only maybe five -- was on night shift. Around the
Was around the holiday. I believe it was only five men in it. Two of them got killed. A fire boss, and a Italian fellow. They were cleaning the place, you know, for air. And somehow they must 'a hit a bit of gas, and when they fire a shot, he explodes. This must have been a way late in the thirties, I believe.

MB: When they had a funeral, I mean, when somebody gets killed, I mean, everybody feels bad --

DA: Oh yes! They used to stop the mine then, when a thing like that, you know, all work --

MB: So then, when they had a funeral, how was it? They had churches here?

DA: Oh, not here. We had churches, but if we got any funeral, would be down Nanaimo. You know, because we had no undertaker parlor. But we had churches here too, that time, two or three. They haven't got any now.

MB: Did they have nuns here?

DA: No, not here. Nanaimo and Ladysmith they had nuns. They had a convent. They closed down. And then now they pull it down. That property still there, empty. I believe.

MB: Do you remember when the hospital was built? Was the one at Ladysmith built first, or the one at Nanaimo?

DA: Oh, I don't really know now. Just that once in Nanaimo they were having trouble. Was small, and then they were going to rebuild. And for a while, they used to send the patients to Ladysmith. But this was around, oh, probably 1927.

MRS. S: Excuse me. But here from Extension they were going to Ladysmith. They had the train running, especially pay day. Used to go down, take the train down, Ladysmith, and do a bit of shopping, and then everything even the doctor, and show, was down there.

MB: Mhm. And the nuns? They were always helping the sick too, anybody that got sick, I guess?

Mrs. S: Well I don't understand English, and I have to just listen what the others ones say ... (referring to the past).
A: No, I don't think at Ladysmith that they had those in the hospital. But the nuns, you know -- they had the church and --

MB: I guess they would go and see people in their homes...

DA: Oh I guess so! But you see at that time, I guess you know, --you know before this -- that here and Nanaimo, they was two different company, you know, that time. Here had Cumberland and South Wellington. So the coal from this mine used to go from Ladysmith, that they got the railroad. And Nanaimo had their own wharf. And then round 1929 they 'malgamate. But still the coal from this mine, he all went to Ladysmith until they finish up.

MB: They had mules in the mine, up here?

DA: Oh yes, mules, horses.

MB: Did you have to drive mules?

DA: Well, sometimes, --but really they had their own driver, you know, for the mules. They had their own. Or even some of them they were just pushing the cars, the men themselves.

MB: Did they treat them all right? those mules?

DA: & Oh-h--h no! Some they abuse them.

MB: Yes, Dave MacDonald told me the --

DA: Oh, he used to drive!

MB: Yes. He said the boss told him to get the mules, twenty mules, up on the hill, so the government inspector wouldn't see them. And I asked him why, and he said they were --

DA: All full of sore! In some cases you know, the -- but the old mule you know they just had to scrape themselves through, and they get their back all scratch. And then you know, if they have a good animal, they would abuse him. They keep him in there even 'stead 24 hours, to change 'em every eight hours.

MB: I wonder how long they lived?

DA: Oh, some they live quite old, just the same. You know the mule is pretty tough.
At the finish they had more horses because they say that the mule they more expensive than horses. Hard to get mules. See there not many just countries that they used to raise the mule, because they raise them practically for the mines.

MB: And the horses eat so much that --

DA: Yes, and they have to have even higher roof too, for the horses.

MB: Well then, did you go into any sports around here?

DA: Oh well myself, I wasn't much of a sport. But they used to go and see football. And that time, you know, football, it was different than what now, you know. That they kick with their leg, that used to be especially the mine that I was working, with the boss, they were Scotch, and most of the player, you know, football player, they were Scotch.

MB: Soccer.

DA: They used to come from Wallingfamx Scotland, and they guarantee 'em a job, you know, if they were good player.

MB: How many hotels did they have in Extension when you came?

MB: Oh, in my time, was only the one hotel. It was over here where they build a new house now. Duplex. They used to call em the Tunnel Hotel. But if you go back to the beginning of the century, then they said that they had all kinds. But I wasn't here, I could not tell you.

MB: How was the Tunnel Hotel at that time? Who owned it?

DA: Well, at that time when I come, Steve that you went and visit, his father used to own it. But before then, well different people own it. But really was belong to the brewery. The hotel, was belong to the brewery. And Steve's father, he bought it.

