Tape interview of John Pecnik, Nanaimo, interviewed by Myrtle Bergren
--the clock can be heard in background - a clock brought over from Austria by his mother early in the century (told later in tape).
The small dog has been put out. Barks for some time, but then stops barking.
John Pecnik begins by looking into a book he had on hand.
He is quite deaf,
Robert Dunsmuir - well he was the first one to start work. Well I - I know
that too, but here you make a -- it says: Vancouver Island Mining and Land
Company... were only able to produce 82,135 tons... Well, are you writing?

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States. And he died over there. Well, he was 86 years old when he passed away. Right before when my wife was home and well -- I didn't have the money to go, but after my wife passed away, and then my son and I we went to see him several times. He was out at Renton... you know. Coal mining area too. He worked in Black Diamond for a while, but he didn't like it. He liked carpenter work better than anything else. That's what he did mostly, worked in the mines. He worked in the mines here.

MB: What year did he get here?
MB: Two years before you were born then.
JP: And my mother she come a year after. And then my brother he was born in Canmore Alberta. You see, when he come to Nanaimo there was no union. And when he come over here, 1913, it finished, just before the first world war. (Looking for something).

And the last time I saw my father -- cause when he took off he didn't take it. And he wants me to give this to my son. (brings forth a ribbon, mounted on a fine metal mount.)

MB: (holding it and looking at it) Isn't that good! (Reading) Member, Local Union No. 1887, U.M.W. of A., Canmore, Alberta, Canada. --That's a medallion, with a pick and a shovel, and a lamp --


MB: And it says, U.M.W. of A., April 19,
MB: Eight Hours, -- oh that's what it -- it commemorates the first 8-hour day. JP: But it wasn't all over. It wasn't all over. --You regulate that glass yourself.
MB: April 1st, 1898. Eight hours.
JP: Pa says: Many and many and many a man died to get that 8-hour day! Because they used to work 12 hours a day.
MB: That's really a treasure, that!
JP: And then (turns it over) on this side they wore it for a funeral, when a miner got killed. Black.

MB: Oh, a black ribbon. Isn't that beautiful!

JP: That's the last thing my father asked me. When he left he never took it with him. And we had it. And he asked me, he says, John, he says, you still got that First 8-hour Day? I says Yes. You can keep it, he says, give it to Ronald.

MB: I wonder when he got it? When he went to Canmore, Alberta?

JP: Yes. We were only there for about a little over two years. And then, see, in them days, all them mines -- all them little mines there -- I got some stories of them too. All them little mines along the CPR. It kept the trains runnin' You know. Cause the Albertans used coal. And all the coal rights did belong to the CPR anyway. That was in the Rockies. And then he didn't like it there because it was so cold there. That was between 16 and 18 miles from Banff.

MB: Yes, I know where it is.

JP: Yes my son took me there about four years ago. He had a truck and camper. Took me right to Canmore, see if I could recognize. I recognized the old church. An old church. I have pictures of it.

MB: Did you go to Michel?

JP: No, I never been there, no.

MB: When did you come back here?

JP: We come here just when the war started. 1914. January, 1914.

MB: Then you'd be 8 years old?

JP: Yes.

MB: So how old were you when you went to work in the mine?

JP: I was fifteen. I lied my age, one year. When I went to town, well I see him every day. Jas. Good. Him and I we started work together. The same day. He's the same age as me, and ever time I says, Well, how old are you? And we always used to go back again, and remember that your age
MB: What was your first job?
JP: My first job, in the coal mine!
MB: Right in the coal mine, not on top?
JP: Right down -- Reserve Mine! In Reserve was the first mine that I worked in. Yes.
MB: I thought they had them on to first, the boys.
JP: Yes, well they had some, yes. They had some on the pickin' tables and that there. They had some. And some went down. It depends on how they needed 'em. And the boss just about knew what you could do, because -- all the kids heard everything what was goin' on in the mines anyway. From the men. Because the olden days there -- well not so much right here around Nanaimo, but it used to be, like miners, when they got to be like three, four -- that's all they talked about was their work. You never heard nothing else, only what they did! About this guy and this guy, and what mine, or what they do, and things like that. Well that's how you learnt, you know. You heard all these things. And loggers were the same way. But you don't hear them any more, because loggin' is -- well you hear that when you came from Courtenay, north. But not too much over here.
MB: And in the beer parlors, too.
JP: In the beer parlors, yes. Okay. Years ago they were mining in the beer parlors. You know, when they got together. (laughter)
MB: I heard that there were more beer parlors here in Nanaimo than anywhere else in Canada.
JP: Well I don't know about Canada, but -- there's one beer parlor less than it used to be.
MB: And which one is that?
JP: Nanaimo Hotel! It used to be a few doors past Woolworth's on the right-hand side.
But there was another one -- there was that one where the fountain is.

Oh yes, the Crescent. The Five Cent Beer. --Well, that's what it used to be! See them days there, all the beer parlors -- they had competition. I'd like to see that again, like it was! Yes, okay!

