BM: This is Bernard McNicholl interviewinv Johny Sandland for the Coal Tyee History Project.

Mr. Sandland, when were you born?
JS: I was born in 1905 in England.

BM: And what part of England were you born in?
JS: Around Staffordshire.

BM: What that a coal mining district in England?
JS: Yes. My dad and all them worked in the coal mines over there.

BM: Humhum.

JS: And then they come to Canada about 1900... just before the First World War to work in the coal mines here.

BM: Why did they come to Canada to work in the coal mines? Were they offered a job or?
JS: Yes, they were offered a job out here, quite a few come out from where I lived.

BM: How did they go about offering you a job. Was someone approached... the area or whatever?
JS: Yes. Someone come to England there and they were lookin' for coal miners so... my dad and his two brothers, they and a bunch more come out this way to Vancouver England.

BM: And... how old were you when you first came to Nanaimo? Did you come with your family?
JS: Ya. We first moved up to Cumberland. Around 1914. Just before the First World War. Then he moved on here 1915.

BM: So, your father worked in the Cumberland mine for a while?
JS: He worked up there for a while. Yes. And they were workin' pretty slack up there, and the work... and he come down and he got a job in Nanaimo.

BM: And what was the first mine that your father worked in? What number?
JS: A. Number 1 mine.

BM: So, he worked in the big one downtown.
JS: Yes.
BM: Do you remember anything about Number 1 as a child?
JS: Oh, yes. I started there when I was around fourteen years old, and I first started on the pickin' tables and then I went to the pithead, like when I got a bit older I got to Number 1 pithead on the top. And then 1924, I went down to the shaft bottom.
BM: O.K. I understand what a picking table is. So, I'm not gonna ask you what that is...
JS: No.
BM: But you said you went to the top of the pithead. What was up the top at the pithead?
JS: Well, the loads would come up, two loads at the time on the cage and you pull them off and then on the turn table you dumped 'em. There was boys behind the shaft puttin' the empties on. They bumped the loads off and they sent the empties down. You know, two cars come up and two cars go down.
BM: Could you give me an idea what the payscale was for working on the picking tables? That was basically the first job...
JS: Well.... It was only a dollar and a half a day I think. I got there. But then, when I got to the pithead it was about three dollars a day.
BM: And how old were you when you went to the pithead?
JS: I'd be about sixteen then, I guess, seventeen, sixteen, seventeen when I got to the pithead.
BM: And then eventually, you got down to the shaft bottom. How did that happen? Did some one say, we are promoting you or...
JS: No. There was a fellow there, he is movin' to Vancouver, and a friend of mine told me about him. He was like, leavin' the job, so, I applied for it. And I got the job at the shaft bottom.
BM: And you would have been about eighteen, then?
JS: I would be about, no, about nineteen then, when I got...
BM: Nineteen.
JS: Yes.
BM: And what was at the shaft bottom? What was your job at the shaft bottom?
JS: My first job was pullin' empties off. Puttin' them to different sections...
BM: Yes. And what else did you do?
JS: Well, later on, after a few years, I got runnin' the motor, pushin' the loads in and then pullin' the empties up, and then 1935, I .... he got sick and he ... and I got his job.

BM: What is the cagery?

JS: The cager was the...

BM: Oh, cager?

JS: Ya. He was in charge of the shaft bottom. He send the loads up.

And tell the boys on the other side which way to put the empties. There was two different sections. There was a ... Number 1, that was down the slope and then the Protection. The motor pulled the empties away (in the way?) in Protection.

BM: Yes. Did you ever do any digging of the coal itself?

JS: No. No. Once or twice I did that at Bright mine.

BM: Bright Mine?

JS: Yes. I worked there on rope rider there. That closed down in 1953.

BM: So, you worked in the right mine and Number 1. Did you work in any other mine?

JS: Oh, yes. I worked in Northfield and Reserve and Number 10, White Rapids Number 8.

BM: Could you give me an idea what Number 1 was like? The type of coal. What was it?

JS: It was a steam coal. Soft kind of coal.

BM: It was soft. And Reserve, what kind of coal...

JS: Reserve was just about the same.

BM: And you worked for the other one, White Rapids?

JS: White Rapids. That was a kind of a harder coal.

BM: White Rapids, is that out by Gramby?

JS: No, that was the Bright mine, up by Grandby.

BM: And where was White Rapids?

JS: You went up to Lake Road up there. Just up Nanaimo River.

BM: And what was the other one, Number 8?
JS: Number 8 was right across the river on the other side. That was out there by... what is the name of that mill? There was a mill out there at the time, but I forget the name of the mill.

BM: So, White Rapids then and Number 8 where in the same vicinity?

JS: Yes.

BM: So, that would be, I guess, near the South Wellington area?

JS: Well, off from South Wellington.. We used to go passed Extension Road there and then branch off.

BM: So, it was even further up than Extension?

JS: Oh, ya. yes.

BM: So, did you ever work in Extension?

JS: No, no, I didn't, no.

BM: So, but you would have gone through when Extension was a town then?

JS: Oh, I've been up there when I was a boy. Played soccer.

BM: What mine, would you say, was the worse for gas?

JS: Well, the old Granby mine was pretty bad. But... they used to have blow-outs there. I never worked in Granby, that was... they had these blow-outs. And they had a few out Reserve too. Not many though, not many.

BM: Were you ever witness or involved in any sort of miner accidents, maybe even major?

JS: Well, no. There was one time there, at the shaft bottom there, there was a little explosion. Just when the men got down the mine, about, I figure, about a quarter after seven, just when the day shift was goin' on on shift and there was a, an explosion down, what they call One East, way down at the bottom of the slope.