MB: I wondered about that. They said it was in prohibition time that he bought it.

DA: Yes, when I come, was prohibition.

MB: That's why the brewery wanted to sell it, I guess.

DA: Well probably. But he didn't pay very much at that time. But when
I come was prohibition. We just had to go to blind pig, or otherwise you go to vendor.

Mrs. S: I have the picture, when we got married, you know, they have a reception in the Tunnel Hotel.

MB: So that would be interesting. -- So then you had a good time when you went there, I'll bet. The Tunnel Hotel.

DA: Yes, well, at that time, I say was prohibition. But after that, yes, you know, we were all like one family up there. Was some outsider come in, but not too many. And most of the time, you know, if you sit alone, maybe two or three, they would tell you, specially was a man that they call him Bowater, the father of those that you mention. You say, what's a matter? Fence across? You know, he wants everybody to join in one big table.

Well then beer was just ten cents then. A glass.

MB: I heard that Nanaimo had more beer parlors than any other town in Canada.

DA: Yes, well I believe they had about sixteen, fifteen, when they open up.

MB: Who were some of the famous beer drinkers, do you remember any?

DA & Mrs. S: Oh lots! (laugh) We had one in the family! One of my uncle -- oh two! Two! Tony and John.

Mrs. S. (laughing) John specially!

MB: What happened to John when he got in the flood?

DA: Oh, that was John! But Tony was in too! But it happened, you know, that he manage it. To get out and float in the water. They were down in what he was a slope, you know, deep, and when the water come, give him (the water came in a wave) a wave, like, and then the water went down, he said. And he manage it, him and another guy that they call him Wargo (?) and probably some others from Extension. They manage it, that they didn't stay in the water. But this other uncle of mine, he was in it. He's the one that survived. He wasn't religion, and the way he tell me he was there nine hours and he never thought about religion, just the same. You know. He telling another guy that -- two drowned, another Italian fellow, he say, and he was complaining about his family, and kids. He said Forget your family! They're dry! Think about
ourselves, that, you know, how we got to save ourselves!

MB: How long was he in the water? I guess,

DA: Nine hours. But really you know, the water was up to/— pretty near up to their heart, for a while, and then they spotted a little place that they were walking on: a board, something like a chicken going on a roost, and when they went across there, was an open place that there was no water. So he said there, and the water went down little bit. Said he took his clothes off and rinch 'em (demonstrates wringing out clothes)— and he told his partner— his partner was hurt, you know, because he was bleeding, and he was in the hospital for two three days after. He told him, said, Take your clothes off, and rinch 'em! And then, he had a pick there, and he start pretend to work. To keep himself warm. But he said, after they got discourage, he says, they knew that the xpump was going, and then something happen, the pump stop. And he says, I guess now, now is no chance for us. And then the pump start to go again. And then he thought, you know, that they gonna survive. So he says, he was knocking on the wall, you know. This way, that they had some signal, the miners, with a pick. You rap so man time, and they know maybe that you're in there. So he rap, and somebody else is hurt, and they rap the other side. And then they knew that there were two there. But they were five in it. Two, they die, along with my uncle. And they could swim and everything, better than my uncle. But they worked too hard, and they played themselves out. And he could see them, he said, gradually go down in the water, splash little bit, then away they pass out. They were uncle and nephew, even, them two. Their name was Sheppard.

MB: How do you mean, they worked too hard? Swimming, or —

DA: Swimming. You see, and then— my uncle like, he had the fortune, that he was the one that would like to hold the other out of the water. The other, you know, the water wash him up for quite a distance before they got to him. Probably got swelling water, or something. But they had a wall, that you know, something like here (house wall)/they used to build for air, to conduct the air down the road. And they were gonna try, you know, break that
wall, and go over the other side, but you know, with the water, is stronger than cement. Was impossible. And then maybe was better. You know -- you can't just tell. Maybe was their destiny. --One of the miner, he - he got no chance.
The place that the water broke out, he broke down lots of material, and timber on th top of him, and he could not get away.
MB: Where were you when this happened?
DA: I was here, on the farm, at that time.
MB: When did you first hear about it?
DA: Oh, her husband, and her brother, you know, they come from the mine, that they was in a mine South Wellington, and they knew, and they come and tell us. And then we were all run up -- o-o-oh! was people, you know, waiting outside o-o-o-o-h! the people that were up there -- not just the relatives, everybody! And that uncle of mine, when he come out, you know, and you know how the police, they have an ambulance, they took him in there. And everybody wants to go near -- I have even no chance to go near him! And then he called me to go over. And then he told me that he was feeling all right. He said he could eat a steak right then! --They took him down to the hospital, you know, and tried to give him medicine. And he said What he wants was a steak! But they keep him in the hospital one night. Then the next day as soon as he come out of the hospital, he went to the beer parlor, -- everybody (e-everybody) after him! He got drunk -- paralyzed drunk!
(Mrs. S. laughs heartily)
DA: He was boarding with her that time!
MB: Yes, I heard he was quite a famous man. When he came out of the mine he said, Give me a drink of Scotch! I'm all right!
Mrs. S.: Yes, him and his brother Tony they were -- I don't know, kind of full of fun, or -- you know --
Mrs. S: He was single.