Now we pay fifty cents, now we got more for a nickel than you pay for fifty cents! And the Crescent Hotel, now, the last ones that I remember, but I can't remember before them. You know, that run that Crescent Hotel. Well. There was a few white men and Chinamen working at Number One mine outside. You know. We used to call it the pithead. And as long as you had ten or fifteen cents, or -- lucky if you had two bits, well, at dinner hour, twelve o'clock and the whistle blew, you had to come back at one o'clock. Because it wasn't far, it only took five minutes to run over there. They never took no lunch nor nothin', they went to the beer parlor, but there'd be trays of ham sandwiches, and cheese sandwiches, and you eat and they spent their ten or fifteen cents or two bits in their lunch hour. And right up until they tore it down, they had -- it was a brick building, and they had a big mug o' beer -- Five Cents, printed on the wall. That was the Crescent Hotel.

That was a popular hotel then.

Yes, it was. And then after a while it depended. You know. Say there was a group of men -- them days women didn't go in the beer parlors -- Never heard of a woman go in the beer parlor! They maybe had a drink outside, but not in the beer parlor. And you never seen a woman smoke -- very seldom I seen a woman smoke. Not like it is today. You know, its different customs. Well, I don't say that they shouldn't smoke, you know. They smoke just the same as a man. I agree with that. But --

What about on Saturday nights, was there a big crowd down town?

Yes, when the mines wasn't working, Saturday nights yes. Used to have the E&N train, cause we had three trains a day, all the way from Ladysmith, or where ever you come from, stopped in South Wellington, Starks Crossin' here, you go to town, or you walked, or horse and wagon,
bicycle, and then when things got opened up more, well they got the
trucks, buses, jitney, you know, we used to call 'em, take the people to town
just the same as we have now. But that was only weekends. The miners, well

\[ \frac{1}{2} \text{ pint milk (2 cups)} \]
1 tbsp. cream

well, them days, in the early days at first, the miners had to go to work. I know
people lived here in Chase River, either walked or rode their bicycle, or
horse to go to Extension, to work. Or to South Wellington. Reserve mine,
we were luckier. Because they were better than the Canadian Collieries.
Better. The conditions were better.

MB: Why?

JP: Well, I don't know. Well you read that book and just find out.

The Dunsmuir outfit was the oldest one! But the Western Fuel was after
that with Number One. Mine started. That was an English outfit. Well,
Dunsmuir was an English outfit too. The Western Fuel was better. They paid
more for their employees. And the work was better. And the men got treated
better. Than they did for the Canadian Collieries like, Extension.

MB: Did they have mules where you worked?

After

JP: Yes. I drove mules. I first started when I went on the
hoist.

MB: What were they like?

JP: Mules? (grin) Well, I drove mules right up until the mine closed down,
Number One. When they finished up. When Number One finished up I was --
Jimmie Mercer, and Johnnie Gordon -- well he's older than I am too. Well,
May's older'n me too. Well I knew her father. I knew her brothers. Well
her \textit{fi} father -- she was a Mills -- they used to have the Columbus Hotel.
But the old man, he worked in the mines too. Well them days you didn't need
to pay money like you do today to get in to the hotel business. Because
it was cheap.
MB: Yes, I heard about that Tunnel Hotel at Extension. They bought it during Prohibition.

JP: Yes. Well, when I was a kid, when Extension mines was working, well, my home was up on Thirteenth Street, on top, right across from the church. And if I wasn't workin', my mother would be after me, she'd say, John! I'd say What's a matter? --You go look for a job! --Go to Extension. I didn't want to go to Extension anyway, never liked it. So, I got on the bike, went up there. Old Bill Wilson was boss. I got there around 2:30, the miners were comin' out of the mine, there, out of the tunnel there, round 3 o'clock. Well, first train that come, they had motors runnin', takin' a hundred, a hundred twenty car trips, goin' out -- I see George Bodovinick's old man on top of a load -- dead. --I never asked for a job. That was it. I never went back any more. --Yes, well them days a man was worth nothin'. You might as well forget about him. You know, they never even lost a car of coal. They just put him on top of a load, and take him out. (deep sigh)

MB: And you knew him, of course?

JP: Oh, I knew him! I knew him well! I knew George and I've been in their house many times, when they lived in Extension. His sister and his family. The old man, the old lady.

MB: Was the family there? Did they know yet?

JP: Well there was only George and his sister. There was one girl and four boys.

MB: But you knew before they did?

