... Doing John Peffers for the Coal Tyee History Project.

BM: Mr. Peffers, what year were you born?
JP: 1914.

BM: And... were you born in Nanaimo?
JP: Born in Hamilton, Scotland.

BM: And where abouts is Hamilton, Scotland?
JP: Not too far from Glasgow, I guess, I don't know exactly, how far.

BM: And was that a coal mining community?
JP: No. They... a small coal mining community about a mile outside of Hamilton, a place they called Quarter.

BM: And... did your father work in the coal mines there?

You know, father and his grandfather.

BM: And how did your father come about to Canada? Did he see advertising, was he approached, or what?
JP: Well, I think, my mother had relatives. Her people had come out first, and they'd trying send work back, I guess, and trace the other people out.

BM: Humhum. So, they came out by word of mouth from your wife's relatives? Oh, not your wife's, your mother's relatives?
JP: Right.

BM: And, where they living in the Nanaimo area? The relatives?
JP: Ya, they were living in a house up on, what is known now as Townsite Road, here in Nanaimo, but it was called at that time
North Wellington Road.

BM: And, when you first came to Nanaimo, where did you settle?

JP: One year, we stayed with my grandmother and then my dad bought a house on Fifth Street in the Harewood area.

BM: Humhum. And was Harewood called Harewood then?

JP: No, it was known as Five Acres.

BM: Humhum. And... about what time would that be? About 1917, or '18 or what?

JP: No, it was 1920 when we arrived in Canada. I was six years old then.

BM: And... did you immediately go into a local school?

JP: Humhum.

BM: What school did you go to?

JP: Well, originally, I went to Brechin, the old Brechin school for one year and then moved to the old Harewood school, the old Harewood elementary school.

BM: Is that still here?


BM: Is that the same one that is till here now?

JP: Ya. It was built in 1914.

BM: And... did your father go directly into mines here?


BM: And, which mine did he go to work in?

JP Wakesiah.

BM: That's up by the highschool sittin' now, right?

JP Where the highschool is sittin now, ya.

BM: And what was your father's job?

JP: Well, he was a coal miner. He had a fire boss' ticket in the old country, but he never did renew his ticket. in Canada. You have to sit through another exam, you see. But he never did do that.

BM: And so, he was just a digger then.


BM: Did he ever... was he ever a digger that was on a contract?
JP: Yes.

BM: So, a contract digger would make more money than when he was on salary?


BM: So, your father was able to bring a little more money home than the average person then?

JP: Well, at that time, I guess. It was... I'm trying think the... what the wage was at that time. I know when I started in the mine, a digger got $5.30 a day.

BM: When you moved into your house in Harewood, what kind of living conditions were you living under?

JP: Well, it was just a frame house and the family- five of us - two girls and three boys. Of course, all my other brothers were born out here in Canada, they weren't ... I was the only boy that ... one sister is older than my - she is dead now - were the only ones that came from the old country.

BM: Did you have electricity?

JP: Humhum.

BM: And did you have hot and cold running water?

JP: Ya. after a while, ya. It seems to me, for a while, when we first moved into that house, we didn't have any hot water at the time. But after a few years...

BM: Humhum.

JP: ... Really, I had to go to work to help to support the rest of the family. So, you know, living conditions weren't that good, you know.

BM: So, what were you working as to support the family? Was that coal mining?

JP: Ya. Well, My first job --- I quit school in 1929, when I was 15, and I worked this job in the service station up here, Calgary Service Station.

BM: Oh, ya.

JP: ... On the corner across from Wei's Café, just started a business there at the time, and he was working in the mine, and I was gonna look after the service station til he came home from work, you see.
I think, I'd only been there for two weeks when he got smashed up pretty bad in the mines. So, that meant, that I was there full... from eight o'clock in the morning to nine at night. The service station was open, you know.

BM: Humhm.

JP: Well, after he got sorta he could get around a little better, I got a job out in the woods out here.

BM: Oh, yes.

JP: That was McMillan first when he started the new South Wellington Road, that was, I think you called it the Vancouver Race Sport Company (?)

BM: Oh, ya. And what caused you to work in the mine afterwards?

JP: Well, after, this I worked there, burned down and set the woods on fire, we caught fire for a couple of weeks and there was no other place, you either go in the woods or you go in the mines, you know.

BM: Humhm.

JP: And at that time, there was quite a few young fellows that used to work in the woods in the summer time and then goin' in the mine in the winter time, even, you know, you get the bad weather condition.

BM: So, after you fought the fire, you went to the woods then.

JP: Humhm.

BM: I mean, not the woods, the mine.

JP: Yes.

BM: Which mine did you approach to go to?

JP: Number 1 mine.

BM: Number 1.

JP: Yes. See, Wakesiah had shut down by that time, and it was in the late twenties, that Wakesiah mine shut down that time, I think. And my dad went to Number 1 mine. That's down at the Waterfront.