DA: And then you know when he finish up, before, sometime, he used to stay with me here. After he retire. Some time we go in town, or they were here. 0, 5 or 6 year before he died, he said, if you keep me, or let me stay here, he said, I'd sooner die here. Than any other place. So all right. Well that time there was something like the flu around. And I had him one day. And he was not in very good shape even then. One thing, his legs, they weren't so good. So he bring me water, and coffee in bed. The next day, when I got up, he got up, come out of the bed, and said I'm finish! I'm finish! Say what's the matter? Oh, he said I can't sleep! I can't sleep! I feel -- so sick! So he don't want to phone the doctor, he don't want me to go phone the ambulance. So, I still had a few cows up at the farm at that time. And I had some kids after school that they come and help me. So I thought, I says, now -- I put him in bed, you know. Took him in bed, but -- he won't stay in. I want up the barn, and I was waiting on those kids to come, and I would come down, and either phone a doctor, or -- somehow, you know, to come and get him. Instead of that, when those kids come home, they look in the house, and there he was in the kitchen, close to the door, lying down, dead.

EB: And he knew!

DA: Yes! He said he knew. And then they had an autopsy, and they said it was the virus of the flu that killed him. Course he was in bad shape for quite a while.

MB: How old was he then, when he died?

DA: He was about 78, 79.

EB: And he had been retired for a while?

DA: Oh yes! He retired when he was 62. You know the miner at that time, they used to get the miner pension at 62. So he retire when he was 62.

MB: He was a tough man then.

DA: Oh, he was tough!

Mrs. S: Even when he was sick, I'm dying, I'm dying -- and once, he put a coat on and a hat, and way he go to town and get drunk!

DA: He was a different man than others. If he said he was sick, he had a bad
cold, he go to town and get drunk, and no come home cured! (laugh)

MB: Did you ever get married?

DA: No.

MB: But you had many friends, I guess?

DA: Oh yes! Lots of 'em! Lots of 'em!

Mrs. S: Too many! (laughing)

MB: And when you used to go to the Tunnel Hotel, I hear they played botchi?

DA: Yes.

MB: What kind of a game is that?

DA: Well I don't know, I think they still do. It's something like bowling. You know, they play with a wood -- round -- and one, they call the Jack, and then who that go near the Jack, that's point -- make the point. Just paying for a drink, you know. They still around, a lot of them. They had a place in the back yard.

MB: That must have been lots of fun, and arguments.

DA: Oh yes, sometime, even fight over nothing! There is people, make no difference, what game, card, or -- they're good winner, but they don't want to lose!

MB: In those days what nationalities were there in the mines around here?

DA: Oh -- mix! Mostly any nationality.

Mrs. S: Was Italian, Jugoslav, and Scotch, and English.

MB: Chinese?

DA: No. Chinese they were out of mine at that time. Just like on the railroad. Otherwise they were out. But years before my time, especially Cumberland, they said there used to be lots of Chinese. But then they pass some law that they don't like the Chinese because they said that they didn't know the danger, but some of them didn't learn the language, and they would not know if it was danger or not. So they pass a law not to let Chinese in the mine. -- Outside, lots! On the outside there was a bunch of them.

MB: I heard Dunsmuir sent for 2000 one time.

DA: Oh, I THINK mostly to build the railroad from Victoria up.
Probably even this one from Ladysmith to Extension. But when they lay from Victoria up to Nanaimo, and then they went up to -- first they told me they went as far as Wellington where they had the mine, and then --years after they went as far as Cumberland.