JP: Well I knew, before, I seen him come out the mine. I went there to go after a job from Bill Wilson. You see, there's a loaded trip come out first, but then the other trip they took the men out. Six empty cars. They sit in empty cars. Six men to an empty car. And the coal trip was out first. And I seen old (George) Bodovinick comin' out on top of a car of coal. Got killed.
No, but that mine -- I know a lot of miners that worked in there. Everybody -- that mine there, everybody worked alone. Be there alone, you wouldn't see nobody, maybe for a week. You know. The fire boss 'd come in there, once in a while, and you wouldn't see nobody else. Anything happen to you and you wanted help, well there was nobody there to help you either, you know. But the Western Fuel, they made it a law that in a place and that there, there was always two men. You know. Then they could help each other. My father told me the same thing. I've seen too much of it. -- After I finished up, and while I worked at Reserve, I worked in Number Five, South Wellington. I quit and went there. Year, year and a half. Them days there, if you -- you could quit 'n get another job, and come back, too. Bawl 'em out, too! (laugh). --No, but times was different! They knew that! But just before Number One mine closed up, well, I wasn't livin' here, I was livin' across from the store, that big house where the trailers are, on the other side the track when I got married. When I got married in 35, that was 37, 38, the mine closed. And I was on night shift. This was on Protection. Ted Courtenay was the big shot there, boss. Me and a mule. Got in a low spot, off the track, couldn't get out, I was behind the load, car rock. I And -- couldn't untie 'im, couldn't get out. Well it was off all four wheels. I got my end out, but I couldn't get to the front to lift the front end out, because it was too low -- I couldn't see through -- only three, four inches on each side there. Of the car. There was no way. And there was a walk around, no other road for me to get around to the front end so I could get out! I was pinned. Stayed there, for hours. I had to wait till day shift come in. Well, you know, like miners: Hey! Why the heck don't you stay awake once in a while, instead of sleepin' all night! You know, it made you mad too, you know! You know, they tell that! But I wanted to get home, get out. I didn't want to miss the Wee Too. We used to call it the Wee Too. A steam tractor (something) used to haul a scow between where the bus depot is to Protection. Well, I had my bicycle there, well, day shift comin' in at seven, and you're supposed to be out at seven to -- you know, the cagey?
When the dayshift come in and the other shift could get out. Well, the men had to walk out and maybe walk back there a couple a hundred yards to get in the right spot so they get clear, because there was too many narrow spots. Get squashed. And I wasn't supposed to leave the loads. I was supposed to keep all the sidings clear, for day shift, to go on the coal. To pick the coal out. So the first siding I come to, I left that car o rock down. Got the chain, put it over the mule, (something) his hame, --and the mule took off! Never seen it no more. Well, (Nezer?) Muir, he was comin' in for Number One. Just like a train whips out. (?!) 130, 140, 50 cars, comin' in first thing in the morning. (heads?) All the men's inside, and the power's on, you got trolley wire, remember, you heard the old street cars? With the trolley wire? Well the power's on. Lots o places that there wire is only four feet, four and a half feet off the floor! Well you get down or you'll hit it with your head! What the heck are you gonna do? Mule took off, quit, time!

You know, the mules know that! Soon as they see somebody else, they're gone. They know that, they go headin' for the stable. Well, it'd be about three miles. From where I was to the stable. Took a little while to go there. Oh well, the mule was ahead, I didn't see the mule. Trip was comin' in. I figure well, if the mule hit the wire, git in a narrow spot, he gets squashed. Cause the motorman wouldn't have a chance to stop. He's comin' a little bit up grade, because -- they're goin'! So, anyway, I keep runnin', and stop, and listen if I could hear the motor comin'. Just the same say, that you're walkin' on the railroad. And the train's comin'. You look for a place where you're gonna get off the road. But in the mine, you got mine holes here and there, you know. Little wide spot so you can git -- in the clear -- so you don't get squashed.

So as I said, didn't see no mule, no dead muly. kept on goin'. 
that I could hear that motor comin' -- I couldn't see it. And the motor's got big lights on it, just like on a locomotive. You can see the lights comin' round the corner -- it's all crooked! (demonstrates twisty canyon).

I find a wide spot, and the engineer's goin' like that (fist) to me. You know, for comin' out like that! You know, you're liable to get hurt. Well I wanted to get home! You understand --/stay there another eight hours to get out! (laugh). So, I get to Protection stables, Ted Courtenay, he says to me -- well, the mule was first. I didn't see the mule. Cause Courtenay -- the bosses had another office in the mine. And then the stable. The stable had oh, 120 stalls. And Courtenay there, he saw the mule go past, well it was about five, ten minutes after, I come runnin' behind, and he hollers to me: Why don't you stay awake once in a while, instead of sleepin' all night? -- And I told him off! I called him everything! Finished. Walked out.

I run down to Protection shaft, and the fella said Johnnie, sorry, you can't come out, he said. Wee Too's gone! You had to get up 600 feet in the shaft. to outside. --Everybody's gone! Nobody there to run the hoist. And get outside, to the surface. --So, I started walkin' back again. --And then Courtenay knew that! That the Wee Too had already gone. I never had a watch! So I had to walk back again, and Courtenay, he waited for me. And then he layed it to me again! Makin' the things worse yet! An'nen I had to start sneakin' out, in between Protection to get out at Number One. Well, I got out a there around quarter to seven, out of Number One, on top of a load, too. And I thought that car o' coal was goin' to go through my stomach! Because boy, they just --whoosht! Just like that! (Bangs hand in fist). You know, if you got on and they dropped you, you'd think there was no bottom on it either! That's how fast they go. (Laugh)

And, I got on top. Then I had to walk all the way from there, all the way back to where the Wee Too scow is, where the CPR, where the bus depot is, to get my bicycle. I knew my wife 'd be worried, something happened to me. Supposed to be home round seven thirty. It was pretty near eleven o'clock.
o'clock by the time I got home, and I told my wife, I says, I quit! I'm not goin' back any more! My wife didn't say nothin'. She kept quiet. Which I thought maybe she'd give me heck for quittin'. Cause them days it wasn't too easy to get jobs, either. Tightinin' up! And oh, I stayed home for two weeks, and I told my wife, I says, Well, I'm goin' to go and see old Williams. Look for a job. Reserve was workin' that time. Cause I'd worked there before. Worked once there, quit, come back again, back and forth.