BM: Humhm. And how did you go about approaching the proper people to get a job?

JP: Well, they used to-- it was in the hungry thirties-- there was the regular line up there. When one miner quit, you had quite a bunch asking for the job. So, you just went into the line and asked for a job. And then when I started they called it the winch kid, you run
a little machine to haul the coal, you know...

BM: Yes.

JP: ... two dollars and seventy-eight cents a day. And then, you know, when you got in this line asked for a job and they need a winch kid, well, then you got the job.

BM: Huhhum.

JP: And you... that was mostly were all the young follows started, you know. you get a little experience in the mine and then move to, what they called the driver. You could drive a mule or ridin' rope and that was four dollars and thirty cents a day, you got for that.

BM: Huhhum. So... was there a demand for winch kids due to because they left or they moved up?

JP: They moved up, ya. And then that would leave an opening for another.

BM: Huhhum. So, was the mine expanding or was there just a large turnover of employees?

JP: No, there was just a large turnover, I guess. That was a real good mine, you know, and I guess, may be too, when they got further away from the shaft bottom, they had... further... the whole coal and then actually needed more haulage.

BM: Huhhum. So, you finally got a job as a winch kid then.

JP: Huhhum.

BM: And... could you explain exactly what you did at a winch kid?

JP: Well, it was an air controlled winch, mostly in the mines they had compressed air, you see, and they, that's what they call Dobson winch, they used to make them at the Foundary, here in Nanaimo, old Dobson's Foundary. And they you dropped the empty cars down on this slope, wire rope, and the diggers would load the car and then the, what they called the rope rider, would give you a signal. He would pull, jerk line, pull 'em down, you see. And if you wanted to go, it stopped, you see, because most of those winches, you didn't bother stopping (?) then they shake their light, you know and on top they stopped.

BM: Huhhum. And how long did you do this particular job?

JP: Well, it seems to me, I wasn't too long. I asked for a change and
I know, I remember the first pay I got, after I got driving mule - it wasn't mules - pony - and they paid me three dollars and fifty cents first pay I got, of course. At that time, I guess, I got by a guy that, we used to work, like morning and afternoon shift, you see, and the guy that was on the afternoon shift was gettin' 4.30 a day, so I complained to the pit boss, what we called the pit boss, at that time it was George Sander(?)

BM: Oh, yes.

JP: So, he fixed it up for me and only at the next pay I got my 4.30 a day, the same as the other guy got.

BM: Why were you getting less?

JP: Well, they explained, they were trying to get a category in there what they called boy driver, you see. More or less you were appointed (?) driver, that's what they were taking about, you know. But it never helped us because you were expected the same work then the guy who were given more money.

BM: And... sort of getting back to the first time you went into the mines. What was your opinion when you first went down into that dark hole? Sort to speak. What was your first impression?

JP: Ah, it seems to me, I think it was scary. all right. (chuckle) It don't take long to get used to it.

BM: What kind of noises did you hear?


BM: What about the cracking timber and things?

JP: Well, that was lateron, after you get down in the coal face, like I was diggin' coal on contract lateron too, when the timber is cracked, mostly is when there are drawin' the coal out, not when you are moving ahead. And you get to know about when to leave, you know.

BM: Humhum.. What kind of things do you remember, sort of like, about the coal mines that sticks in your mind? That either bothered you or ... that you remember.

JP: Well, one thing that bothered me a lot of times ... I ... I could have lost a arm down there. We used to have electric bells too on these at one time, you know, and they had two wires spread apart and we used to have a three quarter with a handle on it
and we shortened those wires, ring the bells, and we used to carry these in our hat, you know. I had a couple of cars on this rope, I was ridin' rope and another guy was ridin' the winch, you see, and I jammed on a post that was stickin' out and a four inch of a car stuck on that post and one of the truck layer's tool was layin' there and his pipes, they were full of spikes(?) and I grab a barren and pry it off but I bell them slow bell, they used a bell three and then one for when to go slow. And a good thing I did when the car did start to go by the post, the barren flipped around with the on the barren, you see, it grabbed my arm, you know.

I just grabbed my and I the wire and by this time my arm is up to here, you know, and just lucky the bell rang and stopped. By this time, my arm is up to here, you know. I could have lost an arm. A couple of guys that were workin' there, they come and lifted the car up the trucks so I could get my arm off. By that time, my thumb was broken, pushed away to here. Lots of times at night I'd wake up and think about that. You know what I mean. That some of the thoughts(?) (close ones (?) that you got to...

Of course I got since then.

BM: So, what was your opinion of safety conditions in the mines. Were they something to be desired?

JP: Well, in those days they were, ya.

BM: And what sort of things would you thing need to be improved?

