This is Myrtle Bergren interviewing Nelson Dean, on Jan. 29, 1979.

Where were you born, Nelson?
I was born in Nanaimo, B.C. Kennedy Street.

What year?
1907.

What did your parents used to do?
My dad was a miner. He come out from Scotland. He come here in 1904, to Fernie.

When did he come to Nanaimo?
Oh, he come to Nanaimo in 1906, I believe.

Tell me what you used to do. (Searching for a pen.)
What I used to do? Well, I started out when I left the Harewood School, I started out to go to work for Coburn’s Mills. It was a mill in East Wellington.

What age were you then?
Oh, seventeen, I guess. Close to seventeen or eighteen.

So you went to school all that time?
Yes.

How long did you work there?
Oh, I wasn’t there too long. Maybe a year. At East Wellington. At Coburn’s mill.

What was that?
A sawmill.

So how come you worked in a sawmill instead of going into the mines? At that age.

Well because I wasn’t eighteen, and they wouldn’t take men in the mines under eighteen. Although a lot of men said their sons were over eighteen, and I know they got into the mine, but my father was too honest to say I was eighteen. (chuckle).

How many brothers and sisters did you have?
One brother, and one sister.

When did you start work in the mines?
I would say somewhere around 1922, I went out to Cassidy. And I worked there till the mine was finished, practically. That’s approximately, ’22. So where did you go from there?

Well, I was driven all over the place through the Depression, and I couldn’t get a job for love nor money, and I helped organize the loggers here on the Island, with Morgan, and a few more. And we started at Northwest Bay, I think, was the first camp we got on the Island, organized.

And this was what year?
Oh, that’s hard for me to tell you that.

Was it in the thirties?
Yes ... it was before that, really. (Hjalmar): Forty-one.

Around forty-one, wouldn’t it be?
Yes. Okay. But you were at Fort Rupert, weren’t you?

Yes. Oh yes.
every mine in Zeballos, because I got fired, because I'd been organizin' with the loggers in Nanaimo, in the district, and one fellow knew me quite well. He was the manager of one of the mines. And he told me, he says, Dean, if you got any money get out. He says, don' t tell anybody I told you, but he says, you're not going to get much more work in this valley. So I thanked him very much. I think he's dead and gone now, so it wouldn't matter if I mentioned his name. His name was Bill Turner. And he worked for -- hmm -- not Mount Zeballos, it was Spud Valley Mine. And then when I went out of there, I went into Mount Zeballos, then I come back down, I got fired there, and I come back down and I stayed in the hotel, and the fellow that ran the hotel was Harry Blackburn. So Harry Blackburn says to me, What's the matter, they don't seem to like you here. And I says No, I says, I got fired. Everywhere I've gone. He says What's the matter? Well, I says, I was organizin' with the loggers down the Island, and I says, they don't want organized labour in these mining camps. Well, he says, I' ll tell you. I' ll hire you as a night man around this hotel if you want to go to work for me. Well, I says, I got to have something to do. I can't live on nothing. So I worked as night man for two or three weeks, and then they wanted a hoist man and an electrician, I think. At Mount Zeballos. And the plane come in, and there was nobody got off. So the manager he was kind of disgusted and he says, I don't know what I'm going to do for a hoist man. So I asked him what he was paying, and he told me, I says All right, you got one, if you want one. He says Where, I says Right here. I says, I've done a lot of that work. He says, Okay, he says, you can go up there and work for me. I says Okay, but I says You' re going to know who I am, and why I been fired in the other places. So I told him. Oh I didn't have to worry about that -- I wouldn't be fired there. So I said All right. So up there I goes, and first thing that happened, I gets into the office, well I had to sign up for so much for war bonds. No, I says, I don't pay war bonds, I says, How can a married man with three kids buy war bonds, I says, You could hardly get enough to eat, after you pay your board. --Well I had to buy war bonds. Well, I says, I'm not buying them. So up I goes to the hoist up on the top of the hill and I was only there one shift, maybe two -- when the boss come up and fired me there. So I said All right. --Down the hill I goes. So this Blackburn says, What's the matter? I says, Fired again! So there was only one other mine that was a way out in the woods, where I knew they had no phone, and the only way they could find out who I was if somebody packed it in, or one of the managers come out. So up to that mine I goes, and I got a job. And I worked for about three weeks, and I got good money, made good money, I got enough to get out. And that's my do in Zeballos. So I got out of Zeballos, and I come back down to Nanaimo, and I think I just -- after I paid my fare down to Alberni I just about had enough to get to Nanaimo, and that was it, and had to go and sign on relief. So once I signed on that, I went up and down the Island looking for a job, and you beat your way on the blind end of a passenger train, and that's the only way you travelled, either that or in the boxcar. So I happened to go over to this camp in Alberni, and this fellow, Floyd
Biles (Boyles?), he says, Well, he says you can come and help me, he says, We're going up to Port Neville. He says, We're just gettin' this stuff off the scow. And so, Okay. So I went and I worked for him. And they went up to Port Neville. Now that wasn't a bad sort of a camp, but the equipment he had, these logging trucks, and everything, seemed to be haywire, and I wasn't there very long till I was glad to get out of there too. So we come back down to Vancouver on the old Ventura, that took you about two days, I think, to come from Port Neville to Vancouver. So I got back to Nanaimo again and it was back on relief. There was nothin' else to do, and you had to go, I think it was five days a month, we went and worked on the sides of the roads, to get our relief.