All over the place. And then Len Warden, he was timekeeper. His office was here, and you hadda go through this door, that's where the bosses were. But you had to go through the time keeper's office first. And Len Warden says to me, he says, Hey John, you can't go there! I says, Darn right I can go there! --Didn't pay any tention to him. Just walked in. Open the door, go in. And that time it was John Hunt was superintendent. And he was sittin' right by the door. All the bosses were in there. Every one of 'em.

Huh! John Hunt he says to me, he says, John, he says, Are you workin'? I says No. I never even asked. And Courtenay he was sittin' right across from him, over there. He says, Send him out tonight, he says, he's the best man I had, and he quit on me! He says, Send him out tonight! And I had dam near told him to go to H. You know. But, all the bosses bein' there, I had to keep quiet. So, after I come home, then my wife asked me, she says, Did you get a job, John. I says Yes, I gotta go to work tonight. She says Oh no! I says Yes, k I didn't like it either. And I thought, Well -- they'd blackball me if I didn't. So I started to work on a Thursday night.

I went back to work, he told me, he says to come day shift. And then I was day shift, right up until the mine closed down. And then the driver's and that said Johnnie Pecnik is Courtenay's right hand man, because Courtenay and I we never did get along. (laugh). But after the mines had finished up, he sees me on the street, he says, Hey, Johnnie, come over here! I want to talk to you. He says, Johnnie, you're the only guy that talked back to me. He said the rest of them (demonstrates trembling).
JP: Well, I had 18 years seniority with the Western Fuel. I tried to get into Number 10 mine in South Wellington. Well, Bill Atkiss, well we had the union goin' then, and (?) Boyd -- you heard of him, I guess? Well, we were on the seniority list. The seniors were first. But, there was a few ahead of me, too. Well, we went to see the seniority list, to see if we were gettin' any closer to gettin' to work! We were gettin' away further! A-a-aw! What the heck's goin' on there? So I thought, Well, I'm goin' to go and see Number Ten and see what's goin' on there. Because I knew most of the guys. And I know strangers too. You know. Because them days there, you pretty well knew everybody. Okay. And Bill Frew, he was boss over there. He says to me, John, he says, Are you workin'? I says No. Well, he says, John, I'd give you a job, he says, but I can't. He says there's men startin' here that's never been in a union before. (laughs) He says, you never seen him before! I says, No, I never, either! (Ha ha) But that's the end of it.

And then I ended up in Cumberland. And the I quit there. During the war. I quit there. And then/it was okay, it wasn't too bad there, when you were workin' five days a week. And then they got three days a week. And well, my wife was payin' rent, and she had to eat, $4.30 a day, drivin' mule -- well, I got a miner's ticket, once in a while they put me on a wall, for an extra day, but -- it wasn't enough. And Herb Torkko -- you've heard of the Torkkos, you've heard of Herb, he died -- okay -- we were both stayin' the Waverly Hotel, and -- well Herb, he wasn't married then. And I was married. Two of us in one room, two beds, you know. And I told Herb. I says, I quit. He says You can't quit. I says Yup! I quit. Well then he says to me, which I thought he wouldn't do, he says Johnnie, he says, if you quit, I'm gonna quit! Well you see, I was too old for the army, and I didn't give a goddamn. I figured on I was better off in the army than gettin' nothin'! You know, at least my wife 'd be gettin'
somethin'. That's the way I was lookin' at it. But Herb, he was single. So, we worked Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Three days. Well, we wasn't makin' enough in three days to pay the board, clear, because we had so much (optics)? --So, I -- well he had to do the same thing. We had to pay board and for Saturday, Sunday, to get another day so be square our boardy -- and we didn't have no more money. We walked all the way from Cumberland to Nanaimo. Herb and I, after a day's work. We had supper, paid our board, and then starts walkin'. Yup! And that's why I went to his funeral, and I told his brother I said I know Herb well, because we walked cursed all the way -- (breaks out into a laugh) --I told my son, I says, I know every inch of that road!

MB: No rides, eh?

JP: Well at night time, you know, don't know you. Well them days it wasn't like it is today either, you know. You seldom heard of anyone gettin' hurt or robbed.

MB: Well what about these mules that you were driving, how mean they were sometimes?

JP: Oh, some were mean, yes. Some were mean. Well, you see, you can have the meanest animal, --I've drove mule, I don't know who was the scaredest, between me, or the mule! Of each other! They go in there, in the stable, the stable man says Well, today you gotta take so-and-so. Nobody wanted that. Mule. Everybody was afraid of him. And gee, yi-yi-yi-yi.

