This is Bernie McNicholl interviewing Will Broderick for the Coal Tyee History Project. 

BM: What year were you born?

WB: 1914.

BM: Were you born in Nanaimo?

WB: No, I was born in Union, B.C., which is now Cumberland.

BM: Your father was a coal miner in Cumberland, then?

WB: That's right. My Dad came here in 1912 to work in the coal mines, in Union, B.C. My Dad came from Sneffs County, a little town of Letworth in England.

BM: Was that in the coal mining district?

WB: My Dad was a miner there. In the North of England.

BM: Why did your father come to Canada, did he see an advertisement for coal miners in Canada?

WB: Yeh, a man by the name of Rivers was recruiting miners there at that time. And my Dad and my mother's brothers came out here to work under that scheme.

BM: And he came all the way to Union, B.C. which is Cumberland now?

WB: That's right.

BM: What was your father's job in the mine?

WB: My Dad was a fire boss.

BM: So had a fairly important job then?

WB: Yeh.

BM: Would you remember what your Dad had to do exactly as a fire boss?

WB: Well he was in charge of a section of a mine with the men and it was his job to make sure that the workings were safe and he fired the shots after the holes were drilled to pull out the coal. Now he had to inspect the place before any miners went in, he had to inspect the place after the shots were fired—for gas. Well all over, gas is well that is more or less the result of poor air, poor air circulation, see if there is good air circulation then gas can't accumulate.

BM: So if they had installed proper air circulation they would never had this problem then?

WB: Well, the problem resulted from taking out so much coal, that the air pressure it was such a large area, the air couldn't circulate properly in a large area and it would mix with coal dust then you would get your gas and it would blow. The coal dust and the air and the gas. Poor oxygen.

BM: How long did you live in Union, B.C.?

WB: Well I was only a baby, came to Nanaimo in 1915.

BM: What's the reason for coming to Nanaimo, did it have anything to do with the big strike?

WB: I couldn't tell you, I wouldn't know. My Dad moved, there was the big strike in Cumberland and there was one here, but my Dad moved and mother moved down here 1915.

BM: Whereabouts in Nanaimo did you move?

WB: We lived in the south end of town, the first street we lived on was Watkins Street.

BM: What mine did your father go to to work?

WB: Number One mine.

BM: Was he also fire boss there?

WB: Fire boss there yeh.

BM: So if you were a fire boss then you would most likely get a fire boss job again?

WB: Oh yeh, because a fire boss, you have to get a government ticket. And my Dad had the ticket.

BM: What do you remember about growing up in the south end of town at the time? Like what school did you go to?
BN: Where is that today?
WB: That is on the corner of Stricl<land and Needham Street where the library sits there today, the Regional Library.
BN: Where is the head office is. Was it a large or small school?
WB: 4 rooms.
BN: What kind of things would you say they taught in school, the same subjects as today or was it stricter or what?
WB: Much stricter than it is today in school. The teacher was really disciplined and there was no you know you went to school and the teacher was the boss and that was it.
BN: As a child did you ever hang around some of the old coal workings? Go down to Number One or something? To watch?
WB: We used to go down there and steal rides on the train. We used to play in the slack piles down there, go home black as niggers.
BN: You weren't supposed to be doing this were you or they didn't mind?
WB: Nobody bothered you as long as you weren't thieves.
BN: You mother think of you coming home black?
WB: Well in a large family you only got one bath in the house. She wasn't too happy about it?
BN: They didn't have hot and cold running water and that then?
WB: Oh yes, we had hot and cold water. Because at that time we weren't livin at Watkins Street where we were living off Irwin Street, there was a set of houses that was owned by Mrs. M.A. Rowe but that time there was a piece of street which was behind where Gavin's bakery is now there's Baker Street goes down and that was all connected with Irwin Street, that was a piece in there that was - there was 6 houses on it and it was a dead end.
BN: But you had hot and cold running water and you had things like bathtubs, showers.
WB: Everything was there, yes. Electricity, no refrigeration.
BN: Did you have an icebox?
WB: No, at that time what they used to do was when the basement wasn't cemented you dig a hole and use that in the summertime for your...
BN: Did it suffice quite well?
WB: It seemed to, none of us died from it.
BN: What year did you start working in the mines?
WB: It started in the mines be about 1931.
BN: How old were you?
WB: I'd be 17.
BN: What was your reason for working in the mines? Financial to help support the family?
WB: In those days, everybody worked to support the family that was capable of working and if you at that time I finished high school, there was no jobs for anybody, you couldn't find a job anywhere so with my Dad working in the mines, knowing some of the mine bosses. My Dad wouldn't speak for us to go to the mine, he didn't want me to go to the mine. But it got to a point where I couldn't find a job so I went to see a man by the name of Sutherland - Jock Sutherland - he was the overseer that is the next man to the mine manager. Then there's the fire bosses. The mine manager was head of the mine, then there's the overman who looks after a certain part of it, he'd maybe look after half that mine, section of the maybe 6, oh 800 men. Then he'd have maybe 5 or 6 fire bosses working. So I went to see him and he gave me a job in the mine.
BN: What was your first job?
WB: Well, I went down in the mine, the man who took me down in the mine, was a man by the name was Les Mottishaw, now the father of the Les Mottishaw. You see him around with the different projects, you know the bathtub - that was his Dad
I went down in the mine to run a little winch. I was a winch boy. I went down with another young fella and I forget his name. You talk about funny things - the first day I was in the mine, the first trip I pulled up from the face was a dead mule that had been killed on the shift before. Inside a box, inside a little cart. He got killed.