So things got so tough, that we just had to do something. We didn't steal, but I did take off again. So I got into Britannia Beach, and I was going to hire out there. Well I didn't get hired out. But when I got up the mountain, and was going to pass the doctor, they must have phoned up from the Beach, because the doctor wouldn't pass me. He says I can't pass you. I says Okay. He says But you go down to the office, he says, You'll get your fare back to Vancouver. I says Okay. So instead of coming back to Vancouver, I crossed over to Woodfibre.

So one fellow comes out of the office and he says, Are you looking for work? I says, All depends what kind of work you've got. Well, he says, we need some men to fire down in those boilers. I says Okay, I says, I'll hire out. So I went down and sure enough I hired out -- I was there about three years, and got my family up there, and of course my wife says, Now keep your mouth shut. You know what'll happen. But I couldn't keep my mouth shut. We organized Woodfibre too! (chuckle).

And anyways, while I was there, I got my third class engineer's ticket. I didn't get along too well with the management because I was really talkin' - as they say -- "red". But that didn't matter to me. I didn't keep my mouth shut. So, finally I says to the wife, I says, Well, I says, I think we better get out of here. So I got out of there and I went down to Vancouver and then out to Westminster (i)ster. I hired out to a sawmill in Westminster -- a shingle mill -- as an engineer.

So I got along very well out there, and -- oh, I was there for maybe two years, I guess. And the kids come over to Nanaimo, and the girl went to work in the telephone office. So the boy, he come over here, and he got a job on the tow boats. So my wife says to me, she says, Well Nels, what are we going to do here? Well, I says, Nothin'. I says I know I can get work in Nanaimo, so I says we might as well pack up and go too, -- the kids say they're not coming back. So we'll go. So we packed up and we come back to Nanaimo.

And the first job I got was in Northwest Bay, in the woods again. Well then, I didn't care for that, it come winter time, and some of the fellows I worked with just weren't -- in my way of thinking, they weren't a hundred percent. They were all good
company men, but, however, I didn't let that worry me too much. It come so wet, in the fall, that I just decided to quit, and I wasn't going to work in that weather. So, I got a job in the mines again.

Back into the coal mines. So, I worked at White Rapids mine for -- oh, quite a little while. All winter, I guess. And then it was coming spring and they were building the pulp mill. So I happened to go out there, and asked them if they needed any men to drill. They said yes, they needed drillers. I said Okay, I says, I can hire out, I says, I've done a lot of jack hammer work. Okay, you can start tomorrow morning. So I had to go and tell them at the mine I wasn't comin' back to there. So I went back and I worked at the pulp mill. Did a lot of drilling out there, and I think it was the B.C. Bridge had the contract, so when that job was finished they got the contract to build the pulp mill at Campbell River. So I went up there. And between the two pulp mills I put in seven years with them. Sp that was seven years of my life gone. I didn't mind. I did very well, as far as work and that construction work. Made good money.

And then this fellow in Campbell River wanted me to stay there and hire on in the boiler room. Well I didn't like that work, so I left there, and I come back down to Nanaimo.

So, I was with the Operating Engineer's Union, so I phoned over and told them that I would like to have some work, I was out of work here, They says Okay, so from there I got sent down to Victoria, and I went to pile driving engineer. Very good work. I worked quite a bit on that. And I guess that's about -- as far as my engineering career went, except when I got a job with the Government. They hired me at Nanaimo Indian Hospital. So, I didn't go back any more to the pile driving, I stayed with that, because it was a government job, and I paid into a pension plan, and it's a good job I did, because the Old Age Pension wouldn't have kept me. So, I got a pension out of that. And I was there thirteen years. So, when I come out of there, the laundry phoned me, and wanted to know if I'd go and work for them. And he says, Well he says, I's just while the men are having their holidays. I says Yeah, I'll come down, so I went and worked with them, and the fellow there, who was a very good engineer, and the helper was a very fine fellow too, both good men. Resudo. Alec Resudo. He was a first class man, and, poor fellow, he got cancer, and he died. Well of course these things are comin' to all of us, sooner or later. So, I worked with him down at the laundry for a while.

And then, I was retired, till they phoned me up again, a couple of times, wanting to know if I'd go back, I said No. I'm retired now and I'm stayin' that way! I'm not goin' to work no more. That's it.

Q: What were your jobs when you were in the mines, then? How many years would you say you worked in the mines, altogether? 
A: Oh -- I would say -- putting it all together -- close to fifteen. You start out as a hoist man. And then a rope rider. And then you went to digging coal. Well I would say I put in about fifteen years. And of course, everything wasn't rosy in the mines, either. You were making a living, but it was hard work.

Q: Describe the job of hoist man.
Well, a hoist man was -- much the same as what you see on a railroad -- there was switches going in and out, it was on the pitch. And the hoist man, he hoisted the cars up, and when you got the bell you hoisted up, and two was to drop down, and this was the way it went on. And you hoisted out of the places all day long.

Q: A shaft, or a slope?
A: No, a slope.

Q: And that was when you were young -- younger?
A: Oh yes.

Q: And then you went on to -- what work did you say, next?
A: Well, rope riding. Rope riding was going in and out of places with cars, you know. Taking the cars in to the diggers.

Q: Did you drive mules?
A: No, I didn't do any of that. Only once, in Cumberland. I got a job there. Driving mule. The mule was pretty smart too. He would lay down and roll before he would do any work. The horse -- was the same way. And if you didn't hook the tail chain on right, he would kick it off, and run. And then you'd have to go and get him again. There was one place I went to work, and it was after I left Westminster, I went in to the Employment Office. To see if I could hire out. And they said Yes, and sent me up to Anyox. I No you won't. Oh, he says, you'll be all right up there. No, I says, there's labour trouble up there, and I'm not going to Anyox. However, there was a few weeks went by, and a fellow says to me, he says, I think I know where they need a hoistman. I says Where. He says up at Fort Rupert. Well that was -- um -- they didn't call it Fort Rupert in those days. They called it Suquash. So I happened to go up there, take the boat, and when I got sent out, I had to show 'em the letters from the office to shoe 'em where I was goin', so I landed in Alert Bay. And in the hotel I met a fellow by the name of Bert Mainwaring. I knew him and his wife from Cassidy, years before. And he was running the launch that took us over to work, in these places.