BM: Yes..

JS: And the men were on the way down to the men way and you could feel the change of air all at the shaft bottom. Explosion. It was luckily, there was nobody, nobody got hurt.

BM That was fortunate.

JS: Ya. There shut the mine down that day and ... til they investigated. If the men had gotten on to the workin' places, say another half an hour
before, they might have got ... might have got killed from the explosion.

BM: Ya. That was, so, lucky.

JS: They kind of hit, what they call the part (?) the dead end, that was wet (?) and they figure that is what...

BM: Was water a big problem in the mines?

JS: No, no, it wasn't too bad. No. There is a lot of places... wet places, you know.

BM: Was Reserve a wet mine?

JS: No, no, Reserve was kind of a ... well, I only worked at the shaft bottom at Reserve too. I don't too much about the place out there. But I don't think, there was no water out there.

BM: Which mine would you say had the worse water dripping down all the time?

JS: I'd say, Protection, I think. Protection mine. That's under the ocean out there.

BM: Most of the shafts or tunnels, I guess, levels, did they keep at a uniform height all the time?

JS: Yes.

BM: Is there a few where they followed a seam and that was...

JS: Oh, yes. But at Number 1 level they went in and then sl with all level all the way and the motor pulled the coal out and that was what they call long wall work practically over there big bulks (balls (?) They had the pans on them. About three-hundred feet long.

BM: Could you give me a definition what exactly a pan is?

JS: Well, it's a big steel about ten feet long and they couple 'em up with the boats and then they put the pan engine in the middle of the wall and it shakes the coal down with the shaker.

BM: Oh.

JS: And then the end is a long wall, just like a long wall. Machine cut it and the miner just loads it into this pan and then they had the road way below that and they what they call a chunk and each chunk the cars and take 'em out. You know, with the rope rider take them out.
BM: So, a chunker, as that your...

JS: He jumped the cars at the bottom of the wall.

BM: Oh, jump!

JS: Yes, you know, they fill them up with coal coming down.

BM: Oh, you just sort of put the coal in... and chunk the coal off.

JS: Right.

BM: So, this long wall co

JS: Did they have the machines that sort of looked like they had...

JS: Yes, that's a big coal cuttin' machine. They cut it, you see. And they keep movin' the pans to the place.

BM: I've seen an example in the museum downtown Nanaimo. I guess...

JS: That's right.

BM: And they would only take out a certain amount, like...

JS: Four inches...

BM: Four inches.

JS: That's what they called the jip and it cut in to it and you get little pigs in there, I guess, you have seen them down there,

BM: Ya, a little bit.

JS: And they cut this, the bottom of the boys (?) and then the driller would come out, what they call they drill man, he drilled holes all the way up the wall, and then the fire boss would come and shut the holes and then the coal would be all down for the diggers when they come on shift.

BM: So, it was just basically, weaken the coal wall.

JS: Yes. That's right.

BM: Well, using explosives in the mines, when mines were very gasy, wasn't that dangerous?

JS: Well, the fire boss, he always had the safety lamp, you see, and he always tests for gas before he fired the shot.
BM: So, it was mandatory that they had that safety lamp?
JS: That's right. Yes. That was... they test every place they went in to for gas before they fire a shot.
BM: Was sulphur a problem with the coal, sulphur?
JS: Well, not Number 1, Protection and Reserve, they had sulphur out there quite a bit. I think Granby too. But Reserve was bad for sulphur.
BM: Working down in the mine, well you would have been down the shaft bottom, but it still is deep down inside, like in Number 1, it was...
JS: Number 1 it was six-hundred feet down and then you walked along level a little bit and it did, the slope went down quite a bit...
BM: What was your feeling way down the mine? Did you ever think you were down the bottom of a hole?
JS: No, no. Well, when you were a boy, that was all that was around here 'them days. I don't think there was even a mill around here. That's all we had to look forward to. (laughter)
BM: Ya.
JS: Ya. You followed into your dad's foot steps, I guess.
BM: Ya. That's when you had no choice... of vocation.
JS: That's right, That's right. I went down the mine, like in 1925, I went down, I was gettin' 4.01 a day. That was the wages then. The drivers and that, they got 4.30.
BM: Did they use mules in the mines?
JS: Yes. Mules and horses. Sometimes, in this low places, they had ponies down there. Little ponies. Not many of them though.
BM: What would you say the treatment of mules and horses, was it just or was there a lot of cruelty?
JS: No, no. They had there, what they call their stable boss. They had one on each shift and he'd come and (let) them good, you know. Sometimes, the animals had to work double shift, you know.
BM: I've heard reports that some miners.. and... people would cruel things to this horses?
JS: Oh, well.
BM: And I even heard that some miners lost their jobs, for you know, tying the horses up and whipping them and hit them...
JS: Well, you get some of that, you know, they get mad, and they kind
of... the mule didn't do what he was told, and I guess, they kind of take it out on the mule or horse. Ya, that's happened. But if they ever got caught, they'd loose the job over it. If they catch 'em.

BM: So, actually, very few men would do anything cruel?
JS: No. No.
BM: It was a sort of like an outlet.
JS: Ya, that's right. Just...
BM: You would be mad at somebody else and that...
JS: He might have got up a ruck and something and you know, he would get mad at the mules, and he start, maybe, beaten the mule up and that, you know. But, apart from that, they were pretty well looked after. They kept the barn nice and clean all the time, yes. And they got fed good too, you know, oats and they used to send them the (carrots?) down when they were available. They used to get some of them once in a while.