That really didn't give you a good...

No, this other young fella was working farther up and I pulled one trip up and he was pick it up and take it up to the next winch. The second trip up I pulled up there was a man sitting in the box car and he got hit in the head with a fall of coal, they were taking him out of the mine to the hospital.

So the second trip had an injured man on it? For your first day it was a little exciting? Did you think it was going to be like that forever?

Well, it was a little scary at first, but the other young fella, when he pulled the man up he left the mine. Quit right there, he just couldn't take it anymore. Just took off and quit.

So he thought pulling up dead mules and men he thought...? He probably thought the man was dead too?

Well, no no the man was sitting up, but he was quite a mess because you know black face and blood running down but he couldn't walk out so they took him up on...

So what was your opinion of working in the mines in the first day?

Well that's so far back, it's hard to say, you're a little scared and you know everything's strange, black and but most of the people you worked with, the older men and that, they made you comfortable, pull little tricks on you and everything else.

What kind of little tricks?

All kinds - tell you to go out for a broom to sweep the tracks. And to look for a Jim Crow. Go find Jim Crow.

That's right, you'd be looking all over the mine for him.

You'd be looking for a person by the name of Jim Crow. And they'd have a good chuckle over that?

Oh yah, they'd I mean just funny little things.

Would they try and scare you by turning lights off and sneaking up behind you and things?

Oh yes.

So you must have gotten used to it after awhile?

Oh you got used to it but in those days it was a job. It was a job. And the pay in those days was $1.85 a day for 8 hours work.

So they hadn't got into an hourly wage yet?

No that never came, well the most they paid in them times, well a coal miner would get maybe $5.00 a day unless he was on contract and they used to get 98¢ well 90 to a dollar a ton for coal.

So they would make quite a bit more money then?

They could make some money yeh?

Were you always a winch kid?

Oh no, I was in the mine for about 6 months and then I went skin the mule, mule-skinning. Driving a mule.

Why did they call it skinning the mule?

I couldn't tell you but you were a mule skinner the same as down through the years. You see on T.V. and men that drove mules were called mule skinners.

How could they get that kind of a name?

Well that's just a man that's driving mule, horse or whatever. You were so that's what you took from a pony to a horse.