So, if you stayed three months, you got your fare paid both ways. But if you quit under three months, you only got your fare paid the one way. So I said that was fine with me. So I went up there, and -- well, they had to hire a man with a power saw, to cut enough wood to keep the boiler goin' -- they couldn't hoist enough coal. (chuckle). So anyhow, the donkey engine -- it wasn't in bad shape, it would have worked all right, very well, for hoisting coal, but it was only a stock market deal. The stock started off at 35 cents and rose to 75 cents, and then they shut the whole thing down, well, somebody made money, and it wasn't the miner, or the fellow that worked there. So anyways, when I came out, they fired the whole works of us, just before the three months was up. So when I come out of there, I said to these fellows, now, I look. I says I'm going over to Nanaimo -- it's cheaper for me to come to Nanaimo than it was to get a hotel room. So I got a return ticket to Nanaimo, but I says, I'll be back on Monday morning, and I says, we'll be up at that office. All right. So I was to meet them in the Columbia Hotel, so I went and I met them first before I went to the office. So I says, have you fellows been up to the office. They says Yes. Well, I says, did you get everything that was coming to you? --Well, we didn't get our fare both ways. I says You didn't? They says No. Well, I says, I don't see that, because they laid us off, before the three months was up.
Now, I says I'm goin' to get fare both ways, or there's going to be an awful argument with 'em. So I went up to the office, and the fellow says - to the girl, the secretary -- he says Well you can make Dean out -- and he says to me, first. What are you doing? And I says, you know what I'm doing here. I says, you shut the thing down, I says What am I to do? Oh, he says, you shouldn't have come out. He says, you can give Dean what is coming to him, and he says Fare one way. I says No, wait a minute. Stop right there. Fare both ways. Now if I stayed three months, I was to get fare both ways. And I says You're the ones that laid me off. I didn't quit. So finally he agreed. Okay, give him his fare both ways. So that was my settlement with them.

When I went back down to the Columbia Hotel and told the fellows, they were kind of mad. Well, it was their own fault. 'Cause I told them, they shouldn't have taken anything until they made sure they were getting fare both ways. So -- then I come back over to the Island and I went to work in the mines again.

White Rapids, I think, was the place where I went to work. And then I got a job at the pulp mill, drilling the rock at the pulp mill, to blast it out, and from there I went up to Campbell River, and I think I was seven years with that outfit. B.C. Bridge and Dredging.

Q: Why couldn't they bring up enough coal to keep the boilers going?  
A: Because the mine had gone under the sea, and it was shut down because they were too close to breaking into the salt water. And this was the reason it was shut down in the first place. But there was no coal on the Vancouver Island side. It was all out under the sea. And they couldn't go any further. So somebody got ahold of that. I think if a couple of men hadda got ahold of it, they couldn't even keep the boiler going, for the laundry in Alert Bay. And if a couple, or three men got ahold of that, I think they could have made money, because they had to ship all their coal in from Nanaimo, for that laundry in Alert Bay. And that was a long way to ship coal. And Alert Bay was just across from Suquash.

Q: Do you know what year they closed it down in the first place?  
A: No, no I don't.

Q: That would be in the early, early years.  
A: Yes. It was. Yes. In fact, I think, I have a book somewhere and I could look it up.

Q: Well, tell me, did they need steam in the mine?  
A: Well, steam for that boiler, for hoisting, yes. A good many of the mines needed steam. Had to have steam. There were a lot of -- a few mines electric. Number Eight in Cumberland was an electric hoist. Number Five -- I forget now whether it was steam or electric. But a lot of them turned to electric, anyway.

Q: And this is where you worked, on the hoist?  
A: Yes.

Q: Well that is interesting. After they closed Fort Rupert down, did anyone open it up again?  
A: Not to my knowledge, no. And the Canadian Collieries, or the Western Fuel Company, now I don't know which one had it, but they had some lovely big machinery in there, and they really intended to go
ahead with that. But then, after they closed it down the first time, the Indians, or somebody -- I'm not saying who -- they went in and they took all the brass and copper they could get ahold of off the machinery, and as far as I know, it's still stuck there.

Q: So the shareholders lost their --
A: Oh yes. They lost out there. It went from 35 cents up to 75 cents a share, and 'course when they shut it down there was no more shares. Gone bankrupt.

Q: What year was this?
A: Oh -- gee -- I could not tell you offhand.
Q: Before the war?
A: Before the second world war?
Q: Mhm.
A: I believe it'd be while the war was on.
Q: In the forties then?
A: Yes, I think so.

Q: You were telling me one day about the buildings that you could see down here at Departure Bay, when they were mining here. What could you see from here?
A: Well, not too much from where we're sitting, here. But the coal wharfs used to be just right out here, where the Jingle Pot coal used to come in. Now, (pointing) was where the Pecks, the three Peck boys, had that hotel. And it was a beer parlor. And of course, when you rode to work in those days, you either rode on a bicycle or a horse and sulky, or horseback. And all the miners from Nanaimo had to go past that hotel, and a good many of them stopped there. And the Chinamen, and the railroad, used to come in where the Safeway is up here now. And then the cars back up here, and they had bunkers over here, and they used to ship their coal right down here, where you see. --the boats in there.