BM: What would you say, the safety conditions were like in the mines?
JS: They were pretty good, ya. Where I worked, anyhow. I guess, years ago, before my time, I guess, they were, they could have been a little different...

BM: Well, what kind of allowances were there for safety conditions? Can you describe what safety conditions there were?
JS: Well, the miners, like I say, like the miner itself, he did, he kind of had a space to look after and had to test it, the timber, you know, for his own safety. And then the fire boss would come in and he'd check it over, the pit boss and then, you know. If somebody needed the timber over there, they put the timber over there for their own safety, you see. Yes, it was pretty good for safety.

BM: What qualifications were there needed to be a miner because, I guess
you had to know, not a certain amount, but training of a certain amount to be... (talking overlapping)

JS: You had to work there so long and then you got the ticket, what they called the miner's ticket. I think, they cost a dollar them days. You had to work so long with a miner, learn all of it, then you'd take exam, get your ticket, the miner's ticket, and you are a full fletched miner then, I guess.

MB: So, what age would you have to be to get a miner's ticket. Was there a legal age?

JS: No, no. Just nineteen, or twenty or, if you had your qualifications and got your ticket you were qualified.

I never did go in for mine, I was on the haul. Like a miner with his ticket, he could take a young fellow in with him or somebody who didn't have a ticket and learn them the ropes (rules) learn them what to do, and when he figured he was qualified, he could go by himself and could get a place himself, you see.

BM: Which was the highest paying job?

Was it the digger?

JS: Contract digger, yes.

BM: So, contract diggers got the most?

JS: They did, Number 1 Protection, they got paid so much a ton. I think, it was 98 cents a ton them days. And then Number 10, they got a dollar and a half a car. There was a little difference, you see. Cars weighed about, let's see, each is a ton and a half, I guess, Number 10.

BM: So, they usually ended up being the most...

JS: They was the ones that was... and they'd get paid for puttin' the timber up too, so much, what they called a set, and put the timber up...

BM: And the timber, a set of timber would be two and then

JS: Would be two and one across.

They put in notches, you know what I mean?

BM: Were these support timbers, did they have any particular names?

JS: No, they would, the digger would cut them, what they call the string, they put the two posts up and the string on top and they put between the timbers to stop little bits of rock.
BM: These timbers, were they square or...
JS: They were round, they were round. Maybe the main slope, they were different. But all down there were all round.
BM: It was easier and cheaper to put in?
JS: Just to start, when they start the tunnel that was all square timber so far down maybe, you know, all timber. The main roads.
BM: Would you know where the coal went as soon as it went out of the mine? It went up to the pit head and what would happen to that coal immediately?
JS: Well, I'm talkin' about Number 1 now, well, Number 1, it come to the pit head and it went down to the turn table and the screens and the shaker shook it down, and the slack, they had the different screen, you know, four different screens on each shaker. The slack would go down into a shute of its own and then into a car and they had nut coal, and that would go into a different sized, another car, and then the lump coal would go the big car, to the bottom of the pickin' table.
BM: Which was the best coal?
I mean, you know, one that was most marketable? Was it the lump coal or?
JS: Ya, the lump coal, yes. And there was,... it all depends how the market was at the time. Sometimes, the , what we called the soft coal, that was steam coal, that was pretty well (undistinct0
But Protection coal was a hard coal, they used to ship that quite a lot.
BM: Well, the soft coal was for steam.
JS: Steam, ya.
BM: What would the hard coal be for?
JS: Well, that would be more for, I don't know, I guess they could use it for furnishes and that.
BM: Hard coal would be almost pure coal then?
JS: Oh, yes. It wasn't too much slack to it, you see.
BM: Do you know, was names of coal was?
I guess, the hardest would be...
J: I guess, that would be the hard one, ya. Then there was the Douglas seam, that was more of a soft coal.
BM: I forget, what the names were. Something called be or something like that.
JS: Yes, they got a name for this hard coal too.
BM: I can't quite remember what it was.
JS: No.
BM: And... when it's been loaded in the cars, where would it go to?
JS: Well, it... these Chinamen... they break the car down, maybe about, take it down a little grade, have the brake on it and stop it maybe two-hundred yards. And when they got seven or eight or ten cars there, the locomotive would come and pull 'em and take 'em right to the wharf If there was a boat in. Well, they get 'em weighed first. They had a big scale there. They'd weigh them and then they'd take 'em to the wharf and then they would go down east chute (?) to the scows and the boats.
BM: And these scows, where did they go to? Did they go to a bigger boat?
JS: No, no. These scows just come in from Seattle and all around...
BM: So, they are just sort like a, are they like a, a big barge?
JS: Like a big barge, ya.
BM: High-walled barge?
JS: Ya.
BM: Is that like those big saw-dust barges that they have?
JS: Yes. Something like that, but not like that. Ya. Right, with sides up, ya.
BM: And then they would be sort of...
JS:
BM: And...
JS: Sometimes... a lot of big boats comin' up here, for quite a lot of coal too, you know.
BM: Would you know where the coal would go. Like, you know, a lot of ships from around the world would be here, I guess. And what parts would they go to. I guess, Vancouver would be one...
JS: Oh, yes. And then years ago, they used to take quite some coal to an Francisco. Quite a lot used to go to there and it used to go to Seattle and different ports down that way.
BM: So, basically, served the Pacific Northwest, I guess. Do you remember any stories, rumours, that you heared, something funny,
that happened?
JS: Down the mine, you mean?
BM: Yes. You know, do you have any stories that you can think of that were, were hilarious or humorous or...
JS: Well...
BM: Did they ever allow women down the mines?
JS: No, not to work. But there was lot of visitors coming down, women, that did look around. They'd get to the office, and they take these people down and show them around, but there were now women worked at all. No.
BM: Humhum.
JS: They worked in the company's office too, like, secretaries.
BM: Yes. There uses to be a superstition that heard from one miner, that women were not allowed down the mine because it was supposedly bad luck.
JS: Yes. (laughter)
BM: You obviously did not believe in that?
JS: No, no, no.
They used to have them in England, I think women worked in the mine.
(talking overlapping)
BM: That surprised when someone told me that. Because women worked in England.
JS: There was the big explosion... there were no Orientals allowed in the mine, Chinese and that.
BM: Why was that?
JS: I couldn't tell you.
BM: Because I heard it was something, they smoked down there.
JS: Ya, I think, at one time you could, but after the explosion I think, they used to wear these naked lights, like with the fish oil, but you know, and that had something to do with the explosions too. Till they got the safety, they got the head lights and the battery lights
BM: Humhum. They had a large Chinese community in Nanaimo and, well
when Chinese weren't no longer allowed in the mines, where did they go to?
JS: Well, there was... they had... like on top, there was a bunch of Chinemen there, and then they had them loadin' the timber for the mines and workin' on the truck and on the coal wharf. They had them all around the mining. Different jobs.
BM: Humhum.
JS: Yes.
BM: If a miner was to have an accident, not a serious one, but... break a leg or he would cut himself, what facilities were there on hand... for, you know, .... his injuries?
JS: They never had much down the mine. They had these little boxes, like, little wooden... first aid boxes, and the men who had the First Aid Ticket, you know, they'd do the best they could. They'd patch them up. Say, he had a broken leg, they... all they do, they put the splints on him and then they put him on a stretcher and then they would get him out as fast as they could.
Say it was a broken arm...
BM: They had people, that had some kind of think like the Johns' Ambulance, you know...
JS: Well, maybe sometimes they would... maybe they would be on a shift and sometimes there would be nobody in there with a ticket, you know, what I mean? But the men would do the best they could. The fire boss, when he was there, he generally had his ticket, the First Aid Ticket. They was always around.
BM: When they got to the surface, was there not a doctor... or whatever?
JS: Well, when it was a serious accident, the ambulance would be waitin' for him, and then, of course, they might go to the hospital.
BM: So, they technically, at Number 1, anyhow...
JS: No, they never had no doctor.
BM: They didn't have a doctor. Because at Grandby, I know, they had a doctor on camp.
JS: That was a different... that was a company
BM: I guess, they didn't have it because it was it was so close inside Nanaimo.
JS: Ya.
JS: Well, in Granby, they took their patients to Ladysmith, I think.