JP: Well, I don't know. You... of course, during the hungry thirties, they... everybody was competin' for a job, you know, what I mean, there was lots of times, there was five-hundred men down there lookin' for a job. So, you had to be, you know, top-man before they hired you to start with. So that meant, like you are doing a lot of things that you shouldn't be doing too, I guess, you know.

BM: Humhum. You were taking risks.

JP: Taking risks you normally wouldn't do, ya.
BM: So, this job market reduced safety conditions.

JP: Right. There was no union running at that time either, you know. If you didn't do it well, then they would get somebody who would, you know.

BM: So, did they have things like first aid attendants to attend to the injured when they did get injured?

JP: Ya, they... the fire boss generally was a first aid man, you know. He would do what he could to fix a person up when they got him out, you know. But mostly you didn't get much attention til they got out of mine.

BM: Did they also have an ambulance always on the premises of the company?

JP: I don't remember, but they might have had. That day when they took me they just took me up in the time keeper's to the old hospital.

BM: Oh, yes.

JP: The time keeper was right there and time when I came out of the mine and he hauled me up. I just jumped in one of the coal cars and got a ride out of the mine and he hauled me up to the hospital.

BM: Humhum.

BM: And also on the mine, did they have... like a fire boss, and he used to go around with a lamp to test to see if there was gas. Was there always a lot of gas in the gas in Number 1 you worked in?

JP: Number 1 wasn't too bad, but also they did have an explosion when I was there.

BM: Could you describe what happened, if you remember?

JP: I couldn't... we were sitting in the car, waitin' on a different section, you know, and it went right by us, knocked people down what we called the you used to have to walk down this what they called the main slope... they hauled the coal out, I think they hauled about 24 of those cars out at one screen, the empty cars were going down but they had to have a big winch there, big electric winch
but right along side, there was a narrow place for the men to walk...

BM: Yes.

JP: and they, of course who had gotten by that and were sittin'
what we called the motor, and Number three level they called that, electric motor that hauled the cars in this level part and this blew right by and knocked the fellows down in that men way, what we called the men way, it just happened between shifts. The nightshift was just goin' off and the dayshift was going on. If there had been anybody in

they probably

BM: So, it happened in-between shifts, so no one really got...

JP: No one really got hurt.

BM: So, that was fairly lucky, then.

JP: Right, ya.

BM: Do you know what the cause of the explosion was? Spark or...

JP: That area that the seam... coal was seventy feet high in that area.

BM: Seventy feet high?

JP: And that's way out over out in Saltshop there toward the Gabriola bluffs there. Somewhat around there. Ya, they figured, the coal seam was seventy feet high, you know. But they couldn't work it, because it used to take fire every time they had to shield it off to keep the air off or as soon as the oxygen... it would take fire, you see. So, that was the place they had that explosion. Every now and again they would open it up and go in and work it for a while but they could never stay there very long.

BM: Why would it take fire?

JP: I don't know.

BM: Pressure?

JP: Pressure or something to do with that. Well, some places you could tell, I even... nails... they used to use to put the timber up, you know, the nails would feel hot
BM: So, at a certain depth it would be really warm?

JP: Hmhm. Oh, ya. The diggers, I was working on the haulage, and the diggers. Lots of them just were a pair of football shorts, you know, soccer shorts, and that was all they would wear. And they couldn't stay in there long enough to load a car, they had to come out again.

BM: And... how long did you work on haulage?

JP: Oh... I worked on haulage til Number 1 mine shut down. 1938, I guess.

BM: Hmhm.

JP: And they, when they shut Number 1 mine down, I started at the mine in Northfield.

BM: Hmhm.

JP: Some others went to Northfield mine but I stayed in Number 1 mine and worked for the mechanics and the pipe fitter because they were taking all the winches and the pipes and everything. I stayed there with them, oh, I think it must have been eight months to get all that material out and after that I went to Cumberland.

BM: Oh, yes. And what made you go to Cumberland?

JP: Well, I couldn't get a job here at that time, and I was on what they called relief, at that time. And I only had this room finished in the house, I had the house started, like, you know.

BM: Hmhm.

JP: And on relief, all a guy got was twenty-one dollars and seventy-five cents a month. For a man and wife, you know. But every month we used to get three days loadin' coal down the... oh, where would it be, down...

BM: Assembly wharf or...

JP: Ya. Somewhere down there, but more towards where Harbour Park is now, like you know...

BM: Oh, yes.

JP: Like behind where the old soccer field used to be, the old sports ground. They called it the Green there, they used to dump coal there. And store it there, you know. And then when they got ordered, they'd have the guy to go and load it up. And he'd load it in to five ton cars.

BM: Yes. Were those railway cars?

JP: Railway cars, ya. And the old coal wharf was right there. At that
time, they used to haul 'em up and dump 'em on the ships, you see. The ideal was to wait until, you know, now ships in the getting ready, you see. And that was four dollars and twenty-one cents a day, I think, we got. But only ... three days a month, they had to give everybody.