Q: That was Canadian Collieries?
A: No, that was the Jingle Pot. Now what company would that be? The Vancouver Coal Company, wasn't it? I think so. I'm not sure on that point. It was the only company that had signed the agreement with the miners when they went on strike. In 1913.

Q: That was that German, VanAlbenstine.
A: That's right.
Q: I read that later, because he was a German, he was
A: -- done out of business.
Q: Yes.
A: Yep. I'm not surprised at that.
Q: Put him in jail, or something. Because he was an enemy alien, or something.
A: Could be.
Q: Did you say that you could see a row of houses? Where did the miners live? Around here at that time?
A: Well -- when you come off the B.C. ferries, the first road you hit, to take the up-island road, the miners lived all up that way. That was their row of houses, was up there. --Brechin hill, isn't it, they called it?
I think that's what they called it.

Q: Where did the ferries come in, at that time?
A: The only ferries you had then was C.P.R. There was no B.C. Ferries here then.

Q: And that was behind the Malaspina Hotel?
A: Yes.

Q: So then, the miners lived nearby?
A: Well, most of them lived in Nanaimo. And rode a sulky back and forth to go to work, in Brechin.

Q: How many would go on a sulky?
A: Oh, maybe two or three miners — all depends who owned the horse, and the wagon.

Q: That's what I mean, who owned the horse. Did many miners own horses in those days then?
A: Well, it was practically all horses — and bicycles.

Q: So they had fields, big enough to have a barn, and so on?
A: Oh, yes, well you see, the Five Acres was called the Five Acres lots, and all these — well, I knew a lot of fellows that lived there all their lives.

Q: And that five acres would grow enough to feed the horse?
A: Oh yes, sure.

Q: Do you remember any disasters that happened — were you involved in any?
A: No, not personally. But I do remember the Oscar blowing up. On Protection Point. And I think — I have the date — January the 13th, I think it's 1916. But if I'm not right in my conversation here I've got it marked somewhere else, and I'll find it for you. And when it blew up, I don't think there was a window left in town. A lot of kids in the school got cut with flying glass, flying out of all the windows.

Q: What was the Oscar?
A: The Oscar was a towboat come in here loaded with powder and dynamite. And she had the dynamite on, and they were going to load coal at the coal wharfs. So the skipper and them knew there was a fire there, so they decided, him and two or three more, they would take it a chance and get it out and get it outside of Nanaimo, or it would have blasted Nanaimo to pieces. So they got it out around the point of Protection, and it went up. And a fellow by the name of Muir, who worked in Protection, his house was the closest, and it was blasted to smithereens.

Q: Was his house on Protection Island?
A: Yes. Right around the point there, at the mine.

Q: Were there any lives lost?
A: No, there wasn't. 'T's a funny thing. The fellows on the boat got off, and they just run to the bush, and that was it.

Q: And you remember that?
A: Oh yes, quite well.

Q: Did you happen to hear it, or were you —
A: Well, we lived on Kennedy Street, and — oh yes, you could hear it all over. you felt the air, going back towards the mountain, and then, all of a sudden, there was another rush of air coming in. And this is what took all the windows out. Concussion.
A: And the cage going down the shaft. I remember that. And the rope broke, and that was in 1918. Now, that was too bad. I don't know why that should have happened, but it did. It happened. And the fellows that got killed—there was sixteen of them on it—and as a pension. That was the compensation they got.

Q: How far did it fall?

A: Oh... Protection. She'd have to be about 700 feet.

Q: What time of day did it happen?

A: That happened first thing in the morning. The men were going on shift. Going to work. Because I was going to the Harewood School, and I remember, one young kid, of course, he should be excused I guess, the parents talking at home, and he come to the school and he told this kid his dad had got killed in the mine. He said, No, he hadn't. No, he says, he hadn't. My dad is all right. No, he says, you'll see. And sure enough, the teacher come and told the boy he'd better go home, his mother wanted him, and that's what happened, his dad was on the cage. And I knew a few of them that went down then. There was a fellow -- I think this Ed Turner -- he's a good preacher. I think his dad was on it. In fact there's a Turner mentioned where she only gets $25 a month compensation, it's in one of the books I have here, I think it's in that one you've got, isn't it?

Q: I've heard the name, yes. Can you remember what happened in the days following -- when the cage fell?

A: Oh yes. You see, the war was on at that time too. And there was a lot of talk that somebody had filed through the rope, and cut through the rope, and tried to blame it on the Germans, and all this sort of stuff -- that -- I just think it was neglect on the company's part. The rope had never been examined properly. That's my own opinion.

Q: This was the first world war, in those days?

A: Yes. Well, it was right about 1918 when that happened.

Q: Can you remember what your parents, and other people, talked about, at the time? How they re-acted, when a disaster like that happened?

A: No, they just took it all in stride, there wasn't a thing they could do about it. These things happened, and I remember my father saying God allows it. So what can you do about it? And that's true. There's not a thing you can do about it. Personally, since I went to work in the woods and the mines, I always say there's no death, in the woods, or the mines, but what somebody's to blame. Now the man himself could be to blame, but the company can also be to blame. And I've seen cases where men should never have been killed. And the company has been to blame in some of them, -- in some of them, the men themselves have been to blame. So. I don't know how you would handle it. I know one place in Cassidy I worked at, and I told the man he had chain blocks around his neck, and he was gonna walk down the main slope, and I told him, I says, Don't stand there. And I says, You don't know what'll happen if that trips and jumps
the track. I never knew it to jump the track there before, but it did. And he got killed. --Now the man knew -- I already warned him not to stand there. But he got killed just the same.

