Mr. John Baloni.

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Transcribed by; Bernard McNicholl

This is Bernard McNicholl interviewing John Baloni for the Coal Tyee History Project.

JB. He died there, He died there, only one guy died there and.........
BM. Could I ask you first, where were you born?
JB. Born in Nanaimo.
BM. You were born in Nanaimo. What year were you born?
JB. '82.
BM. 1882?
JB. Yep!
BM. You lived in Nanaimo all your life then?
JB. Yeah.
BM. And. What part of Nanaimo were you born in?
JB. I was first born here in the Army.
BM. In the army.
JB. First War.
BM. You were in the First World War then?
JB. Yeah. How long did you serve in the first world war?
JB. I just put a year.
BM. Just a year then. So you just saw the last year of service in then.
JB. Huh!
BM. You just saw the last year of the war then.
JB. ........
BM. Did you fight in France?
JB. No, never went overseas.
BM. Oh, so you just took your training in Canada then. (Yeh, repeated)
JB. Yeh, I just stayed in Canada
BM. When was the first time you stared working in the mines? How old were you?
JB. Huh-uhl
BM. When you first started working in the coal mines how old were you?
JB. I was about 16,
BM. 16 years old.
BM. And you worked in the Brechan Mine then?
BM. You worked in number one, \(\text{mu-\text{mu}}\).

JB. Worked in number one. Number Protection and Brechen.

BM. Do you remember anything significant that happened then, anything important like, you know were there any accidents.

JB. No.

BM. And what kind of things went on, like what did you do in the mine? You know what did you talk about with your friends, and you know heard about things.

JB. I first worked\(\text{(?)}\), you know, I didn't work long, for three years, anyways you know. I never worked too long. I didn't like it.

BM. Why didn't you like it?

JB. I didn't like it.

BM. It wasn't good work\(\text{(?)}\)? (HUH-JB.) It was working? Why didn't you like working in the mines?

JB. I didn't like it.

BM. How come?

JB. I don't know?

BM. You just felt it wasn't what you wanted to do. (HUH-JB.) Then...(repeat)

JB. I never Liked it.

BM. What kind of things you were working in the mine then?

When you did work?

JB. Oh I can't think of nothing.

BM. What did you start off riding the horses, whatever.

JB. I drove a horse, \(\text{job, heh heh heh}''\)

BM. Did you ever go and work the coal?

JB. Oh yah! Sure I was a punching machine.

BM. Oh yah! What was it? (HUH-JB.) Could you describe what a punching machine be the punching machine do?

JB. You punch 'em take .... that dirt(?)

BM. Oh yah about it?

JB. My job was hold it, he was doing a job, you know!
BM. What else did you do in the mine besides using the punching machines?

JB. Worked two months then quit.

BM. You worked two months then you quit. Did you try anything else in the coal mine? That's all? Did you do anything else in the coal mine besides that punching machine. Did you do any digging.

JB. No punching machine do all the dirt out, punching it, you punching it and your job was holding it up at the dirt and you pulled it out you took it down dies, you know. Before I was working it wasn't much of a job.

BM. What did this other fellow do? (HUH? - JB.) repeat.

JB. Well he punched the machine.

BM. Oh yeah. And you held it. (HUH? - JB.) repeat, or did you run the punching machine too?

JB. Well you punched the machine, you go ahead and take it out and you scraping it out.

BM. How much coal was removed from the mine in one day? How many men worked in the mine.

JB. Oh about 30.

BM. 30.....

JB. No! about 30,000 in a plain, you know. You punched it.

BM. Was this in the Brechin mine then?

JB. that't in Brechin, yah.

BM. Wasn't really a large mine then, was it a large mine then?

JB. Well six walls and down a couple of levels further down, you know. Oh we had about a thousand men.

BM. A thousand men.

JB. 500 anyway!

BM. That's a pretty big number isn't it.

JB. Yah it was a good size. You know it took more than one wall, punching machine.

BM. What did you get paid a day?

JB. $2.60

BM. $2.65 a day.

JB. $2.60

BM. Oh, $2.60, 

JB. At first, then $2.60, then $2.80 and that was top.

BM. Did you consider that good pay? (HUH. - JB.) Did you consider that good pay then? $2.60 was that good pay?

JB. It was suppose to be good wages.

BM. Did you have good relations with your boss? Was he a good boss at the Brechin mine?
JB. Yah. 

BM. You didn't have any problems with him then? 

JB. No! Never went back to the mines. You see when the strike was over. 

BM. Do you rember what instigated or started the strike? Do you remember the goings on that happened just before that strike, was that about 1914. Was it long?.........................Could you tell me anything about the strike then? (HUH-JB.) Do you remember anything about the strike? 

JB. No I never went back. 

BM. No but do you remember hearing any rumours, you know do you remember what happened in the town during the strike, do you remember that? the effects, was it a big strike. 

JB. Yees, half of them went into the army. 

BM. OH you did. 

JB. They all went back to work, you know. 

BM. So all the coal miners went back to work? 

JB. No no not them all, some guys worked steady(?), you know they were scabbing. 

BM. Was it a violent strike? 

JB. Yah! 

BM. What happened? What made it so violent? 

JB. Well I don't know. 

BM. Do do you remember hearing anything, that seemed very violent?....... 

JB. They raised Hell, 

BM. What kind of Hell did they raise? (HUH-JB.) repeat? 

JB. They had there day(?) 

BM. Did they do any breaking of furniture things like that and doing dam­age, like did they go around destroying things? 

JB. They raised Hell. 

BM. What kind of things did they do? 

JB. I don't know, I don't want to say. 

BM. What kind of things were they asking for that caused the strike? 

JB. Higher wages(?) 