EM: Oh, ya.

JP: But there wasn't too many guys at the finish that wanted because it was real hard work.

BM: These ships, did they come from all over the world to get the coal?

JP: Right, ya.

BM: And, did they take the coal to Vancouver, Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angelos?

JP: all Western Fuel Company. I think their head office was based in San Francisco. And the old Number 1 mine was the Western Fuel. Canadian Collieries that. bought it after that. And the, I think, Weldwood bought the CanadianCollieries out. I think, Weldwood owned a lot of coal right here now.

BM: Humhum. So, you went to Cumberland because of lack of a job? Did you move up yourself or did your family go with you?

JP: I finally moved my family up there, but the first time I went for three month. And I come back again and I couldn't get a job and the next time I went up I stayed there for three years. I moved the family up then.

BM: And what job did you manage to get in Cumberland?

JP: Well, in Cumberland, up in that time, they had, they had... I was playing soccer for the soccer team and that was one of the conditions that I got the job in Cumberland was I had to play for their team, you see, So I.. a fellow that was on the Excecutivs, he wasn't a miner, he was one of the Excecutivs of the soccer club. He was the former
of the coal cuttin' machine. Pretty hard to describe these things. They cut like a big chain saw and they goin' by compressed air.

JP: And they had a big chain goin' around with hucks on it, you know.

JP: Right. Cut by about six inches thick, it would take out, what they called

JP: Ya, we l l...

JP: Ya, I guess, I've seen that example of the machine in the museum. It gulges the coal out of the wall. It looks like a funny chain saw.

JP: Well, that's what they called a panel, a wall was a bit different. But they call the same principal, like the idea was cut that coal and then drill holes in it and shut and have an opening. It made a six inch opening between the bottom and the top, sort of undistinct from 350 to 367

BM: The process would, you know, be continious. What was your opinion of that particular job?

JP: Well, I was trying to get a job on the haulage, the first time I went there and I found that used to be, lived down here at Robins Park, he was a miner at the time, and I used to walk every day for a job on the haylage, and he kept telling me, you know, "Just wait for a little while." And after three months I figured I had waited enough so

The next time I went to Number 8 mine and they just opened that mine up, they used to call that the million dollar mystery, you know. They... 1911, they build a great big hoist and a shaft and it was supposed to be modern at that time. Then electricity and then they never worked it after.

BM: Could the initial shaft

JP: Ya. But it didn't open up to 1939, I guess.

BM: And you went to work in that?

JP: Ya. There I was, like, one of the diggers, what they calles one of those pan walls, and the diggers that loaded the coal on the pan, you se. You didn't have to, after the coal was cut, they had... one guy with a driller, he'd go and drill it and the fire boss would
shut her. But before we did that, they moved these pine holes (?) they had to keep movin' the motor sixty hours (sixteen) 408

BM: What was your rate of pay?
JP: I don't remember what it was. I think it was six somthing
BM: A day?
JP: I think so
BM: This mine, Cumberland, No. 8, that' right? what was the name of the other mine that you worked previous for three months?
JP: Number 5.
BM: Number 5. What was the reason for opening Number 8? Was it because the war had just broken out or...
JP: It was openend before the war., and I think, Number 5 mine was right close to Cumberland. But Number 8 mine was quite a ways away. You used to have a train to get out there. And, at Number 4 mine, they had an explosion, that was close to Cumberland too. And I think, they sealed that Number 4 mine off and that's when they started up this Number 8 mine, you see. It was out at Bevan (?) they called it, 5 miles from Cumberland.
BM: So, you and your family lived up there for three years then?
BM: When you were back in Nanaimo, what sort of living conditions did you and your family have to live under? I mean, you couldn't get enough work to finish the house of, you know, the other rooms all. Was that because of lack of money and hard times?
JP: Right.
BM: So, how was the community effected by the depression?
JP: Well, one thing about it. All these lots up in here at that time, they were ... they sell .. some of those for fifteen dollars, to buy a lot, you know. And right across from Hillchrest Avenue
right across from Harewood Road from Fourth Street, there was a fellow by the name of he was in the Real Estate business, and he put a two inch water line right through there ... from the water line used to go from down Harewood Road, you see. And I think he raised that price up after he put that water line in to 35 dollars and still nobody could buy a lot.
BM: We were talking about this man puttin' this water lane in and people still couldn't afford to buy it. So, what he was doing, he was buying it for fifteen dollars, and had been trying to resell it for a higher price?

JP: Well, I guess, he'd bought it for cheaper. You see these blocks here? This property line we are livin' on here was one with a five acre lot. And my father-in-law owned this property, and five acre from that corner on Howard Avenue up to that fence line there, you see, it's five acres.

BM: Humhum.

JP: From there back this other way to, well half way between here and Third Street.

BM: So, this house you're living in now was the house that you lived in before you went to Cumberland?