Q: What kind of blocks did you say?
A: Chain blocks.
Q: What are they?
A: They're for lifting hoists, and one thing and another. You know. You have a hoist in the mine, and you're going to move it from one place to the other. It lifts the drum out, and it lifts up the rest of it, and puts it in a car or a flatcar and takes it away to wherever you're going to put it. Aw, there's two or three cases. -- another fellow I knew, I was workin' beside him and I told him, I said, I don't like the looks of this. So he said I don't. And I said I think we should get out of here. So we all run out of there because we heard a crack, but this other fellow he didn't, he -- Oh, she's all right. --He got killed.

Side 2: Q: When your father used to go out to work in the morning, what kind of outfit did he have to work with?
A: Well, he just -- ordinary work clothes, with a miner's cap, and -- in the days when he was first working in the mine here, I remember the naked light. But they done away with those. They were too dangerous. It was a fish oil lamp. And it burned fish oil.

Q: That's -- I've seen them in the museum there.
A: Yeah.
Q: And how were your sanitary facilities? Did you have a bathroom, or what?
A: Oh yes, and -- we had the bathroom, and -- sometimes, if I remember right in the first place, the toilet was out the back. It was one of these skylight houses out in the back. And then they finally brought them into the house. Where you had the flush toilet. And the bathtub was just an ordinary galvanized tub in the middle of the floor. And this is the way they went on, and -- oh I don't know -- the miners, they all seemed a happy bunch. Enjoyed themselves. But then they had the big strike in 1913, and I remember the soldiers coming along Nicol Street, the Bowser's Seventy Twa, they called them. And the soldiers -- I never had too much love for soldiers after I saw that. I always thought that men that joined the army were a lazy bunch. They were just in there for anything they could get. They didn't care how they got it. In other words, much like the pimps on the street in Vancouver, that was my idea of the soldiers. And they were just driving men to work, scabs, or anybody, it didn't matter, so I had no love for them. In fact, some of them was brought into my house, and I wasn't watching them too well, and they wandered around the house, and they robbed everything they could get their hands on. So I made up my mind that anybody that comes into my house, after that, I'll watch them, just sit still. Unless they really wanted something. So that was that.

We moved to Victoria. --My dad, he got the name of being a scab. He was John Dean. Well, I know that some of the Deans did do that. But I finally asked my father about it, and he said to me -- I remember living in Victoria, and he was working for the City of Esquimalt, and he said to me, I expected you to ask that question. Well, I says, sure. Well, he says, when I went and asked for my job back, he says, there was over a thousand men working. He says, the strike was lost, anyway.
Well, I says, as far as I'm concerned, I'll excuse you. I says, it doesn't sound very good, --but they had lost the strike anyway, so, I never said no more. And that was that.

Q: I know that families were split on it. I hear --
A: Oh yes. It split up homes. It even split up the church. In a lot of places. I know of one case -- the fellow, he belonged to the Catholic church, and of course the Catholic church was against these strikes, because some of the big shots were Catholics. And they were trying to get the men to go to work, and I know one fellow in particular, he just defied the priest to put him to work, and he said that priest would never bury him, and he never did, either. I watched it. When he died, I watched his death in the paper -- the priest didn't bury him.

Well, it split up quite a few, the strikes, and of course these labour struggles -- a man has to fight for his condition, or you're not going to get it. The company's not going to give something just because they love you. They don't love you. They want every ounce of sweat they can get out of you. And you've got to give it, or you're not going to be there. Somebody else '11 have your job tomorrow. And when I worked in the mind at Cassidy, you had to work Saturday afternoons, --a few of the fellows got fired, because they wouldn't work Saturdays afternoons. And you couldn't blame them, because I say, five days a week was enough.

Q: They were pretty militant, the miners. I've heard things about them driving away the soldiers, or the militia, with their picks and shovels, even.
A: Well, they tried to a lot, yeah, but it didn't work too good either.
The barracks was up here at the corner of Milton and Wentworth, and there's just a kid's ball field there now -- the Kinsmen Park, that's where the barracks was, and they kept the soldiers in there. But of course, ix men can't fight against guns, there's no use a trying, you gotta decide what you're gonna do, and if you get a gun yourself and kill anybody, well well you're -- in those days they'd hang you.

Today, they give you coffee and donuts! -- But, in those days they'd hang you.

Q: Now here's one question. When you go into a mine, how do you know where you're going?
A: Well, you see, the places turn off. Like, you go down, -- if you were going east from here, that would be north, and this way would be south. And there'd be a place driven off one south, two south, three south, all the way down to -- you might have seven, that's the way it was in Cassidy. And the same on the north side -- one north, two north, three north, four north, and so on, down. And, of course, if they told you to go into/six north, and you were going into Number Two slope, you knew where you were going to drive hoist. Or you knew where you were going to ride rope.