BM. Do you remember anything your friends did? Can you remember your friends telling you anything about the strike, you know did you talk about in the beer parlour? (HUH-JB.) did you talk about this kind of thing in the beer parlour? 

JB. Ah yah strike to keep out of the mine(?) You know the mines up at Extension had a h................? ......friend? 

BM. What did he do at that place? (HUH-JB.) Your friend out at Extension, what did he do?...........Did he ever tell yoy anything? (HUH-JB.) Did your friend in Extension ever tell you anything? 

JB. I don't know. 

BM. What do you remember? (HUH-JB.) Do you remember sort a like the goings
on and the social atmosphere of the town was, what did people do after work?

JB. Well they went to Church(?)

BM. Did you ever remember going to the beer parlour after working in the mines?

JB. Not after.

BM. What did you do after you worked in the coal mines, after work in that day? Well after a hard day of working in the coal mines what did you do?

JB. I couldn't even vote, you know. (Interviewer thought he said boat)

BM. Navy boat? do you remember the name of this navy boat? Was it during the war that it came into the harbour?, this Navy boat.

JB. About, brought them down and put them down...near(?) (Now he's talking about when they brought a boat load of strike breakers in)

BM. Departure?? (Interviewer is still thinking about boats)

JB. Down on(in) Nanaimo, put all them scabbies around.

BM. So they were all over place then (Not people, still thinking of boats all over the harbour) These Navy boats were all over the harbour then, and in the water.

JB. I don't think they were Navy boats.

BM. Why was the Navy boat there?

JB. The boat brought the scabs in, you know. And they put them guys in in Departure Bay and they took all the miners.

BM. What did they do with the miners, after they brought that boat load of scabs in?

JB. They took the miners, they took them up to South Wellington.

BM. South Wellington?

JB. South Wellington.

BM. And what happened after that?.............Were the miners angry about this?

JB. Some of the miners went back to work and some didn't.

BM. What happened to the miners that went back to work?

JB. What the men do?

BM. Yah. I mean were the miners very mad about being forced to go back to work?

JB. The men go back?

BM. Yes were they mad about it?

JB. Oh yah, sure there was Hell popping..............

BM. Oh yah what kind of things happened because of this you know this anger in the miners, what did they do with this anger? Did they go around breaking people's property?

JB. Oh yah they was hell popping.

BM. And did anyone get hurt?
JB. OH yah. some fellows got hurt.

BM. What happened to them? Do you remember?

JB. I wasn't in the mine anymore. I got out of that and started fishing, then went fishing two days in a row.

BM. Was it the war that ended this strike? Was it the First World War that ended this strike?

JB. Yes son that is they went into the army.

BM. Oh yah so a lot of the miners went into the army. What happened to the mines did more coal miners come into the mine to take their place? because they went into the army?

JB. I can't tell you anything. You know I forgot all about it. Heh Heh!

BM. Do you remember anything about Nanaimo? Back then. (HUH-JB.) Do remember anything about Nanaimo at that time, I mean were things downtown as they are today? Can you think of some story you have to to tell? Can you think of some story you have to tell about that time?

JB. Can I tell about them two guys?

BM. Yes!

JB. Well (HA HA) A lot of them stayed over seas and stayed, you know a lot of 'em got killed.

BM. Oh yes. Was that a sad moment. Can you think of any other stories about that time? Something you remember very well at that time.

JB. I never went back you know.

BM. Was Nanaimo a busy place at that time?

JB. Yah of course it was. Around here and down in Brechin. Oh I can't tell you.

BM. What did your father do?(HUH) was your father a coal miner also?

JB. Yes hes was killed he died down in the mine.

BM. Oh yes. What year was that. (HUH-JB) What year was that do you remember, how it happened?

JB. When he was killed?

BM. Yes.

JB. Oh I was was about six six years. I didn't know much about him.

BM. You were quite young then (HUH?-JB.) repeat.

JB. Oh yes I was about six. And he was trying to dynamite and he.

BM. Do you remember any other stories from back that time? What else do you remember that sticks in your mind that happened then?

JB. When I was doing something else?

BM. Yah. Did you ever go to Church?

JB. Did I ever go to Church?

BM. Yes. Didn't go to Church then?

JB. No.
BM. Was Church an important thing back then? Did you have any strong community ties? I mean was there a strong community involvement between you and your friends?

JB. Did I have any what?

BM. Did you have any community involvement, like did you and your friends get together for parties and things like that? and dances?

JB. No, never took anything like that.

BM. What did you do in your spare time?

JB. I was fishing all the time.

BM. You fished all the time. How long did you fish?

JB. Well this guy.....

BM. When was the first time you went on a fishing boat?

JB. Use to ... used to use row boats, you know, we went with row boats row boats.

BM. Just outside Nanaimo?

JB. Yah. Go down to, go down

BM. Out by Harmac and that? (HUH-JB.) all out there in the Harbout and the Nanaimo estuary, around Protection Island and Entrance Island?

JB. We use to go up to Cape Mudge.

BM. Oh Yes.

JB. You know Cape Mudge?

BM. Yes.

JB. With the row boats, three days to go up and three days to come back.

BM. Just in a row boat? Was that dangerous? (HUH-JB.) Was that a dangerous thing to do?

JB. No it was safe. It was safe enough.

BM. How long did you use a row boat, most of the time or did you get a larger boat later?.....(Spits out chewing tobacco.) You remember what you did? What kind of fish did you catch?

JB. Salmon.

BM. Mostly salmon, did you catch cod, rock cod?

JB. Oh rock cod.

JB. Can't think.

The rest of tape is just a bit on how long he fished and not related to coal mining. Purpose of doing the rest was to make it appear that the interviewer came to see him and not just for one purpose.