BM: So, you didn't sell the property, then, you kept it?

JP: Oh, I kept the property, I had it rented out. In fact, I had some relatives stayin' in the house, and I didn't charge them anything for that even, as long as I had somebody here, and ... for the time I was away. When I first got married, I lived in the little house, you can just see further in that corner, that white house over there.

BM: Oh.

JP: On Lambert Street there. We only used to pay five dollars a month for rent.

BM: And then you moved down to this?

JP: Then I started to build this place.

BM: When you're in Cumberland, who owned the home, the company?

JP: Out in Bevin, were company houses there.
BM: Humhum.

JP: There was a lot of company houses in Cumberland too, but I didn't know when I rented one. After I moved in... I moved in from... I think I only stayed out in Bevin about three months, and then when I got a chance of a house in Cumberland, I moved in, you see.

BM: At the time you were up there, were there any strikes up in Cumberland? During the time you were there for your three years?

JP: I don't think so. I can't remember any.

BM: Did any explosions happen?

JP: No, but that Number 8 mine was awful gassy mine, but they put a lot of air in, they would force air in, it was cold in the mine.

BM: Oh, it was cold in there?

JP: Real cold, ya. They had to put so much air in, you see, to trace (chase) the gass.

BM: That's usually unusual. Most mines are, you know... temperature would be maybe, I don't know, maybe about 54 degrees or so, ideal for working or something. So, how did they force the air into it. Did they have huge fans or something.

JP: Yes, that was pressure, what they called an airshaft, a shaft to haul the coal up and down, they don't use that for air, they have another one, that they use for airshaft and they have a big fan there to blow air in.

BM: Humhum.

BM: And that's good enough to force air to the whole mine?

JP: Humhum.

BM: So, there is always a raft going through the mine then?


BM: What about this mine? Was this mine a very creeky type mine. Like, was it always shifting and, what they call
JP: Ya. Lots of times it would all right, but it... it was always low coal, you know, about three feet of coal, it seems to me. Sometimes we were gettin' about 3 foot six, I think.

BM: So, it wasn't a very large seam, just a medium seam, I guess.

JP: That pan wall... you see ... you could hear it workin' back on the old ... you know, were you had left, you could hear it breakin' the timber there lots of times, but then... I got close to the coal face, you see, you wouldn' get that. Lots of times it would give a little bit.

BM: So, when they were mining coal. did they follow the seams exactly or did they keep a uniform height, maybe five to six feet, you know, even if the seam was about three feet wide or high, would they keep a uniform height for the miners throughout or did you sort of around?

JP: Oh, you have to around.

BM: So, you would get on your knees...

JP: Ya. that was that biggest trouble, you had to have special knee pads and they were made with rubber and they sweat your knees pretty bad all the times, and that was one of the bad things about those job.

BM: So, thy didn't try to keep a uniform height, no matter what, even if they had to take rock out ?

JP: Well, they took rock out where they get the, that's all. Just to work for the car. But that was after... That's what they called brushin'. That was after the coal had been takin' out, you know, and then they shoot the rock, to get enough height to get the car in, because those pans that was the coal, the car had to be down lower than where those pans come off the wall, you see, what we called the long wall. The car had to be down lower so the coal

BM: So, you had to crawl through all... in dampness in all sorts of things. Was there a lot of water in the mine?

JP: Not much, wasn't too bad, no. The water, no.

BM: So, that was a very uncomfortable way of workin'?

JP: Oh, ya. Because you and you would when you started on those walls,
say, that was the seam there, you know, not on the coal face, well the pans would be shaking here, well there are up against the coal, they boom right up against the coal, you see, and the coal, they fire the shot, they didn't ... they blast any coal, they wouldn' put that much powder in. So, you would have to start on the other side of the pan, well, first thing you would have to do, shove underneath to get as much, til you got a hole on the other side, so you could get in there, get across there. Sometimes that was pretty panic,, you know. Those pans werebangin' all the time, you know.

BM: So, that didn't leave you really that much room.

JP: No, no.

BM: So, that could get pretty dangerous at times.

JP: Oh! !

BM: So, then in comparison from Number 1 mine in Nanaimo where they had 70 foot seam...

JP: Ya, but then lateron, they had a lower seam too.. in Nanaimo area, in Number 1 too, you know, but mostly... different sections, like, the seam where Number 1 mine was hooked up to Protection mine, Protection mine was all low coal, you see, and the Number 1 mine, part of it, went into that Protection.

BM: Do you remember why Number 1 mine and Protection mine run into each other ? Just because they were actually seams that were overlapping? Or something?

JP: Ya, they had ... the coal used to come from Protection, never did come out Protection shaft, you know. It used to come out from Number 1, The only thing they used the shaft for in Protection was for air and they used to haul the miners across there with a scow, you know.

BM: Ya.