And the fire bosses, that was the driver boss. And the fire boss, they had control of the diggers. So he would look after the diggers, and the driver boss was supposed to look after the haulage hands.
Q: Well, was it marked in any way?
A: No, it didn't need to be marked. You got so used to going in and out of the different places, you knew where to go.
Q: What was a "room"?
A: A room was just a place, where two men went to work. That was all. It might be anywhere from, well, I know in Cassidy, the coal was anywheres from six feet to fourteen feet high, and if you had a place, say, nine feet wide, and fourteen feet high, that's what you'd call a "room".
Q: How would you get up to that fourteen foot height?
A: Well, you had ladders, or you used what they call "timber". You nailed what they call "lagging" on the timber -- then you got up there and then you'd timber up a place.
Q: Oh, you had to timber it up as well as mine the coal?
A: Oh yeah, yeah. You'd timber it up, and you paid a dollar a can for your powder. And ten cents for every cap, you used.
Q: Well -- every cap "you" used? I thought the fire boss was the one who --
A: He was in charge of them, all right. But, you drilled the holes -- suppose I had four holes, or five holes in my place, and he'd come in, and he asked me How many holes have you got? -- I got five. All right, he was only allowed to shoot -- two at a time. But I've seen some cases they went against the law, but however -- that was their business. And he would go and he'd mark it down in a little book he had, there, how many shots he fired in your place. And that was all charged against you, and kept off your wages. And the same when you went for powder, over at the powder house, a dollar a can for powder. And that was charged against your statement, kept off your wages. And your lamp, that you used -- that was kept off your wages too. I just forget now what that was. Two bits, or thirty-five cents a pay, I think it was. For your lamp. And pay was every two weeks.
Q: Well then, the coal that you mined was weighed?
A: Yep. And it wasn't the proper weight, either. Now, if you had ten pound of rock in the car, you lost the whole car. And of course the weigh man, he got to know just about what a car should weigh. It didn't take him long to figure out, well, there must be something wrong here, there must be rock, and then they would dump it out, and find this ten pound of rock, and you lost it all. So, however, that was the company's way of doing things. You didn't blame the men for organizing, because they used -- the heads of the companies, they were nothing but slickers, you know, and they had to figure out -- I guess they were getting the pressure from the big companies at the top, and New York, and all these places, -- course they had to pressurize somebody else, so they went after their bosses, and that was the way it went. And the bosses in the mine went after the men.
Q: How much would a car weigh?
A: Well, Cassidy was supposed to be two ton, but you never got two ton for it. You always got around 2100, 22, that's about what you would get for it. And the cars in the Western FueJ Company, I think they were quite a bit smaller. So you'd get about 1500 or 1400 in the
Q: And you mean, if you had ten pounds of rock, you lost the car?
A: Yes. You lost the whole car.
Q: Well, how could you get away from it, ten pounds of rock?
A: Well, you were s'posed to pick it out, before you loaded the coal in the car.
Q: I thought they had special people to pick the rock out?
A: They did, on the top. What they called "pickin' tables", they called them. But of course, you figure, if you got a place anywhere's from nine to fourteen feet of coal, and you put a few shots in there, it was seldom that you got rock, unless you -- what you called the "brushing". Now the brushing, if you had a low place, you had to shoot the floor to get the car in. So you might get some of this rock mixed in with the coal. And this is what they didn't like. And you had to pick all that out, if you could. But of course what you missed, the kids on the top, they'd get that.
Q: Well, how did the miners get by then, if they had to pay for the half of the things they needed to work, and --
A: Well, they didn't eat too good. But they never starved. Hamburger was ten cents a pound. So, you can figure out. You can't get that today. (chuckle). However -- no, the rents wasn't too bad either. For a lovely two-storey house there in Cassidy, I think it was twenty-five a month. Well, we couldn't complain on that. And there was three of us in the house working. My brother, and myself, and my dad. And we had a car. We could run in and out to Nanaimo.

But, and the fellows on the weekend, they had their own ball team, and -- that's all you thought about, was playing a little cards on Saturday or Sunday, and either a ball game, then you were there again until it was time to -- next weekend. We didn't go anywhere through the week.
Q: That would be on a Sunday? You had one day off, I guess?
A: That's about it, yeh. Yes, they got Saturdays they were working and -- oh, I worked many a double shift out there because the fellows didn't show up for work. And, well -- there's no use arguing. I was going to get paid, but I didn't get paid double time either. You only got paid a single shift.
Q: What about your social life --besides the ball games, were there dances?
A: Oh yes, there was things like that. And they had a band. The ball teams was mostly baseball, soccer, and the band, and they had their own dance hall, and they used to bring in shows now and again. I know they had a show there at Cassidy one time, I remember, --anyway, this fellow was a Negro fellow, and he could get out of this trunk, it didn't matter how they tied it up. Sp, he's in behind a curtain, and they're tying this thing up, and I don't know how many knots they put in the rope, but there's the Negro standing talking to him when they're finished. (laughing).

I don't know how he got out, but he got out, ahead of them!
Q: You told the story about the ventriloquist... can you remember it again?
A: Oh yes! It was about the Negro, in Extension mine. Yeah, they gave him the job driving the mule, and of course, he goes in to where he was working, and this fellow, he talked as a ventriloquist, and he's standing with his light hid, and the Negro comes in andhook onto the car and he
1.4 hollers, at the mule, "Giddap!" The mule turned its head sideways: "Not movin'!" So the Negro looked at him, and he hollered again, "Giddap!" and he says "Not movin'!" He says, "No, and when you decide
tom move, I won't be here!" --and he took off and he never come back. (laughter) --Caught the boat to Vancouver. That was him, in Extension.

Q: Do you remember where the Douglas mine shaft was?
A: Well, there's two or three places. Out here by the Co-op, on the
highway, there's a mine shaft there. Now, the old Douglas mine, then when
you go in behind, on the Five Acres side, there was a shaft in there that
they called the Douglas mine. Now I couldn't tell you right off hand
but I have read stories about it. And one story in particular I read
about --was this man anyways, and he married this Indian girl, and they
had two kids, so anyways, he forgot something, and he went back and here
he found another fellow with his wife. So he didn't say anything at the
time, but he said to the man now, he says, look, he says, I'll give you
a chance to get out of here, and he says You better take off and never
come back. He says If you do, he says, I'm gonna get ya! So, the fellow
quit, and he took off. But he went to get a job on the coal wharfs at
Departure Bay. Where the coal ix was brought in from Wellington. So
he come up to Nanaimo, and anyways he was in the beer parlor, I guess,
or at that time, the saloon.