MB: But all the people mixed up, regardless of nationalities?

DA: Oh yes!

MB: Like they all had their different ways, I guess, the Finns, --

DA: Yes, yes. The only thing, at that time they had that habit that like the Italians that they used to call dago many, many time! Instead to say he's Italian, they used to say oh he's a dago! Today it don't seem like they have that habit, you know, as much as they did then.

MB: That's what I was going to say - could you remember any racial discrimination?

DA: Well, was just different person, but otherwise (in terms of the law?) there was no discrimination. They were all alike.

MB: And was there upper class and lower class of people, like, did some people have servants? Business people in town, or --

DA: Oh sure!

MB: They were like upper class, I should think.

DA: Sure.

Mrs. S: Just a few in the mine, like fire boss, or so --

DA: At that time, even the lodges -- you know, if you were a businessman, they had the lodges for the businessmen.

MB: When you had your parties, -- well, whenever you celebrated your national customs, you know -- then would somebody else come, maybe some of the higher ups would they come to visit your affairs?

Mrs. S: No, no, not here in Extension. Everybody was about the same, you know. Just maybe a boss.
The Italians,
DA: There's one thing. If they had anything, all the rest, they would enjoy themselves -- to side in! Specially if there was eating involved.
It seemed that they all used to like Italian food. At that time.
Or drinking. Of course drinking at that time -- was very few making wine.
Was no grapes! Was just beer. Was some making wine, but at that time like was just/artificial, they just make em out of rye (?) grapes, or other stuff, powder.
MB: Well this is what I mean. This is how I can see the breaking down of the racial discrimination. It's usually when they're having a good time, some racial group, then others will come -- and they get used to their customs. But before they know their customs they -- you know -- they think they're better than the other fellow.
Mrs. S: Especially us Italian. I think we were pretty -- you know -- on account of that -- Mafia (Shovani)? that we don't know nothing about it. But just the same we were class something like them, you know. But not now.
MB: Well now, everybody's mixed. Married ... 
DA: They're all connected!
MB: But when we want to get the life of the miners, we would like to know how they got along, and what they had to put up with, any hard times and struggles that they had.
Mrs. S: Oh, was a hard time. For the man and the woman too. Because you have no accommodation whatsoever. They don't even have a wash house, for many many years. They had to go home dirty, and you know -- wet, and tired, until they get home. Specially living in Ladysmith, you know, they had a long shift. They used to leave Ladysmith at seven o'clock, you know, no -- half past six. We used to go in the mine at seven. And then come out of the mine at three o'clock, it would be four o'clock before they get home.
MB: So that meant half an hour extra each way?
DA: Yes, each way. But then after that they had a wash house, and everybody had to get washed.
MB: How did you manage when you had boarders? Did you say you had some boarders?
Mrs. S: Well no, not really, just the family -- was him, and Johnnie, and my husband and two boys.
MB: Were they on different shifts? They didn't all have to wash at the same time, eh?
Mrs. S: Well now, when we move here, only Johnnie and my husband was workin' in the mine. We could have a shower down here, but not running water. Had to warm up the water in a boiler, and --
DA: Use the bathtub.
MB: And what did you do in the summer when the wells dried?
DA: well, we would have to go somewhere else that have water, you know, and get water off of them.
Mrs. S: We couldn't make no garden or nothing.
MB: What about if a house burnt down?
DA: Wasn't much that you could do, if a house on fire. So they try, you know, with dirt and that, but if it really got a good hold, you could not stop it.
MB: Were the houses close together?
DA: No. Very few. The houses they been apart, even at that time. You know, is quite a bit area for the houses. Oh, maybe there were two or three that were close -- I know one went on fire over there where Loudon is now -- there were three houses close together, and the one in the middle burned, and the next one that it was Loudon in, it start to catch fire, but somehow they managed it to stop.
MB: Were you here when they had a forest fire?
DA: No. No, they had a forest fire I believe the year before I come. The same fellow that owned this property, that had the mill here, he had the
mill down that way where they had Virožko's farm. And he got wiped out.

MB: Beban.

DA: Yes. He got wiped out. That was the year before I came.

MB: Yes, Steve was telling me about that. The powder works was here.

DA: Yes, the powder works was up there, and they were afraid that it was going to blow up.

MB: They had to take all the kids away, and the women.