And then they say, a lot of them they call "star drivers" -- you know. Which I figured then I wasn't. If he can't handle how in the heck am I gonna handle him? You know. We used to kind of take clothes off, the harness off, you know. You had to crawl around in the stall there, to put the collar on, and put the hames on, and everything, and watch, they bite you, they -- you name it! (laughs) And this time, well I had to take Fox mule, everybody was afraid of it, --and I was afraid too -- really afraid! So -- that mule -- saved my life! I was sittin' on a empty car, like this,
and for no reason at all, the god damn thing there, it jumped the track! Jammed my knee up against a post. It was in there that fast, that I couldn't reach down there to unhook it. And the mule 'd be lookin' back there, switchi' his tail, his long ears 'd be wigglin' (laughing) -- I thought he was gonna take my leg off. Cause I couldn't get loose. --Come on, back up, Fox; Back up, Fox! -- he'd wiggle his tail. --Back up! -- wiggle his tail. and back up a little bit. Till he got his back up against the car, and he pushed it back! --He did! Oh yes! And I got free, okay! --And you know, that's the best mule I ever had! --That mule 'd do anything for me! But it's the drivers. Well, you see, a lot of people are mean, they don't know how to handle them! You know, they make an animal nervous. You know. Okay, if he does nothin' wrong, leave 'im alone. But there's one thing you've got to let them know that you're master. When you beat them, beat them when they're doin' it, not after. Just the same as a pup, or any animal, they don't know what they're gettin' a beatin' for.

But, I've always found out that -- I know, we've had horses at home. You've seen animals, some animals 'd make a fräänd, I don't know why, but that --they do. But then other ones they're afraid, of the person. And never even seen 'em. Can't have nothin' to do with 'em.

JP: Fox. Well, there was all kinds of 'em. Between Number One and Protection there must have been 300 mules and some horses. Another time, in Reserve Mine, this is the only thing that really hurt me. Oh! This was a horse. It was fast. It was a good runner. It wasn't a heavy horse. Good runner, fast. Okay. Well, it's just like anything else, when you're finished, well, that's it. The same as a man, but they respected an animal more than a man. Because they had to buy the mule. But they only bought you by the day. Not right for me to say this, but this is true. This time there at Reserve Mine I had another shaft in the mine, a hundred feet, down below. Below the main shaft, down hill, fast. The horse is goin' as fast as he can go. And he got his
back foot caught in the switch (emotional tone here), and the cars hit, and tore the hoof (demonstrating on his leg) right up! You couldn't get it out. Tore the hoof right up! And you know, I had to finish the shift with three legs! Oh! (emotional).

And then when they took him in the stable, flat car there -- well I beat it, I didn't -- it was a good old -- a good horse. And the fire boss come there, cap (demonstrating horses ear) in his ear -- that's it! (these chuckles and laughs of his are quite filled with feeling, other than humor) Killed it right there, sent it out on the rock dump! Oh yeah.

I shouldn't say these things,

MB: No, this is what we want to know. This is how it really was.

JP: My son says, John don't tell all the bad things...

MB: But how are people going to know, the younger generation, what it was like, if the miners don't tell them. Nobody else is going to --

JP: Well you see this is why we had all the problems. You know. You see that all the time. You don't want to do it. I know fellows, lived here at Chase River, worked together with a partner, get killed, the fella that's workin' next place, felt bad about it. He daresn't say My partner got killed. I couldn't -- tell the other fellow what happened -- he'd hush it up, so -- didn't want nobody to go home. --I know fellas that they that got fired for that! Never got their job back for doin' that.

Because once there, the whole works went home. And the company locked it. A day's profit.

MB: This would be in the twenties, I guess?

JP: Yes, it's in the twenties, yes. Well there was no union them days. No, the union got started after the war. 1936. I was just goin' through some of my papers the other day, lookin' there -- my Miners' Union, you know.
MB: I went to see George Bryce, and Jock Gilmour.

JP: Well, at that time, Geordie Bryce was on the haulage. Or skinnin' mule.

JP: Story re Daisy Waugh. We were cross-shiftin'. That was/between Number One and Protection. We used to call Cobble Hill. What we used to call the Half Way. Well, it's three miles underground. From Number One to Protection. But the level went parallel with Esplanade, all the way, almost up to the high rise, in a big "U" -- now it's so far back to Protection, straight across, no distance at all, you know, just like across the water there. But that's the way it was. And Cobble Hill, well Daisy Waugh and I we were cross shiftin one another. And there was Norm Wallace, he lives in a trailer, he's still there. Workin' three shifts. Norm Wallace, Daisy Waugh, myself. Okay. I was on the night shift that time. And Daisy Waugh -- well them days there, when they told you to go to work, you hadda go to work! And Daisy Waugh, he was on afternoon shift on New Year's Eve, and he had to go to work. But he got killed. He got electrocuted. He hit that wire.

Now, you're talkin about the mule there. Let me think now. Oh yes, & it wasn't a mule, it was a Shetland pony. And that was in the Cobble Hill area. The union just got goin'. At that time. So -- and it was low, only four feet high. Just four feet high -- just a little bit higher than the height of the car. You couldn't see over top of it, or nothin'. And that's why they had the little pony in there, because the mule couldn't go in there. It's too tall. You're down on your gol darn knees crawlin in and out anyway. Okay. Well, ---- Bennett, Wakeham (?), they used to give me a rough time, but Jesus, on the other shift. And Colin Bennett he was driver boss on my shift. --But did I finish about Daisy Waugh being killed?

MB: Yes.

JP: Yes, okay. That was on New Year's Eve. But about that pony.
They were all after me, you watch Queenie. Because one was Jeannie, and Queenie. Queenie was the mother, and Jeannie was born in the mine. It was born in the mine -- never did see daylight!