To Nanaimo, I think.

BM: So, they would have an ambulance that would rush them to the hospital.

JS: Yes, the company ambulance. They're waitin'. They would phone ahead and tell them there was a man injured and if anybody got hurt in Reserve mine, they had, what they call a first aid coach, they would go out and bring this coach, and it would be a big train, like of this...

BM: Like a little hospital...

JS: Like a little first aid deal, you know. And then they transported him to the ambulance when he got to Nanaimo.

Reserve had a pretty good set-up for that. But down the mine there was well, just the same as everywhere else.

BM: Yes. Well. I was thinking, once they got out of the mine...

So, did Nanaimo actually have a good emergence system in the hospital?

JS: Well, yes. Them days, there wasn't too many doctors. Ya, the doctor would always be there. Them days they'd come and see you too, in the house. But... he would come to the house if he was hurt and look at you and... I think, you know, when you got hurt bad you had to go to the hospital.

BM: Yes. And if you were injured for a longer period of time, was your job secure?

JS: yes. Yes. You got your job back. When you went back to work.

BM: And the same thing would occur, when you were sick also.

BM: Oh, yes. If you happened to get sick, you'd just phone the mine there and tell 'em you're sick. Say you had the flu, tell them, you know, and then they would say, "well, you let me know when you are ready to come to work." See, them days there was a few unemployed, maybe, see, if I was out two weeks, they would put the man on temporary in your place, give him a few days' work.

BM: Was this just... enlightened policy of the company or was this the result of the union?

JS: Well, no, if was more of the company, I think. Yes.

The union didn't come in before the the thirties, 34, I think.

BM: So, in certain aspect, the company was enlightened enough to
preserve the workers' rights, you know, to a certain extent.

JS: In the thirties, that was the depression too, you know. There was a lot of people 'out of work. A lot of men waitin' for the boss to come up, I can see them now lined up goin' to the office. You walked through rows of them and he just shook his head. He was saying there was no work. No jobs.

BN: So, even if you were injured in the depression, they would just say, because you were trained...

JS: Right.

BN: ... they would just put someone temporary and then when you came back to work they were glad to get their trained person on back.

JS: Ya.

BN: Well, that is really good, then.

JS: They would just put somebody on for a while. And then in the meantime, if any opening come up they'd keep that man on, you see. Instead of laying him off.

BN: Do you remember any kind of common illness or desease or virus that was common to the miners, like... I'm thinking something in the way of coal or something that was always common. Like, did miners have always the sniffle or something like that?

JS: No, I don't think so.

BN: Humhum.

JS: The only thing what I could see was this sulphur that they used to get in their eyes. That was bad. They couldn't see for days., you know. They had to lay off with that.

BN: I'M also thinking of some kind of illness that would be the result of the employment itself, like they got today, where they have things coming up in asbestos miners, where they get... they lungs are really...

JS: Well, this Protection mine, like I say, that was quite a bit of water there, in different places, and they used to wear these rubber boots. Naturally, the miners catch eh, in the shower both, they would come home and ... in your wet clothes and then get into the bath, it's easy to catcha cold, you know. They were a pretty hardy
bunch, the old coal miners. (chuckle)

BM: Yes.