JP: And then they'ld go down the shaft instead of goin' underground from Number 1 over to Protection. They can over there in a scow and then go down the shaft over there, you see.

BM: Humhum.

JP: But the coal all come through, what they call, the motor level
the electric motor to haul the coal from Protection through the Number 1 shaft and then up shaft.

BM: What brought you back to Nanaimo from Cumberland?

JP: Well, I went to Victoria and I worked in the shipyard, first part of the war. Then they had ... like the service deal at the time. And they .... make coal mining a national emergency, so they chased a bunch of us back to the coal mining.

BM: Humhum.

JP: This Wolf Robert you were takin' about, well, Harold and I was the first two to get chased back to the coal mine.

BM: Well, how... what exactly do you mean about chasing. Did they sort of... not maybe physically but they sort of legally force you back?

JP: Ya. Well, they sent me a letter. Told me to report to this selected service and I didn't bother with the first one. But the next letter I got... they told me exactly when to report and a week after that I was on the train coming up to Nanaimo here. When I run into this selected service they... I knew the fellow that was the head man there. I said, "Oho," as soon as I walked through the door. He said,"it's Cumberland for you." I said,"what do you mean, Cumberland?" He said,"well, that's the last place you worked, accordin' to..... I see, you worked in Cumberland last."

I said,"Yes. But no way, I'm goin' back to Cumberland (chuckle)." So... he...

There was an old fellow sittin' there. He used to be an fire boss in Protection mine. He was working in that office, down there in Victoria. Joe Nickel, his name was. So, I told him, I said," You know, I got my house in Nanaimo, and if I go anywhere," I said,"I'm goin' to Nanaimo I won't go back to Cumberland." So, that guy said to Joe Nickel, he said, "What chances do you think, you '1 get that guy to Nanaimo.?" He said,"You worked for ol' Bill Frueh?" He said."Bill Frueh is at Number 10 mine. He said," I think, we can get you in there." So, I says, "all right, if
I got to go, that's the best place I could go." So, that's how I landed back in Nanaimo.

BM: Humhum.

JP: That was in 1943.

BM: And ... so you went to South Wellington?

JP: Humhum.

BM: So, how did you commute out to South Wellington? By what method?

JP: Oh, they used to have a bus, a bus to the mine.

BM: Humhum.

JP: They used to take all three shift, like it would go out there three times and come back every day.

BM: Humhum. Who paid... was there a toll for this bus?

JP: I think it was thirty-five cents, or something you paid a day.

BM: Who paid for it? You or the company?

JP: I paid myself.

BM: You paid it. So, the company never paid for it then?

JP: No.

BM: So, out of your pay cheque, how much would you have to pay out of your own pocket for equipment?

JP: Oh, I don't know. I know when we were gettin' 4.30 a day in Number 1 mine, you can figure it out, we worked ... six days on the day shift, and then five days on afternoon shift, that gives you eleven days for the pay, like.. you know. And at 4:30 a day, that would probably... the 30 cents a day would be more then pay for your compensation and all the off takes you had, you would end up ... you had 44 dollars for a pay. But I mean, there wasn't that much.... It seemed to me we had nothing but off takes, you know.

BM: So, did you have to pay for your own compensation?

JP: Humhum.

BM: And you had to pay for even your own tools? Who paid for the tools?

JP: Well, if you are on contract, like contract diggers and that, they paid for their own tool. But if you are on company work, well, then the company paid for the tool.

BM: So, who supplied the special hat and the lights? The company?

JP: No, you had to buy them. Did you ever see one of those?
BM: Ya, I have seen pictures of them. They have some down in the museum. Sort of like a baseball cap, a square cap and then you'd have the light attached to it, attached to a belt, or something.

JP: Ya, I got one downstairs leather piece on the front where the light fits on, you know. In later year, some of the guys wore hard hats too, you know, Not too many in the mine, I remember.

BM: What do you remember about South Wellington mine? Did you become a digger there?

JP: Humhum.

BM: And what kind of coal seam was that?

JP: Well that was, .... little pipes. I guess, it was mostly around eight feet on the average, I guess. But we did work places twenty feet high.

BM: So, you did have crawl around?

JP: Oh, ya. But they were bigger coals, they had bigger cars than in Number 10 mine than what they had in Number 1 mine. The contractors, they were gettin' a dollar fifty-two a car at one time. I think, they got more then that after that.

BM: Well, how would they know how many cars these contract diggers,...?

JP: Well, they had what you call a tally. They'd put on the car with your number on.

BM: Humhum.

JP: A little copper dish and your number stamped on it and hangin' on a string. Used to hang on the car.

BM: Did you ever become a contract digger?

JP: Humhum.

BM: And how much more would you say they made than the men on salary?

JP: Oh, more than twice.

BM: So, you would have probably made a wage that was more comparable to a minimum wage of today then?