Now this is true, you know. --I got a shoe, off that pony. Well, I got it on a plaque. I give it to my son's wife, at their place. I said, Keep that there, boy! That's -- Queenie's shoe! (emotion). You know. It's only a little thing, you know. (demonstrates very small). And you worked with it. Put it in the stable, well, took its harness off and that there, put it in the stable, well the stable man would feed it, okay. Next day, well I didn't feel good, I didn't go to work. So -- Johnny Carruthers, he lives there on 13th Street, come on the way home from work. Day shift. You know. Knocked on the door. My wife answered the door, he says, "Where's Johnnie at?" --He's in bed. Sick. --Johnnie's gotta go and see the boss before he comes back to work -- they're blamin' him for killin' the pony. I said I never killed the pony! I said I put the pony in the stable. It was okay when I left. They probably put another guy on my job. See, because I didn't come to work. --Well, you know there's people like that, they do these things. Okay. Little pony -- oh Jeez, you know, but they're very strong for their size. Pull an empty car up, up -- up a hill. You walk behind it, even there, with a sprag there, to block it, in case you couldn't hold it. So it wouldn't run back there and drag it on the bottom.

So when I felt better, and that there, I went -- and seen Boydie. The union just got goin' too. Boydie says, Yeah, we heard all about it, John. He said never mind, he says, you go back, back to work. (laugh)

MB: What had happened to the pony then?
JP: Killed it!

MB: How?
JP: (sigh) -- Well you see, say that you're up a hill. And it's loaded. And the pony is in front. We had four sprags, and sand on the rails,
knocked the black out, and he forgot to put the sprags in. And it was
goin' so fast that the poor pony he didn't have no chance. The first
corner he come to it flattened him right down. --A runaway. You know
what I mean -- a runaway! Just like leavin' your car without brakes,
if it's parked on a hill. Same thing. And the pony's in front. Well
it's gotta roll!

MB: Were you ever in any accidents yourself?
JP: No. Touch wood.
MB: Did you see any?
JP: Yes, I've seen accidents, but not me. I know like -- I got heck
for doin' it, too. The others had been scared, and all that there,
especially people, fellas that didn't know the ropes. And that there/
Then the (-----?) --Oh, that's okay! It'll never come down, it'll never
come down! Scared. --Come on over here and have a look at this! Okay.
This -- I've done that -- but this last time here in Cumberland, well, I
had to go through that area myself. Fella says come on John have a look.
Gettin' worse and worse and worse. --When the floor starts comin' up
\to meet the roof, well you git the hell outa there! You know, the
floor -- to meet the roof. The roof's comin' down, but the floor's goin/
up too. But it does. The posts and that, pushing' down so hard on the
side -- the bottom comes up, see? It's a ton weight, you know, this--
I says to this fella, I says, Well, I said, you go to pan wall, Go and
ask for a pick! And I said, Keep quiet now, don't you say anything now!
I says, I'll fix it! If it's gonna come down! I says, after it's down,
I says, it's down! But I says, We gotta go home too! We do too! Okay,
or we'll be blocked in. Because, lotta things you know, everything's okay.
Say that I told you that it's okay. But it -- maybe it's not okay.
You understand what I mean? Now there's lives at stake. Okay! The rock
comes down, and you can git rid of it, and everybody else is okay too.

But that's more expense for the company see?
MB: You told him to go and get a pick, did you say?
JP: Yes, I told him to get a pick, yah! and I looked for the loose end, down it come! Okay. We were in the clear. Well I told the other fellow, well he had enough room to go through, I said, you run up there and tell them guys at the pan wall to come out the other side. I said this side's caved. It was caved, but I made it come down, because you just didn't know how long it took before it did come down -- you're just workin', you hear it crackin' and crickin', and then it'd stop again, and then -- funny, like in the mines, if it's gonna cave, then it's always, always, - it must be the atmospheric pressure, of the earth, but if it's going to cave, it's always after midnight. Between midnight, and six o'clock. Always.

Number Five Mine in South Wellington over there -- we-ell -- I had a horse-- they're all dead now that was in there, they were -- Oh no, it's okay! It won't come down! Won't come down! Won't come down! Okay. When the gol darn old horse knows that -- he starts to go, when he won't go in there -- the mule too. Mules do that too. And a rat! You've heard about rats? My father used to tell me, he says John, he says -- like Reserve mine there was no rats. There was lots of rats in Number One and Protection, and in South Wellington, but none in the Reserve. I never seen a rat. In there. Okay. Always called a rat was a man's best friend. Because In the mine. /Come there to warn you.

MB: That's what I wondered -- if they were good or bad, you know.
No but JP: /This is true. I swear it on a stack of bibles. Cause I seen it.

MB: Did you have to work in the wet?
JP: Oh yes. In water, yes. We used to get paid water money.

MB: Did you? How much water for that?
JP: We-ell, five cents a day, maybe ten cents a day. Depends on how deep a water you were in.
MB: How deep could you work in?
JP: Well (laugh) up to your knees! Deeper, in places, you know. As far as you had to go.

MB: Did you get any bad effects, on your legs or anything?
JP: No.

MB: Or your lungs? Emphysema?

My father, he used to tell me these things. He says, John, stay clear from that stuff. A lot they think they're tough. I know lots of 'em. (mentions names) --great big Scotchmen, great big men. Three hundred pounders, you know. Tougher'n nails. They all died young.

MB: What from?
JP: You'd think they're working in a flour mill! They lived here in Nanaimo. They're all buried, every one of them. We used to call them John Hunt's specials.