DA: Yes, well one time, I think it must have been around the early forties, the fire was coming down from the mountain. And was coming down and was pretty near close to the Viroško's farm, and I don't even know, see, in summer time so dry, and I had a bunch of cattle and pigs, and they had trucks, you know, and cars over by the store over there ready to move the people. And it just happened that wind turned the other way, and the fire went the other way. And me here, I didn't even know it! And then I was just thinkin', gee, if the fire had come what would I do? You know, even to try to save the animals!

MB: Did you ever get hurt yourself in the mine?

DA: Yes, twice, my eye, I got a piece of coal that hit me in the eye.

MB: And another thing too, about the union.

DA: Well, was no union at that time. The union only come after -- I wasn't working at the mine. They only got the union in later thirties some time. But this mine was finish before they got the union.

MB: 1936, I think.

DA: Yes, something like that. I know that they used to go around, private house, you know. Having meeting, try to organize.

MB: Yes, they had a hard time.

DA: Yes! I didn't believe that they were going to get a union. I didn't think, you know, the company was gonna --

MB: How long did you work at the mine?

DA: Well I work at the mine until the mine close down. It close down in 1931. And then, other miners they were getting shift to work in South Wellington.
And just on account of I was single, you know, they didn't want to give me a job, I had to wait, quite a while. And then, it came round that this place here was up for sale, and was another guy that, he was working at Chemainus, he coax me -- he say we buy that place. Said even if we make a dollar a day. So, I didn't have much money at that time, because up until then, I got to (save? spend?...) my money, but I wasn't getting much. In the beginning I was only getting little bit over four dollar, and then we say even six dollar, I send some back to my mother, then at that time there, a was a house, that she want me to buy. So I did. And when I was here out of work, I didn't have much, I only had maybe a thousand dollar, you know, when we bought this place. And then again, was coming winter! I had to live that winter. But somehow we struggle along, and people help me, and I never got a dollar out of government, not even a cent, you know! Welfare, or -- Course it took me quite a while to get square up, but I manage a little bit at a time, I got square up.

MB: When did you first go back to Italy?
DA: Oh, I went back in ?? . That's the first time.
MB: And did you know the people back there then?
DA: Well I knew some, like my brother and my sister, I knew them. As far as other people, until they spoke, you know, I would hardly know anybody. But as soon as they spoke, you know, and they told me who they were, well I remember.

MB: Did any of them come out after you?
Mrs. S: Just Tony.
DA: Yes. Tony Senini. He come. I sent for him. He come in 1952. Oh, was another guy too. It was some time, right after the war, that was hard to get people out. Was just farmer that could. And was a guy that stayed here, he had some of his relations, write to him, the whole family would like to come, and he was after me, you know, to get the papers for them. I didn't think ever I could mail it, but he had done some investigating himself, and he manage it. He got them out that time, the man and wife and two girls. But after they were here they were supposed to work for me for one year, but they had in mind
that they were going to work somewhere else. Right away. But they stay here for couple of months anyway. Then they went away. But this was after the war. (Talk now about logging)

MB: I guess they kept the women busy too. Did you have any time to do any fancy work or anything like that? (meaning didn't)

Mrs. S: I don't/have no time for anything like that. I used to knit, you know, some socks. Well, we make in our country, different things, you know. But then, when we got here, well, between one thing and another, there was no time. You wash clothes and carry the water, and I have to do everything myself, nobody help me. We never even think about (going anywhere). Just, you know, stay home, and maybe somebody come and visit, or we visit somebody.

MB: Did you have a radio?

Mrs. S: No, was nothing. Really nothing.

DA: Well, was no electricity. As soon as we got electricity we put electric pump in the well. We got electricity about 1940. Course Nanaimo had it right along, you know. We had it that the mine used to make their own, but very poor light, just small. And then when the mine close down we had no electricity.

MB: Who was the boss up here?

DA: Well at my time really, the top boss, they used to call him Tom Spruston. And then, one of the boss, no - and then the next one was a fellow by the name pit of Jimmie Strang. Then there was another Spruston. He was a big/boss. We used to call him (Bob?) Spruston. And then another pit boss was Tom Strang. And another pit boss was (Whistle?)

MB: What was a pitboss?