And... what was there available for... what mine would you say had the most for miners?

JS: Well, they 'r all pretty well the same. Like, down the mine, they were all pretty well the same. But... you know,, in some there was more to gettin' their tickets, and you know, and everybody was pretty well... like if you cut your finger, all you did then, you bumped it or something, you just... rubbed it off and then you know..

BM: What kind of living conditions did you have at home, you know, well, mining was the occupation, livingconditions... I mean, what did you have in the home. Did you have hot and cold running water?

JS: Oh, yes. We had hot and cold and... I can remember the day when I started and we had no bath and that... I'd always get into a galvanized tarp

BM: And did you have electricity?

JS: Yes.

BM And sewer?

JS: Sewer, yes.

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BM: And you said something about what was it when you first came to Nanaimo?

JS: Well, there was the dry (?) but that wasn’t long before we got the sewer. Quite a few put the septic tank in later too. We were hooked right up the sewer, we were lived on Haliburton Street.

BM: Yes. Hum.... was there anything that you were lacking in maybe... not necessaties but, you know... was there something, your mother always said there was never enough up in the store, or your wife, whatever?

JS: Oh, well, in the stores, when we weren't working very much (they weren't working) you had to go without some little things, you know, what I mean, luxuries and that.

BM: So, Nanaimo never really suffered from a shortage of certain staples then.

JS: No, no. Well, when the war was on, like. or the depression, you know, that's all.

BM: And... was there a free enterprise system in Nanaimo, like I mean some town, you would have, like company stores and that was very bad. They never had it?

JS: Not Nanaimo, no. In Cumberland they did, they had their company store.

BM: Do you remember what happened to people in Cumberland because of the company stores. Were a lot of people forced to live in Cumberland because they were in debt.

JS: Well, when we lived there, I don’t know how much my mom and dad owed to the company, but I know it took them a year or so to pay it off. Like, when dad was working, they used to send, like the money off every month, the debt, to pay the debt off, what they owed for the rent of the house and the food we got from the company store.

BM: So, the company in Cumberland would just probably not pay you quite
quite enough to pay for you food and the rent for your house?

JS: Well, if they worked steady, yes. They would be all right. But what I'm talking about, like the mines weren't working ... I think...

I remember my dad, he worked only sometimes three days a month, four days a month to keep the family. My dad and two boys, like me and my brother and... next you have to go into debt to eat.

BM: What company was Cumberland then?

JS: That was Canadian Collieries.

BM: Well, they had the Canadian Collieries down here.

JS: Ya. They brought the Western Fuel Company out here in the thirties.

BM: Was the work really had in the thirties?

JS: Well, there was a lot of unemployes yes. There was ... everything was kind of black, you see. In the mines, we were maybe working two days a week. If we were workin' three, we thought we were goin' good, you know. But then it picked up again, lateron.

BM: Was there sanitation facilities installed in the mine, like, I mean it's obviously natural that sometimes you have to go, I mean, down the mine, was there any kind of like ...you know.

JS: No, there wasn't anything like that. You just picked a spot that had been worked out and go and that was it.

BM: So, they never really made allowances, like...

JS: No, no.

BM: They never brought down chemical toilets or...

JS: No, no. Nothing like that.

BM: So, I guess, that was a bad thing.

JS: Ya. We used to... what they call a gabler (?), a place that had been worked out, and goin' there, and then that was it.

BM: Ya. it wasn't too pleasant.

JS: No.

BM: Well, that is sort of...

JS: You get your headlight, that's all.

BM: What about... did they ever have wash-houses, like places where you can wash up and a change house, sort of speak.

JS: Well, Number 10 mine did. That was the first one.
JS: And then White Rapids. Were had them in White Rapids too.

BM: That was in the later days?

JS: Yes. Number 1, Protection and Reserve, they never had 'em. Granby, they had a nice wash house and even Extension, they had wash houses. But Nanaimo, they was ...

BM: Was an older outfit, ya.

JS: Ya.

BM: And.. what about unions? When the unions first start gaining popularity amongst the miners?

JS: Well, they had a big union here before the big strike, that was before my time, but I guess they formed a union here in the thirties, thirty-four, thirty-five. I couldn't tell you. I know it was in the thirties anyways.

BM: Humhum. And when were they finally get recognition? Was that there main purpose, recognition?

JS: Yes. That was there, yes. UMWA.

BM: A lot of miner, like in the 1912 strike, you wouldn't have been here?

JS: No, I was in the old country.

BM: And they talked about that the union was the united mine workers of Canada. It was a Canadian union. And then the union that finally did gain recognition was an affiliation of the American mine workers.

JS: Yes. That's right.

BM: Did a lot of miners like the idea of being affiliated with the American Union?

JS: Well, I don't remember anybody talking about it much. No. We had our head office in Calgary and we had our local office here. But I never ever heard anybody complaining about it at all.