MB: Why did you call them that?
JP: Because they'd do anything! That's why they're not here!

MB: How come you called them like a flour mill, these people, they were all white?
JP: Yes, they were all white from rock dust! You'd think they were in -- sure, it's all white! Coal dust is black.

MB: So where was the rock?
JP: The rock, in the rock tunnels. Rock tunnels, into the coal. Oh yes! In them days there you never heard of these respirators or nothin'. Just go in there. Between powder smoke, and you know, the fumes from the powder, enough to knock anybody down!

MB: Did you ever see any racial discrimination? when you were around, with all the racial groups that were here?
JP: Not in the mine. No. When they were down the mine they were all friends.
Outside they were -- you name it! (laugh) -- Just the opposite! But they're all brothers down there. They all want to see daylight. In them days there, it didn't matter how you hated one another, say, you and I hated one another, wouldn't speak to one another, -- I'd say well Myrtle come on over here, gimme a hand! I'd come right away. Or you asked me. Tom help you, you'd come right away. You would. That's the way it was. All the time that I have been in mines. But outside it was different altogether. You were everything.

MB: How many mines were there in South Wellington?

JP: Well, South Wellington, Alexandra, Southfield, -- and, well, Southfield was Fiddick's, and Richardson's. I worked for Fiddick.

MB: And what was Number Five?

JP: Number Five, that was the Canadian Collieries.

MB: And Number Ten?

JP: Canadian Collieries. Nanaimo side was Western Fuel. Reserve and all this side here. And then like, Northfield, Wellington, that was Canadian Collieries. Jingle Pot, Wakesiah, and Number One, and Protection, well it's all in one anyway, and Reserve Mine, Western Fuel. And, well Morden Mine was an American Company. Morden. My father worked in Morden. I never worked in Morden mine. I went there looked for a job, -- when they opened it up the second time, and then soon as they got it cleaned up they shut it down again. And that was the end of it. And South Wellington, Alexander, and Extension, like the Pacific Coast Coal Company, and Richardson's and Fiddick's they were mined before the rest of them were. According to this, now, I can't believe, like, Extension, because Alexandra itself must have been before Extension. To my knowledge. Because I worked in Southfield, in Fiddick's, after they had the -- well -- there's quite a few men got drownded in there. Well, in Southfield. When I worked in there in the thirties, yes, with Bill Roper. Bill Roper he had a first class ticket. And that's how I got my ticket. Through him, because he was an old man. He was way, 20 years of more older than me.
You were a fire boss?

JP: No, I wasn't a fire boss. No, but I got the tickets all right, I can show you that. And a fire boss, is just a shot lighter, that's all he is. Okay. I can do all that, stuff, I could go there and blast stumps, snip snip.

Tape No. 2 - Side 1

MB: Did you know Sam Guthrie?

JP: Sam Guthrie, oh yes!

MB: What kind of a man was he?

JP: Oh Sam. I know, this old well, over here. Before we had the city water? Well, when we drilled that well, it was all solid rock anyway! My wife and I done that! I got my wife sittin' in the well. After we got through the hardpan, on solid rock. With a hammer and steel. A powder box to sit on, and she was sittin' there, and me with a sledge hammer. Every time I'd hit, she'd try. (demonstrates twist) --We got that down there 28 feet. Okay. Then gradually it just about filled up with junk. And when we finished up we had enough water to supply Chase River with. And then when we had that there earthquake, in 46, the tide went out,/crack, no more water! Then, Sam Guthrie, he had a chicken farm out Cedar, well, he lost his water too. Well, I had to I had to go and - two three times a week used to go that there -- that fountain there at Ladysmith! To go and get water! Three 'n four times a week! For drinking. And For washing I used to go down to the creek. Mix the water./ Old Sam, we all used to have a conversation there, the village pump, we used to call it! (Ha, ha ha!) Oh we used to laugh! Sam used to tell us all kinds of jokes, yes!

I saw his wife there in the hospital before she passed away. MB: She had some good memories too. She remembered about the strike in 1912.

JP: Yes, I've heard all about that there -- I was only young, then. --Some tough days, them days!
MB: Is there anything special you would have remembered? You'd be about nine years old. Seven, maybe.

JP: Yes. Used to hear all kinds of things. And then you hear -- well, if I get around to some of the old timers, right now, and there was any of them guys left yet, well, you know -- I don't think it's ever forgotten! You know what I mean? Because somebody says -- Oh yeh, that son of a gun, he's on a old scab! You know. --His father was an old scab! You know, maybe the person didn't even remember that, -- somebody always comes up with it. Yah. --And old Geordie Steven, well, he's passed away long time, he was in his 80's, he's an old man, he used to come here. And old Colin Mackenzie. Used to come here. Talkin' about -- tellin' me -- well, he's an older man, an -- but I've heard a lot of it too, you know. And so-so. But --

MB: I know, we don't mention any of those names on here. But --

JP: No, I don't want to mention any names --

MB: Of any scabs? No you never mentioned any scabs. No. But that's it. This is about Nanaimo - we all know that. It's just under the surface, you know. --And you can't ignore it, because it's history. But no names are mentioned.

JP: Well, it tells you that right here, in this book! I'll lend you that book, and you read it.