JP: Well, that all depends, you know what kind of ...

BM: Ya.

JP: That face that was twenty feet high... Of course, twenty feet in the mine is a lot of height too, you know.

BM: Oh, yes. That was too high.

JP: In number 10 mine they had about three feet of, kind of a clot
they called it, like clay on top of the coal seam, you know. And it was hard to get down to the... Sometimes it would come down in big chunks and knocked the timber, and we got a twenty feet height come down on the timber, pretty panicy.

BM: Humhum. Because just overhead was the three feet of this clay stuff and that is sort of hard to support, isn't it? Is it wet?

JP: It would be undermine, where the coal come out you can shoot the coal out, but it was that kind of stuff that didn't... it was kinda sooky, kind of stuff, you know. And it stayed in one chunk. It would probably break after it hit you, you know what I mean, it was still one piece when it hit you.

BM: Was it hard or soft?

JP: Ya. It was hard enough, ya. When you would get up there and try to pull it down, it would stick on the roof.. The roof would just be just ceiling and this stuff would stick under the roof and when you would try to get it down you could see an opening over the a lot of times, but it was hard to get down. And all of a sudden, it would come down without any warning.

BM: So, they never even had any one that would take that stuff down specially, you know, because it was dangerous. Did anyone ever get hurt from falling clay?

JP: Ya. Lots of people got hurt, pretty badly. We used to have two to get up twenty feet high and get up on a flank (?) and drill a hole, drill a hole right through it, like come closer to a roof after and shoot it down, you know. And that was the best way to get it down. Lots of the guys wouldn't bother to get up and they would try to drill up from down below and leaving all that hanging there, you know.

BM: So, you would shoot this clay stuff out. And what about the difference .... what was the difference about South Wellington? Did they have any better facilities than the other mines had?

JP: Well, not really, I don't think. They had gas there too, you know. Kind of a fearful think too.
BM: What do you remember about those?
JP: Well, this lamp that the fire boss carries, you know, when there is any gas, it shows the cap on the light, you know. And then, when there is very much gas it will put the light out, it's time to go. Of course, the blow offs, the gas that was in the coal and you were close to them, they would actually blow the coal face. In one place, I think, it blew enough coal out to go right back about twelve sets of timber, that is about, that's gonna be about hundred feet, you know. And then that Granby mine, there was lots of people got killed.

BM: When you were in Number 10, was there any serious accident that had a lot of fatalities?
JP: No, not too many. But just before I got there, there was an explosion there and I think... I know two or three guys that got killed.

BM: When you were working in the mines was there a particular time of the day when... you would say... that there is more of a chance of a cave-in or there was more movement of the coal seam or whatever? At night or something like that?
JP: Not, that I remember it. Although I know that the atmospheric pressure had a lot to do with a lot of in the coal mines
This place that I was tellin' you about with seventy feet of coal in Number 1 mine, I just... it flooded, fill up full of water, you know. And sometimes that water would come up and sometimes it would go back down again, it all depended on the atmospheric pressure.

BM: So, I guess, if it was really, a high pressure system would go through, that would be nice weather, then the water would come up.

BM: And low... it would go down.

: Were you ever working in the mines during the earth quake in 1946?
JP: No.

BM: Do you remember that?
JP: I remember that but I was right here in bed (?)

BM: One miner said that he was in the mine at that particular time it happened and he said it wasn't exactly fun.
JP: That was a Sunday morning, you know. And I, I just felt like somebody was pumpin' the post under the house, up and down, until I realized what it was. I was in bed and I scrumbled out of bed (chuckle)

BM: Yes. That was something.


BM: Humhum. What do you remember about... what there anything like diseases that were common to coal miners? They all seemed to have a cold or anything like that? Or did they all seem to be a healthy bunch?

JP: I don't think. I think the coal miners were the healthiest gang in the whole works (chuckle).

BM: What do you remember about the formation and organization of unions for coal miners?

Do you remember how that started up?

JP: Of course, I think the conditions were so bad, you know, they had to do something, I guess. Because they actually had, you know, some were sent home because they couldn't find their ... some of their tools or something, you know. The pit boss would get kind of mad at you. He was probably mad at something else, you know, and he chased you right home for it, you know. It wasn't really your fault, you know. There was lots of things like that, I guess.

BM: Well, was it still common at the time that you were working in the mines that,, if you belonged to a union and the management found out that you had a union card or belonged to a union or had been hangin' around the union, would they sort of tell you to take a hike, that you are dismissed from this job and... black list you?

JP: Oh ya. That was... what happened, you know. See, when I went to Cumberland the CMWA, the united mine workers in Cumberland, I got there in 1936, Nanaimo here wasn't organized, they had to close shop there you see, the only union before I even started to work there. So, I was in the UNWA in 1936 and when I come back to Nanaimo here they just gettin' started at that time, but, you know, that was kind of hush, hush. He didn't like you say, you wouldn't have a job very long when they knew
that you were one of the organizers.