DA: Well, you see, they have like the head guy, manager, and then an under manager, and then a pitboss is like - he take over from the other and then he run the mine. And the fire boss, he's the one supposed to fire the shots, and look after everything.
MB: when he goes down to fire the shots, does everybody have to come out?
DA: Oh no! If he fire the shots, you say, right here, well the people in the other half they don't have to come out. Is just the men that work on that, they have to move back. Is mostly just the smoke. If there is gas they are not allowed to fire fire shots. Not allowed.

MB: I was reading a book where they fire the shots after them men came off shift.
DA: Yes, they do that -- in some mines lately they do that. They have a purpose, they drill the holes, and then a man that go and fire them and they fire them all at the same time when there's no men there. And then you know the next shift, the men they come and they just load. But those mines, they build a shaft, they have everything machinery. They have pans that run. And then they take the coal away right away.

MB: So you didn't have to work in any mines where it was wet, actually?
DA: Oh, wet, yes! I worked there quite a few times. We used to come out, well if we worked maybe six hours, the water just drop down like being underneath the roof. Some place, you know, if you had swamp on top of the ground, well it seems to come right through. In the mine. Oh yes, we had lots of them places.

MB: That was pretty deep, too, under the ground.
DA: Oh yes. But the water still come through. And some places, even if is no water on top, it seems there is different streams, you know, streams of water in the ground. It might be dry at the surface, and then down so many feet it might be a stream. And when you dig out, it come through.

MB: And then you didn't have any other chores to do when you came home? That was it.
DA: Oh yes!

MB: Eight hours?
DA: Yes.
Mrs. S: I guess when you was batching they had to cook --
DA: (Laugh) Oh well that was different!
MB: (asks Mrs. S.) So then I suppose when you got through your work at night --

Mrs. S: Well, it depends, if the man is on afternoon shift, or morning, or so. They used to like to have dinner as soon they come home. So I would get things just about ready. If

MB: Yes, if you have some on two or three different shifts, that is extra work.

MB: Yes, I have a friend who lost three men in her family. Her grandfather, her mother's first husband, and her uncle. They were all on different shifts, so they said let's get on the same shift, so the grandmother wouldn't have to do so much cooking. They managed to get on the same shift, and the very first day, it was the day they went down and Number One exploded, and they were all killed.

DA: Oh yes, there were a lot of bad accidents, even down at in our mine.

Course that all happened before my time. I

MB: What is the main thing you think of when you think of your life in the mine?

DA: Well, I think it's against nature really to work in the mine. mine?

Because, once that you work in there, you never think of doing anything, you know. And some of the coal miners, they wouldn't even take another job if they had a chance, but when you get to realize, it seems, you know, that under ground like that, it's against nature. Because, you know, so many things can happen. And there's only one way that you can get out, and if that hole get blocked, you never get out.

MB: So what was your idea in life, then, when you went in there? Like I heard you say a while back, Maybe that was his destiny. What did you used to think about it?

DA: Well, you take even my uncle, even even after he was in there 9 hour up there, and as soon as the first day that they open up, he went back.

To work. You know, he think that it's just a job, and we have to work for a living. That's the way I figure.
MB: He had no religion?
DA: No, I thought maybe he would change, but no, no, no, no!
MB: How come he didn't, I wonder?
DA: I don't know!
MB: He must have had some idea in life... Some people's religion is, somebody told me -- to help anybody else. That's why I think a man has to have some kind of belief, philosophy...
Bergie! Well there was one French philosopher who said, about man, he can't make a worm, but he can make any number of gods.
(laughter)
MB: You'd be more like a worm in the mine.
DA: Yes.
(few words on the mine disaster in Nova Scotia)
DA: You think even in the mine explosion in Nanaimo, Number One, that they were in so dam far, you begin to think then if something was to happen... you really have no way to get out.
MB: They joined over on Protection Island, I think.
DA: Yes, they did, but still, after they give Protection Island up, the mine was way, way farther than that. As far as Protection Island, yes, they had two way that they could come out. But at the finish, the mine was a long, long way.
Mrs. S: Did they used to say that when the boat went by they could get the time by the boat? They could hear it going over.
MB: But the women, how they must have worried,
(Mrs. S. came in 1925.)
MB: I've seen pictures of the people, when that big mine explosion happened in Number One, they are standing around, waiting for news.
DA: Oh yes. I know, there were only five men in it, (S. Wellington) -- but Jesus, the people that they had up there, by the mine, when my uncle
Mrs. S: Well, they didn't have no other way to know. They got to go right there.

MB: Yes, and it would take so long to get them out, too.