MB: Okay. Thank you. --But then there's another thing too, about it. It certainly drew people together. All those troubles. Didn't it?

JP: Shows picture. This is what the mules looked like. This is Wellington mine. See the little car. Well this is Cumberland. I have pictures of old Number One. --I got an old safety lamp right here, that's one of the first ones I ever got.

MB: (admiring)

JP: That's the first one -- a match 'd give a better light than this.
JP: Man's best friend! I took the magnet out of it so I could unscrew it.

MB: I see -- here's where the flame came up.

JP: Yup. Inside there. They had three gauzes in there. (sound of unscrewing the sections of the lamp). --In the mine, they got a magnet in here. They got a magnet in there, and it locks in. You cannot unscrew it. You gotta have a magnet. To unlock it. To unscrew it. Because you got all the different gauzes. You got asbestos, this one here's for air, too. This is a fine screen, you can see through it, for the air to go, and it stops the gas from (blowing?) -- and this is the gauze. This is asbestos. This lamp, it don't matter how explosive the gas is, black damp, or carbon monoxide, or anything, it's a hard thing to believe that --

MB: When you went down to the mine, you had to test for gas, did you have any protection yourself? The fire boss?

JP: After the mines finished up -- at first everybody had these. Everybody. (Lynch) kids had to pack two, in case -- a spare one. In case somebody's light wouldn't work. See they had a flint. You know, to light it. A flint. That there -- say this room was full of gas. You know. Room full of gas. Okay. (replaces magnet in bottom compartment of lamp). Clock is ticking in background.)

MB: Where did the miners carry that thing? On their belt?

JP: On their belt, in their hand -- my father carried (puts lamp in his mouth) like that all the time -- in his teeth! 8 pounds!

MB: Eight pounds!

JP: Oh sure! You feel the weight of it!

MB: Imagine holding that in your mouth!

KP: You're runnin' around in the mind in the dark all the time. When you're in the mine and you couldn't see nothin', well you knew right or left, that you got your foot on a railin' -- you followed the rail. To where you want to go. If your light was out, and you couldn't get it lit. You know, you followed the rail. And then you come to a switch, and you feel that, pointed this way, and you just about knew where the heck you
were goin'. In the dark. That's how a mule knew how to go, too! (laugh)
MB: Story re man who hung on to mule's tail and was pulled out of cave-in.
JP: (Disappears into another room and comes out) --This is my old belt!
My cap!
MB: (exclaims over loop attached to belt)
JP: Yeh, that was for after we got the battery lights. Electric lights.
Electric lights were no good. Electric would burn anywhere! It'd burn gas,
or you name it. As soon as you walked into gas or anything, you're out, like
that! Your down, till you got in the air. And when you get that there, you
get your nose close to the floor! You know, to the ground. Like that light
there -- well it's the first light -- say when you went in the mine, when
you went out the door, soon as you got down the mine -- first thing you were
searched -- any matches. And they checked your lamp, if it was locked. It
was locked. You know, in case the lamp man made a mistake, or missed it.
For safety's sake. You were searched, you could take chewin' tobacco or
snuff, but no smokin tobacco. Or matches. You left them outside. I used
to take chew tobacco, but I used to take smokin tobacco, or matches, in
case I forgot. Because they used to bawl you out. If you did that. And
that there. And then, when they'd come down the mine, the boss, the first
thing they come there and look at your lamp, see it was locked, and it's
burning, and then he'd go (blows all around the lamp) -- and if he could blow
that lamp out, it's no good, take it out! And when you got to a place where
you're working at, there, when you got your light, and you put it close up
there (demonstrating up high) and you see that flame's gettin' lower and
down lower and lower, you get to hell outa there! because you're too.
But a lectric light 'll burn, don't matter where it's at.
MB: So it's no good then?
JP: For sure, it'll give you good light. But it wasn't safe.
mb: What about the ones you had on your cap?
JP: Yes, electric. That's the idea of the belt. You carried the battery
MB: Asks re fish oil lamps.

JP: Yes, they had them. Well the Wolf lamp was patented in Germany. They're all Wolf lamps. I haven't seen no other ones.

MB: When they go to a funeral, the miners, did they have the black ribbons on like you showed me?

JP: The ones that were union members, yes. All the union members.

MB: And when you came, were there cars here, or did they walk, or did they go with horse and buggy to the funerals?

JP: Horse and buggy. I remember here when Protection shaft, the rope broke and 16 men -- you heard about that. I went to that funeral. Because they were takin' them there in a horse and wagon. Because there were so many of them. I was at the cemetery today. That's where I've been. And I was walkin' around and see some of them old names.

MB: Is this the old cemetery?

JP: No, Bowen Road. --And another thing I remember -- this clock here = (demonstrating clock on wall) is older than me. It's older than me! That clock there! My mother had that clock before she was married. And they gotta keep it. Well, a lot of people want that there. Well, my son's goin' to have it. And it's still goin' yet too!

MB: You can hear it on the tape. Where did your father come from?

JP: My father come from Austria. My mother come from there too. They met in the old country.

(end of taped interview with John Pecnik)
I think it was Ruth Meek who told me that one of her family who was very young (and ill) was charged with setting fire to one of the company houses. He was out on $10,000 bail — or did he spend time in jail. Anyway, it came out later that it was one of the company people who had set the fire.