BM: What was the main purpose of the union besides improving the working conditions. Was the main purpose just to have recognition as an organized body of men?

JP: Ya. I think it was a good think. No doubt about it. Like I said, it had to come, because the, you know, conditions you got in the works, and they were bad enough then, you know. But I mean, at that time, of course, ol' John L. Lewis was the united mine workers' chief in the States, like, you know and... they had some pretty rotten conditions down the Southern States. I think they still do.

BM: Although, what do you remember about ethnic groups working in the mine? Like, I guess, the most dominant would have been the Chinese. What do you remember about those?

JP: There was no Chinese working in the mines here after I started. They worked around the top, the tipple and the timber yard and something like that, you know. Wakesiah mine, there used to be quite a few work on top there. I don't remember them working down the mine there. Cumberland, I think, there was still a few Chinemen workin' around the mine when I went to Cumberland. Not too many, though.

BM: Well, why did they stop the Chinese from working in the mines?

JP: I don't know why that come about. The Chinemen just backed off and let the white men have it, I don't know.

BM: What do you remember about Nanaimo? Were there any social divisions, like, it was obvious that there were economic divisions, you know, some people made more than other, but I mean, in the term, that some people thought they were more aristocratic than others? You know what I mean, sort of society, cream of the crop? Was that in Nanaimo?

JP: Humhum. Ya. the aristocrats were over on the Townsite area where..., most of the coal miners were down around the southend of town, like you know, the mine was down there.

BM: Humhum. Was there a lot of resentment for this?

JP: I can't remember too much, no.
BM: So, most of these people, the society people, were they more like doctors and so forth or?

JP: Ya. they were doctors and even I can't remember too many real estate people around that time. The story, I was tellin' about that guy had these lots up here. I remember a fellow wanted to give me twelve lots over there on the other side of Harewood Road and I wouldn't take them. You only paid two dollars a year taxes for a lot at that time, you know. He didn't want to pay taxes and was goin' to give it to me and I wasn't takin'. I says... I think some of those lots sold for about thousand dollars out there.

BM: Humhum. There a worth a lot today. That's a story common to most people in this area. They had... all had the opportunity, but you know, at that time, it was a big cost.

JP: Right.

BM: You know, what I mean? Five dollars, that was something equivalent to a couple of hundred dollars today.


BM: I think that people never had the opportunity to dish out two extra dollars a year or something.

JP: Oh. ya. That's the first thing you thought about. only two dollars a year. Twenty-four dollars for twelve lots.

BM: Do you remember anything about the Red Light district on Fraser Street?

JP: Humhum.

BM: What do you remember about that place?

JP: Oh, not too much, I guess.

BM: Was there a lot of resentment from, you know, the people of the community wanting to get rid of this place or... did people willing just to live and let live or whatever?

JP: That seemed to be the attitude all right, you know. In those days, I don't know weather... can't remember there being so much resentment. Of course, some of the aristocrats, you called them, were frequent visitors there too, as far as that goes, you know.

BM: So, it was like the melting pot of the classes, met down there.

BM: Well, is there anything that you would like to say before we run out of time, or anything that you remember....

JP: Ya, in Cumberland, at one time, I had a rock comin' down on me in Number 8 mine and these pans they were and this big chunk of rock, I had a post underneath it, and it just swung and then, what we call a we put on top of the post, they were like a two by six, they were split fir(?) and it lie across my back and had me pinned on the floor and a fellow by the name of Johny MacArthur, he is down in California, he has been down there for twenty-two years now, he was smart, and he hold me and a guy by the name of Tony Mazudik (?) was workin' on boundary and they were about thirty feet away and if they heard me when I hollered, I don't know, but they come and lifted this thing up. I wasn't hurt or anything but I could feel cuttin' my off, you know. I had kind of myself on the floor and my feet were covered up with fine stuff and I couldn't move my feet, that big junk that on the floor. So, (that could have been another close one, you know(?)

BM: So, that was quite common, you falling down and...

JP: Number 10 mine, my partner, he used to live just over here, he is my brother in law, and a great big rock come down between us and it was the length of the car, he was on one end of the car and I was on the other. And we were, what they called, we weren't working straight ahead in this coal face, like we were takin' what they call the pullin' and a piece come down, just after this big one come down a little piece come dow, hit him on the head and cut his head, split his head right up down here. He wouldn't know you know, you don't like get a guy panicy. He asked me how it looked when I took his head off, and I said, 'Oh, it's not too bad.' I said, 'we better get you out.' So, I took him out to the fire boss' station and the... on the way out he put his finger in the dutch and (laughter) and he says and he really felt bad. He said, you said it was only a scratch, he said, Jesus

BM: That must have been painful.
BM: Well, I think we just ran out of tape. It was really nice talking to you.