Mrs. S: There was no radio, or nothing, you know. You remember

DA: Oh, they had radio. When we were down town, a place across from the courthouse, and they said there was a fellow there he stop and get gas, and xxxxxx he said that they said over the radio that John Senini was alive?

Mrs. S: Just like him! He said he was hollering like anything, and said to hurry up, that the other guy was in bad shape?

MB: That the other guy that he was holding up, that he was in bad shape?

DA: Yes. He was bleeding. Well, he wasn't bleeding like, you know, to be danger. But he hurt his hand somehow. And even when the miners got so close that they could hear him, from the place that they were stationed, and come down to talk to the miners, they had to walk a bit. And he was the one that had to come down all the time. The other guy didn't want to move. So somehow his wife was waiting, they said what about --his name used to be Louis (?) he's alive, why don't he come and speak to us? So he told him then, he said, You have to go and speak to them, no use to wait. And then as soon as the muddy water went down enough, they built like a trough so with boards -- the mine wasn't dry yet, but as soon as there was no danger, they built like a trough, so then they got the men across. And then they wanted to pack them off, but Johnnie, he didn't wanna be packed. He walk up himself.

MB: He must have been talked about around town here for quite a while.

DA: Oh yes! Even now.

(Story of Crescent hotel, 40 glasses of beer)

Oh, the old Crescent! They pull it down! Used to be all the miners, you know, the tough people like, they used to go there. But they were nice people that run that hotel.

(40 glasses of beer) --Oh, used to be men like that! But at that time you could not sing in the beer parlor. And the Italians specially, they wasn't
too really good singer, **mmmm** or even others, but if you go there in that hotel, and you begin to sing, they just tell you, you know, Don't sings too loud. But then they let you stay. And some they were just going there for that purpose, like Saturday night, the last hour or so, o-o-oh! Sometimes there was some really good singers there.

**MB:** I remember that law! We used to go to the beer parlor in Ladysmith, and sing. And someone would pull a comb out of their pocket and play on the comb, and everybody would sing. We used to think they would throw us out.

(to **Mrs. S.**) Did you used to go to the beer parlor too?

**Mrs. S.:** Oh, sometimes I would go in, because we went to town every Saturday night, and while the men would be in the beer parlor, and I used to go maybe to the show, or play whist, you know. And then, have to wait for them to come out, so I go in for a while, and I might drink a glass of beer.

(Trying to remember the name of an old hotel and beer parlor in Ladysmith)

**DA:** No, no, it's down below. Close to go to Giovando all the time, you know.

**Bergie:** They had a fire there and one fellow burnt up, by the name of Pearson, burnt up there.

**DA:** Yes, that's **mmmm** down close to the post office.

**Bergie:** And then they turned it into a apartment house, didn't they, after the fire?

**Mrs. S.:** I don't know. I used to go down years ago and ...

**MB:** We went to the graveyard on Sunday, up there, and we saw the grave of Pete Conti.

**MM Bergie:** He used to provide our music up around Cowichan Lake.

**DA:** Oh yes, that's Pete.

**MB:** He used to play for your dances too?

**DA:** Oh yes! He was a guy, you know, if you pay him, he won't play. But if he fancy you sing with him, or something, then he was crazy to play!

Oh yes! Different party he used to play.
Mrs. S: He got a sister in Nanaimo. He used to tell her Get Delphina here to dinner! --He want me to marry him, you know. After my husband pass away. And so he took me and his sister down to see his house in down Ladysmith. He had a small house, nice little house too, but low ceiling. And he has Christmas decoration all along the ceiling, and the windows, all the crazy thing! So I say why you don't take it down, Christmas past long time ago. --No, they been up there for so many years, they funny stay up! No, he was a kind of funny guy. And then after that he died, about a year later.

DA: He worked at the mine here, and then after, he went to Chemainus. Chemainus sawmill.

Bergie: His son's name is Joe.

DA: Yes. He used to work in logging camp. He used to live at Cassidy,

Mrs. S: He looked young, he was so small, you would think he was fifty.

MB: What did you used to do on Saturday nights? If you went down town to Nanaimo, what was it like in those early days, on Saturday nights?

DA: Well, like with the miners, it's all that they were interested, was drinking beer!

Mrs. S: Beer, and chatting about the mine, or talking about the mine.

MB: The streets wouldn't be full of people?