BM: Well, since unions at first weren't recognized, but it is obvious that they had, you know, had to build up their reputation amongst the miners, so, some miners were union members long before it was recognized. What would happen if your company boss somehow found out that you were a union member and had a union card?
What would happen to that worker? Would he be fired?
JS: Well, yes, years ago, they, like they used to have these secret meetin's before we, before we got organized, like before we really got the union in. Like, if the boss ever found out, I guess, that would be the end of it, if he ever found out about it.
BM: Where would these secret meetings take place?
JS: At different peoples' houses.
BM: I heard once, that they used to hold in Park?
JS: Well, they would meet at different places. Say, they meet at this place one time and another place another time. They start away with a few men and then they get up to about two dozen or so and then and different groups had... like the organizer, he'd come, and they had... you know... all over the place. Till they got really organized.
BM: Was black listing an occurrence that happened quite frequently?
JS: No, not that I know of.
BM: So, you know, you weren't here when they... blacklisting...
JS: No.
Because I understand that during the 1912 strike that some miners weren't able to...
JS: Oh, they never did get the jobs back. They had to move out of town. I heard some of the old miners talk about that.
BM: Ya. that was unfortunate.
JS: But the old age pension
BM: You had to go to the interior.
JS: Ya. That's right.
BM: What about the education system here in town. Would you say that they had a fairly good education system for students? Could you go all the way up to highschool
JS: Well, that's as far as far as you can go. Like, when, I know when I used, I was goin' to school when I was about, I think I was just turnin'

fourteen, when I first got my job in the mine. He school... was just coming down with the big flu.

BM: What year was that?
JS: 1919 or something like that.
BM: Ya, I think that was a bad year for the big flu.
JS: That's when I started to work on the pickin' table.

And I wished many a time after that I had stayed in school, but I was anxious to get to work, I guess. My mom and dad, my dad told me at the time. He says,"You will be sorry some day." (Laughter). But anyhow, that's the way it worked.

BM: What about other facilities for shopping. Was there a lot of stores in town.
JS: They used... they weren't too many stores there. But used to deal with a store and they used to deliver it to you... and then you paid it by the end of the month (or bill it to you?)
BM: So, you worked on a credit...
JS:... credit deal, ya.
BM: So, you know, like, you know, I guess I should say, Nanaimo, you know had pretty well the luxuries of the big cities.
JS: Yes, that's right.
BM: And what about entertainment. What sort of entertainment would you have?
JS: Well, we had a couple of picture shows, that's all. And there was the old dances and then there was the old boys... miners, they used to go to the beer parlour, you know. (chuckle) But part from... nothing like it is now. We'd go to the show on the weekend, Saturday, sometimes during the week.
BM: These beer parlours, how many were there?
JS: Oh, gee, I couldn't tell you. There was quite a few, I know.
BM: Would you ever take your wife to the beer parlour?
JS: No, not them days. I never heard of it, you know. Them days the men could go and get a bucket of beer, like the mine bucket and bring it home, and take it home, you know.
BM: So, you used to do that then?
JS: Just like the miners, yes. A lot of them, like.
BM: Well, getting back to your lunch bucket, ah... were you ever allotted time to sit down and eat your lunch? Were you allowed a lunch break?
JS: Well, sometimes... you'd eat it on the fly. Like, you know, ya, we were allowed twenty minutes, paid. The contract diggers, like, if they were waitin' for a car, they could sit down and eat, eat theirs. And the old haulage man, of course, he can't eat but he'd eat too.
BM: So, they left it up to your own discretion.
JS: Yes. On these, the company, like the long wall, in White Rapids and that, they switched the fans off for about twenty minutes and everybody used to eat at the same time. But the contract, they just eat when you have a chance to eat.
BM: So, the company never really went and said, you know, "You work for eight hours and that's it." They assumed that sometimes at that time you'd eat?
JS: Yes.
BM: I never had that cleared exactly. They kept saying eaten on the fly. I just assumed that the company was a little ruthless.
JS: Oh, well, No. You could sit down. All could, I could sit down and eat my bucket, you know, what I mean.
BM: Hunhum.
JS: But...
BM: What kind of things would you have in your lunch bucket?
JS: Well, you'd take a little bit of meat and then there was like cheese or you know, mix it up, like as it is today.
BM: I understand, it used to... put liquid in the bottom of the bucket, like in a double boiler.
JS: Just like a double boiler, that's right. A lot of the boys used to put a peg in, so to hold water. The more water you put in... cause you couldn't get the water down the mine, you see. You had to take your own water.
BM: So, you didn't have, sort of like.. thermoses?
JS: No, they came out later. Thermos.
BM: S-, you could never take anything hot down there?
JS: No. Well, my dad, he... the thermoses came out in the twenties, I think he had... like stomach trouble, he used to take a big thermos. But he used to take the bucket inside, you see, water.
BM: Humhum. Can you think what kind of a influence the church had on the community. Did they have some kind of social influence upon the community?
JS: No. No, you had your own religion. Like, we were Methodist, we used to go to our church, and the Catholics go to theirs.
BM: So the church never really had...
JS: No.
BM:... influence over...
JS: No. They didn't.
BM: So, it's just basically, you went to church and that is it?
JS: That was it, right. If you didn't want to go...
BM: Did you ever have any family things, like, you know, did the family ever do things together?
JS: Oh, yes. Once a year we used to... like... this big miners' picnic at Newcastle Island. That was a big day for the miners. There was all kinds of sports, free ice cream and pop for the kids. That was once a year but... we used to have our own little time too. We had our boat, launch, and we used to go Departure Bay for picnic every week end. Nice Wheather. Make your own, whatever.
BM: And so the family would do a lot of things.
JS: Oh, yes. right.
BM The family would find its companion ship amongst itself, you know, because..
JS: And then you'd meet a lot of people over there too. You know.
BM: So, a lot of socializing amongst people.

JS: Oh, yes. The 24th of May was always a big day here.

BM: This may getting back to when you were home with your father. Did your father ever bring anyone home, like friends or anything like that or friends who would come over... and... Did he ever have friends come over and visit at night time?

JS: Oh, yes. They'd come out and play a game of whisk or something. Ya. Havin' a glass of beer, well, my dad didn't drink much. He'd get a bucket of beer and come back and then they all would have a glass of beer together.