And he was boasting about it, so the fellow heard about it,
so, he gets in his canoe and he *xxxx* goes down to Departure Bay, you
know, and he sees the fellow workin' on the coal wharf, And he course
he gets his gun out, and he's going to shoot him. And it ended up, they
both died. He emptied his gun, and then they pulled out knives, and
they fought with knives, and they killed one another. Right on the coal
wharfs down here at Departure Bay.

I got that story I think it was from the Victoria Colonist. In
the magazine section. That Magazine section of the Colonist does give out
a lot about different parts of the island.

Q: I saw something there about the Negros who came here -- one was
Starks, he was murdered.
A: Course this is going back before my day, too. We had a few Negros
here -- they were very nice fellows, as far as I was concerned. *xxxxxx*
We all played ball together, nobody seemed to bother one another, we
got along well enough with the Indians. And the Chinamen. This racial
discrimination, this is a capitalistic idea, as far as I'm concerned.
I don't believe in that.

Q: Do you ever hear anything about the Indians mining coal in the early
days, or having anything to do with -- when Dunsmuir came in?
A: No, not so much when Dunsmuir came in, but -- course, the one thing
I do remember reading about was this Coal Tyee. Took a *cane* load of rocks
to Victoria, to the navy, I think where it started. And he told them
they had lots of that up where he come from. And of course Nanaimo was
spelled a little different than what it is now. It was Nee-aimo, of
something. N-y -- something like that. That's how Dunsmuir and them
got their start. Well, he got his start on the railroad as well, through
the backing of some big outfit in the United States. And he put the
railroad in, and of course then the CPR got it in the finish, but, Dunsmuir
had made his pile, just the same.
And he was all for himself -- he wasn't for the working man, that's for sure.

Q: I have heard that the Indians used to pack coal to the sailing ships in their canoes.
A: Oh yes, I wouldn't be surprised at that. Oh, I've had pictures of the sailing ships anchored out here between Newcastle Island, Protection Island. I wouldn't be surprised, because they didn't have any coal wharves in those days. They had to get the coal on the boat somehow. And then these sailing ships, they sailed down to San Francisco. That was their big market, was down in San Francisco, California.

Q: So from the canoes, how do you think they would get the coal on to the ship?
A: Well they would just load it with sacks, I think, to start with. And then finally, Dunsmuir could see that there was going to be big production here, so he had to build docks, to get boats in.

Q: And then how did the coal get from the docks into the ship?
A: Well, that was machinery. Winch. You see, you would have a winch, and it would lower down a chute, and the cars would come down, over the chute, and the cars would drop down, and of course the bottom of the cars just dropped out, and the coal dropped down the chute.

Q: There weren't any sailing ships left when you were a boy?
A: No. Very few. There's one on the market now, I think they're doing a little training with it over on -- it was on exhibition over round Stanley Park there somewhere. But I think that was just a little training ship to get cadets on to.

Q: They were using steam when -- as far back as you can remember?
A: Oh yes. Yes.

Q: Did you see any of his coaling fleet when you were very young?
A: No, I can't say that I did. I've seen the boats anchored out, but like you say, it come in steam, and of course steam was the real going rig after the sailing boats.

Q: How many powder plants were there here?
A: Oh. There was one down here at Departure Bay, where the boats come in, government boats come in. They had two or three explosions there. Then they moved the powder works up to Nanoose Bay. And I think they had one explosion there, and they decided they'd move it down to James Island, so they moved it down to James Island right off from Victoria there. That's the last I remember. But I think they've had a little bit of an explosion down at James Island, even.

Q: So they only had one powder plant in Nanaimo at a time?
A: Oh yes. That one at Departure Bay was the only one I remember. But -- oh they had a few explosions there. They used to -- in fact I have the picture. Where the railroad come in to Departure Bay there, to the powder works, and it blew up one of the rails, and the rail wrapped around a tree, and it bent just like a snake around a tree.

And then there was a man, he was a fellow by the name of Stevens, the only man that would take this glycerine and powder out to Northfield. And he didn't get anybody to ride with him, but anyways he done it, and this day -- they don't know exactly what happened -- but the wagon and everything went, and him right in the middle of it. The horse -- well,
it was dead, was blown to bits, and he was blown to bits. They never
did find him or the wagon. That happened at Departure Bay Road. I
forget what that road would be. Goin' out towards Northfield, anyway.
Q: I can't understand how they could move this nitro-glycerine in the
plant, and not have it blow up. More than it did.
A: Yes, it was dangerous stuff. I don't know either. Now, I read the
story about how this wagon exploded, and they figure that two of these
demi-johns, which is big water jars, they figure that they were just
rubbing together. And that's what blew it up. So, that happened. I
don't understand why nitro-glycerine hasn't gone up in a lot of places.
Maybe it has happened, too. Because you hear of them blowin' safes with
the nitro-glycerine -- some of these experts, I don't know how they do
it, and I wish I knew! (laughter).