DA: On no, no, not like that! But they had the habit of them days, was so many cars, and the young fellow like we say fifteen to nineteen, they used to travel back and forth, from the fire hall, and go up to the post office, back and forth, back and forth!

MB: Was there more work in the summer, or the winter, or was it just the same?

DA: There was more work in winter, because they was needing more coal in winter. Some time in summer, you know, --at that time they had a whistle at six o'clock, they blow the whistle, if was no work. Lots of time, you know, there was no work, they used to blow the whistle.

Mrs. S: And how were you gonna hear the whistle? We so anxious they
they would, you know, because money was very scarce. When the blow a whistle -- oh God! there's no work! -- You know. Sometimes they work one shift a week, that's all.

DA: Just depends, sometimes they don't have order too much coal.

MB: And this was in the winter time too?

DA: Well not so much in winter, but sometime even in winter. I don't know, but sometimes they make us work on Sunday, seven days! When they are needing the coal.

Mrs. S. They start about February or so, when things was getting very very slack. That the why that time there was no union. They work all the time. And some, they got no job.

DA: And then when they start to go in to use more coal, on boat and locomotive, and well, they cut down on the coal, probably they would have been going, would have been some mine going yet, if it wasn't for the oil.

MB: So you were digging coal too? Those big pieces that come down after you shoot the coal, how did you get it into the car?

DA: Oh you have to break it, with the pick. So that you can lift them, you know.

MB: Were you able to get some to burn for yourself at home?

DA: Well we used to get a reduced price. They allow us a ton a month, the miner, a reduced price.

MB: That was supposed to be good coal up there.

DA: Yes, it was the best of quality, they claim, this mine here. And Wellington.

Mrs. S: Before your time, didn't they used to give the miner coal free? I think so -- before your time. Jim used to tell me. And then you know, see how people are -- they used to get the coal, and then sell it. See? And then they don't get any more free themselves.

DA: We got the right to have a ton of coal a month, a cheaper price, but we had to pay, so much.
MB: Did you ever go hunting?

DA: No, I never went. -- Oh, some people they practically used to live on hunting! Deer, and fish, and --

Mrs. S: No hunting in our family. All except Vince, he used to go.

MB: But you got plenty of food just the same? Did you ever go hungry?

DA: No, no. Not that bad.

Mrs. S: We used to keep maybe a bunch of chickens, and then we kill a chicken or a rooster, once in a while, --

MB: I think you were good managers. Some people told me they went and got a lot of deer, and grouse, and things like that.

DA: Oh there used to be some that went and got meat, even summer.

Mrs. S: My daughter says, I wish I had your like you, so thrifty! I tell her you got to learn like through the depression, like we did.

MB: So, if you had to do it over again, would you do it over again?

Mrs. S: No, I'm sure not.

DA: It's hard to tell, now.

Mrs. S: No, I could not do it now. I could not carry the water and wash clothes.

MB: Some people say, Oh yes, they would do it all over again.

Mrs. S: Oh no, not me! -- But we have to! Have to, no use, you know.

MB: How about you, Mr. Armanesco, would you?

DA: No, I think I would be more wise to it. You know, do something more easy than what I had to do.

MB: Do you think you were happier than people are today?

DA: Well, to tell the truth, I was happy. Even then, not so much in the mine, but I had this place, I worked on it from daylight till dark, still I was happy! But the worst of it is I if I went to town you know, really to look after my things I had to come right home, but gee! I meet people there that -- they won't even let me get away!

Mrs. S: It's too much greed now. They making good money and yet they
never satisfied. In those days they helped one another. Now you can't die! (laugh) Of course the older people, you know, they still carry on the same, you know. But the young people, they don't care about older people.

DA: Well maybe that was the way things were going on, the way we were taught, but at that time, if we could help an old man, or an old woman, they don't have to ask us, we would go and offer to help them.

MB: You were closer together up here too. Everybody knew what the other fellow was doing, I guess. In a way. And if they are in the city, or even if they are living in an outlying place, they have their own interests. It seemed like everybody stayed home more then.

DA: Well one thing now, like, television and that, you know. And they don't mix up as much as they used to. And cars. Big wages.

Mrs. S: That's for sure! (laugh)

MB: But then they are a lot more high strung, you know, and --

Bergie: They have big debts now, too, you know. Big debts. Fifty thousand dollar homes, and twelve thousand dollar jeep, and --

(End of tape)