BM: But basically, they would never talk about coal mining union talk or anything else in the house?  It was just basically about your job they didn't talk about it.

JS: Well, I guess, I know when they got in the beer parlour, I think there was a lot of coal talk there too. (chuckle) As far as I can remember, I don't think my dad... well I guess they'd take about it...

BM: But it never was...

JS: No. It was a days work. That was enough.

BM: Well, I can imagen. (chuckle) Was coal mining a hard job?

JS: Well, there was some here, well, you know, ya, you would get a hard job. Some days you'd go down there and work twice as hard and not make nothing, you know what I mean.

BM: Humhum.

JS: Like these contractors. And another day, they... is easy. Some days they'd go in there and a lot of timber to do and the place would be, you know, like working and that, and they couldn't.. but, ya, they used to work some pretty hard, you know, hard days.

BM: What would you say was the, well, you know, not really, that all the jobs were easy, but what was considered the easiest and safest job in the mine?

JS: Well, there was no, what you call, easy jobs, but the winch boys, they just, they moved the winch all day. But they had to be on the toes too, listen to the rope rider's bell, you easily hurt
somebody. They..- that's a responsible job too. But then the easy jobs... I would say there weren't any at all..

BM: What would you say was the most dangerous job, you know, you almost must have been crazy to do?

JS: Well, I just think the diggers myself. Diggin' in the place, they were really, and then there were the rope riders, some of them had though jobs too. And driven' these miles, you know, you didn't know when you were gettin' a kick, you know. Just depends how they felt. But, you know, on the whole, you just took it on the whole and didn't worry about it.

BM: What would be the most common mode of transportation of that day?

I assume, a lot of people would have walked?

JS: Number 1 mine and ... everybody walked there and walked home. And then when you went to Protection, you used to catch a scowl. What they call a scowl. It took... you pulled it over and then you'd get off there and go down and then get on the scowl and get back and Reserve mine, they had... a train 'd take 'em out. They had a couple of coaches. And then the other mine, they had the jitney.

BM: Yea.

S: White Papiels, they had a jipney too., Number 8

BM: What about for personal transportation. What was available for travelling? You know, you might want to see a relative that lived outside Nanaimo? How would you go and see this person or visit this person?

JS: Well, if you had a car, you know, you could... you'r talking about years ago, you mean?

BM: Yes.

JS: Well, you'd catch the train, if there is a train, if you want to go to Ladysmith. If you caught the train here. They had about five or six coaches on the train 'em days. Ladysmith, South Wellington, Victoria, if you wanted to go. And a boat went to Vancouver for the week end if you wanted to go.
BM: So, horse and buggy was pretty well outdated then?
JS: Well, a lot of them had them when I came here in 1915, quite a few, but then.
BM: Did they have, sort of like, I guess, they had milk wagons?
JS: Oh, yes. There were milk wagons, buggy and horses here, right. And even the grocer's wagon, they used to bring the groceries, they had horse and wagon
BM: The groceries were delivered to your house then?
JS: In horse and wagon, ya but then later on, they improved a bit, they got a car. When I lived on Haliburton, they had horse and wagon. That was up in the thirties anyways.
BM: And going to Vancouver would be by boat?
JS: Oh, yes.
BM: Hum.
JS: Them days, you would get a taxi and they were 50 cents. Well, the wages were pretty low, you know.
BM: Were there any social classes in Nanaimo? Like, you know, did you have some of that... some were considered top and some one that was considered a serf or peasant.
JS: No. Well, (chuckle) they had, what they call the Tom side, that's supposed to be a little, a little higher than a miner, but... I don't think...
BM: What did you call it?
JS: Tom side. They used to call it the Tom side. That's just over the bridge, going that way. But as far as that... I don't think...
BM: So,... people that were maybe considered well-to-do, they didn't really feel that it was below them to mix with the miners?
JS: Oh, no. They used to mix. Oh, ya. sure. But they... they put... what they call the Tom side, they were like doctors and some of them and they lived out this way. And the miners were all towards the anyway... Well, they were practically all. That's the only one I can think of. And there was no class distinction.
BM: So, it is the same as it is today?
JS: Oh, right.
BM: What about the political life in town?
Was politics sort of like, like an important pasttime? Like, I mean, was an MLA important to you?

JS: Well, election day was a big day, you know. If you got in. Like in latter years, I, you know, I got interested in it. But the earlier days, they tell me, it was, you know (chuckle).

BM: parties

JS: Celebrethin' the

member got in or party got in. Oh ya. I guess, it's all the same today.

BM: I guess, the methods of counting ballots, I mean, today, we practically find the same today, if a person... if a party that was you know contesting to be re-elected, was elected the same day. Would it take up almost a couple of weeks before you found if that person was in?

JS: I can't remember that far back. No, I couldn't say. I guess, the absentees votes in them days, I guess, you know... it would take a while.

BM: I guess, by the way, you know... it would take a long time.

JS: Right.

BM: To get down to Victoria.

JS: Well, the communication that they got now, you know what I mean, you know.

BM: Ya. Ya, it's all computerized.

JS: Ya, right. When I was able to vote, we used to go down, on the Federal election anyhow, maybe the Provincial, we used to go down to the old Free Press, we used to get a bunch of people around the window, they used to put the bulletins up the window, there was no radios, you know. Lateron... and, they put the bulletins up, who was leadin' in the local ridings and all that. Be hundreds of people just watchin' the bulletins go up.

BM: So, I guess, they would have relied on telegraphs and telephone.

JS: Yes.