I once worked with a fellow, and he gave me the opportunity
to open up his tool chest. And he had on one of his combination locks.
He said If you can open it, he said, I'll give you all the tools that's
in it. Well, I couldn't open it. But he could, and he had to report
to the police every six months, I think it was, because he was a lock
expert. And he was an engineer too. But he had to report every six
months to the police, because he knew so much about locks. --He's dead
and gone now, so they don't have to worry about him any more.
Q: How were the houses around here when you were young? What did they
look like?
A: Oh, they were just -- well, one-by-four nailed together, or or two-by-
four -- and this is the way they went. As long as you could live in it
comfortably, you see -- the miners at first, they used to get a ton of
coal a month, for nothing. That was given to them. And then in the summer
time they didn't use so much. So, what they would do, for a few beers,
they would give the beer parlor their coal order. Well, the company got
to find this out, and then of course the company started to charge them
three and a half for a ton of coal. Well, you couldn't blame the company.
And it was the same when it come Christmas time. They used to give
turkeys away. A man would go into the office, and he would squawk, Oh,
he got a bigger turkey than me, and I got one more kid than he's got.
Well, the company said, we'll put a stop to that, so they stopped the whole
thing. Now you can't blame the companies. The men are to blame themselves,
in most cases.
Q: And this was the Canadian Collieries?
A: Oh yes. Yes.
Q: In Extension I hear the houses were quite close together. If one
house caught fire, the one beside it might catch fire.
A: Well, in most places, even Nanaimo, it was that way. Outside of going
out to the Five Acres, and then they were on the five acre lots, you see.
And this was how the people bought their lots. They bought them up in
close five acre sections. Now those that did buy those, they've made money,
because the Harewood Shopping Centre is on a five acre lot. And they've
made money on that. But of course, what's good's money when your dead
and gone? Most of these old people are dead and gone now. It's only the
young ones, that's gettin' the benefit. --I don't think I'm goin' to leave
very much to anybody. Because my own kids said to me: Dad, if you've
got any money, spend it -- have a good time. And that's what I'm doin'.
I've been to the Old Country, and I've been to Russia, and I've got a notion to go back to Russia for another trip. God willing, I hope I live long enough to do it. But I've been so sick, and in the hospital, and two or three operations, and -- just a little afraid to move away from home. And, I'm not doin' that very often now.

Q: So what did you feel when you heard about these two young fellows that were found in the Harewood mine?
A: Well, I don't blame anybody, really. Outside of education. And the education begins at home. The same as when you're teaching your kids to say "yes, sir," "no, sir," "thank you," and all this, and they know these mines are around here. Now I think the parents should warn their kids never to go near them. And I think it should be taught in the schools as well. Because this gas is bleeding off of coal all the time. And these kids, they just sat down to rest.

This black damp, that comes off of an explosion, very bad. And that's what kills most of the miners, is the black damp. It's not the methane gas. The methane gas it will rise to the ceiling. Well, if they can get out, with that gas up there, they're all right. But it's this black damp that they've got to stop and -- you've probably read where men, in explosions -- now one case I know of was Blakeburn, where the men went in and they brattished themselves right in, sealed it up as best they could, but that black damp just leaked through and killed -- I think it was about twelve or fourteen they got in this one place. Well, it's no use of trying if the place is caved, and you can't get out, you've got to do something. So they try and seal themselves off. Well, it happened that they didn't seal it tight enough.

Now these two kids up there, they -- I think they just sat down to rest, and they breathed in this black damp, and they killed themselves. And it only takes one half of one percent, and very few people know that. One half of one percent to kill a person. Now that's not very much at all.

Q: So how do you think that black damp -- does it never go away then?
A: Oh, when you're working in the mines, the big suction fans that are going -- they'd take your hat off, if you're standing in line with the air that comes down the slope, or down the shaft. Oh yes. That gas never gets a chance to stay in the mine. It just -- unless in the early days, you see, when they were working, with the naked lights, that was when they had trouble too.

Q: So where would this black damp come from then, that was still in that Harewood mine?
A: Oh yes, it would just leak off from the coal. The coal is there. It would just leak out, yes. --I wouldn't advise -- they were talking about a place where you could take people in and show them the coal mine. I wouldn't advise that at all. Because gas is very dangerous, in fact, you'll notice that even that carbon monoxide from your car exhaust, and how people have got killed with the windows all rolled up, and they're trying to keep the car warm, and, well, this is the way similar things happen.

Q: Well, when they test it -- can they go in if there's methane gas up there? Can anybody go in with a light? And have it not blow up?
A: No. No, not with a naked light. Yes, it would blow up with a naked light. But your fire boss, does your firing, shoots your shots for you, and charges you for your caps and that, he has a lamp, what they call a "safety lamp" -- and he tests the place before he'll even fire a shot. Now what happens, he's got a light inside, and there's a glass there, and he can see, right in the glass, and if he gets a blue flame on top of that light, he's not going to shoot, because you got 'x gas in there. And that's it.

Q: How do you suppose that these miners, you know, in the 1912 strike, --a couple of the miners on the safety committee found -- how did they test in those days?

A: Well, similar to what I'm telling you about. With a safety lamp. They went in there, and they found gas, and they reported it. And of course, just like you were organizing a union -- they were fired, everywhere they went. For reporting the gas.

Q: Was it you that was telling me about a cave-in, and someone held on to the mule's tail led him out?

A: Yes. That was my uncle Jimmie, up in the Extension, I think it was the explosion in '22. It was the last explosion they had in Extension, anyway. And he was drivin' mule in there, and he said if he hadn't of been drivin' a mule he wouldn't of got out. The place was caved, and he said the mule got through a place, he said, it'd take him all his time to crawl through on his hands and knees. And he says the mule got through there, and I just hung on to its tail. And he says, that's how he got out. --The mule, I don't know how he, whether he could feel the air comin' through the hole or not, but he said he hung on to the mule and that's how he got out.

Oh, I'm sure there's a lot of these old time miners, specially up around Extension, they would be able to tell you a lot of these things, that I been telling you about.

End of interview