BM: Probably more likely on telegraphs.

JS: Telegraphs, ya.
BM: So, was the MLA important? I mean, did everyone think that, you know, the MLA was an important figure in the community?

JS: Well, the party got him in. Well, (chuckle) I guess, they did, yes. I guess, they thought he was... just like the mayor in Nanaimo here and the aldermen, you know. If somebody wanted something to be brought up, just go and make an appointment to see 'em, I guess, you know.

BM: I'm getting into the depression. Did the depression really hit Nanaimo? Really hard, you know, was it really, really, the hungry thirties?

JS: Oh, I don't know. Yes, there was a lot of poor people there. You know, it hit 'em pretty hard, yes.

BM: Was there a lot of lay-offs?

JS: Well, there wasn't work for everybody, you know, what I mean. They mines weren't workin', like I said before. They 'r only workin' one day or two days a week. Well, we did have a little bit that was working, but the other people, they were on leave and that. And you had to work for a little leave 'then days too. Sometimes you never got back.

BM: Due to the depression, a lot of commodities on the world market suddenly crashed and prices that they were getting. So, did the miners have to take cuts in pay?

JS: No, n.

BM: So, you know, I heard stories where wages were...

JS: They cut the wages, I think they took sixty cents off one time, 1925, I think. I was workin' on the pit head at the time. They took sixty cents off. I believe I remember right, I think, we went out of work, like we went on strike for a week or two I think. Something like that. I just can't... I know they took sixty cents off.

BM: Well, you know...

JS: In the twenties.

BM: ... that was in the depression, that would have been sort of, like, you know (talking overlapping)

But during the depression it was quite common, that workers in the sawmill would find that their pay would be going lower and lower.

JS: Right. That was the only time...
BM: So, the miners were fortunate, they didn't loose.
JS: No.
BM: They didn't loose the pay, they just lost an hour ...
JS: An hour's work, like a day's work. Ya, that's right.
BM: So, I guess they that way (laughter)
They find some way.
JS: Ya.
BM: What do you remember about Chinatown?
JS: Chinatown. I didn't go up there very often, but it's quite an old place. Like, old buildings.
BM: Ya. Was it sort like, sort of controversy, like, did people in the community shun the place, ... a dirty place for...
JS: Well, they used to have their....
we used to go up there, like Chinese food.
BM: So, all the Chinese lived in that area?
JS: They all lived up there, yes. Chinatown, ya.
BM: Did they used to have any Japanese in the area?
JS: Japanese lived around, as far as I'm concerned, remember,
they lived down on the water towards where the Marine is right now, down that way.
BM: So, they never really got involved?
JS: No, they were more like Fishermen. ya. They never got involved in the coal mining or anything like that. Some of them might have worked in the bush, I don't know. In the mills, I couldn't say.
BM: What do you remember about crime in this area? Was there a lot of crime?
JS: No, no. As far as I can... there would be the odd... maybe the odd robbery. They had one big robbery here in 1924, when they robbed the Royal Bank.
BM: When was that?
JS: In 1924, when they robbed the Royal Bank.
BM :indistinct
JS: They got away with 40 somewhat thousand dollars.

BM: So, they never really had...

JS: No, we never had.... We never had the mischief like vandalism, we never had that.

BM: That is terrible.

BM: What do you remember about the FraserStreet Red Light district?

JS: Oh, I can't remember much about that.

BM: I understand, they were legal, up to the First World War?

JS: Ya. There was the coal, like a sea port town, you know, and these boys, fellows, come in from the boat, I guess.

BM: So, was there any community opposition to this Red Light District?

A lot of people, you know,...

JS: I think some of the organization in town didn't go for it, but what can they do?

BM: So, in general, the people in town accepted it?

JS: Accepted it, right.

BM: In that area?

JS: Yes, right. It was all in one place, Fraser, like you said.

BM: What was your opinion towards Nanaimo when you were growing up and working during the coal mining era. At that time, there would be only one industry.

JS: Oh...

BM: What was you opinion of the city?

JS: Well, I.... was interested in soccer and that. I enjoyed it.

BM: so, you played in the soccer team?

JS: I got plain' for the Nanaimo City and I was on the Championship team in 1927 when we won the Dominion Championship, 1927.

BM: What was the Domino Championship, That would be for all of Canada?

JS: Yes. I got a picture, I'll show you, Right around the corner before you leave.

BM: Yes. So you were probably pretty proud of yourself.

JS: Yes. I was.

BM: Even Nanaimo was a fairly important city

JS: Ya. The Western Fuel Company, they kind of run the team.
BM: So, sports was a very important pastime in the city?

JS: Oh, yes. There was Ladysmith, and they were Canadian Collieries and Cumberland, they were Canadian Collieries, they used to beat you know the soccer team. I remember going to special training to Cumberland before we'd get up to I think it was, and my dad and mom to see a big game in Nanimo and Cumberland, like the regular dirt day, you know, what I mean?

BM: Yes.

JS: Playing those paths. That was all the sports there was. And then they had the baseball team, they used to. That's all lateron, all that.

BM: So, you considered Nanaimo, ah, a fairly o.k. place to live then?

JS: Oh, yes, I enjoyed that. I enjoyed living here. I've been here since 1915. So, that's 64 years.

BM: So, I guess, when you've been here this long, you must have liked something.

JS: Well, I've seen a lot of changes, yes.

BM: Well, do you thing, you remember anything else you want to say?

JS: Well, there is a couple things that stick in my mind. Like.. I was one of the last men on the shaft in the Number 1 mine. There was six of us. My cousin Len Sutherland, Bill L , Harry Jack Thompson and Cliff Pearson