So how many mules would you drive then?
BM: What was the exact responsibility of a mule skinner? Were you always driving your mule?
WB: No, you were driving, there was so many stalls where the men worked, now you go in with a mule and hook onto the car and have to pull it out and then take an empty back.
BM: So did you go with the mule?
WB: Right.
BM: So you would take it up to a place where they had a siding of other cars and you would hook up to those where they would go on a winch or something like that.
WB: Right, you make them into what we call down there, the trip, and it could be 2 cars, 4 cars, 6 cars anything up to about 20.
BM: And then you would go back with an empty? So that was your entire job during the day, you were responsible for that one mule, were you responsible for to make sure it got fed and got water.
WB: No, no we had nothing to do with that. We picked the mule up in the morning. We picked it up at the stable and the mule was fed and watered before you got there and normally he'd work 4 - 8 hours, if he worked more than 8 hours, you had to work a double shift, he'd be fed and watered before he started again. But that wasn't our responsibility. That was the responsibility of the stableman.
BM: Were you always constantly busy hooking up cars all the time?
WB: Oh yeh. And then from there I went to what we call a rope rider, you know what that term means. It's the men that rides the rope. The rope is on a slope or an incline, now a slope is where you pull loads out of it, an incline is where you drop the loads down in it. And it was the rope riders responsibility to get that trip up and down that slope or incline. A slope goes down and an incline goes up. It's a natural, just like looking out here. You come up the incline -
BM: Getting back to mules, what was your opinion of mules, I heard a lot of people say they were more intelligent than horses? Is that true?
WB: All the mules and animals, even the horses and even ponies in the mine were intelligent.
BM: All of them were intelligent?
WB: They were, they were intelligent. Mind, there was some mean ones and there were some bad ones but some of that was created by people who drove those mules and were rather cruel.
BM: I've heard of some of the mean things they did to mules? Did you witness any of this?
WB: Maybe you would think we did cruel thing to some of the mules but some of the mules were quite vicious.
BM: Do you have any stories about what kind of things mules did?
WB: Two or three of them. The strongest mule I ever saw was a big black mule with a Roman nose called Jim - Black Jim. His nose was all hooked over. You had to handle him with a jaw breaker, it was a bit. It was what it was called, jaw breakers to control him. He had a mean streak. He was really mean, he would kick you, bite you, do anything. Anytime that you were driving if you didn't have your eye on him he would kick you and he would get you out here. You could try to control him but if he didn't want to work he wouldn't work. I've seen cases where he would kick him self out of those cars and break his back and get away, he'd run away, going to a place in the mine where you couldn't get at him and then he'd be in there and he'd kick and bite you. He'd go into a dead end and you couldn't get at him. And you know when you're working for a living you had to get 2 or 3 men go in there and get hold of him. So the work had to stop you see.
BM: Did they dock the workers' pay or...?
WB: No, no. Lost time was just made up the time that was all. You had to make up the work to get production back to normal.
BM: But it wasn't really your fault but they would do it anyhow?
WB: That's right.
NB: But there was some real good mules, there were some real good ones, real good ponies, they were really highly intelligent. If you had a good mule it made the work twice as easy or as good pony or horse. They got to work everything more or less on a system and they knew exactly where you were going this time and know where you were going the next time.

BM: What would you say was your favourite animal to work with, a horse, mule or pony?

WB: A little pony and her names was Jeannie, there were 2 of them one little pony, Jeannie and one little pony Mabel. They were as human as any animal could be.

BM: So ponies were gentler then?

WB: Oh yeh, well they were smaller I mean let's face it, a big strong horse or a big strong mule, he's harder to handle than a small pony but the ponies were only put on the very light jobs.

BM: And then you moved up to rope riding?

WB: That's right.

BM: Could you explain exactly what your ...

WB: Your job was, you would be bringing down what we used to call a trip of cars and you'd be lying them into a siding or a part and you would pick up a load of full ones and take them back up or back down whichever way you were going.

BM: You had to go with this trip all the time?

WB: Oh yeh, oh yeh.

BM: Why did you have to be with this trip of coal all the time?

WB: You ask that in a dark mine you'd be riding that trip with your headlight on and people would see you coming, they would hear you coming.

BM: Why couldn't they just put lights on the car?

WB: What if they went off the track, who's ...

BM: Well if they got off the track then they're not going to come and they would know it?

WB: Well, the rope riders you see its their responsibility to put them back on.

BM: Well if a car went off the track you were responsible for getting it back on?

WB: That's right.

BM: Well if they were full and tipped over you mean you ...

WB: No, no they didn't tip over, they'd just drop off the track, they'd be going up the track and they would hit, maybe the track was a little bent or if they'd hit something on the wheels would drop off the track and they'd drop down the depth of the track, maybe 4 or 5 or 6 inches and it was your responsibility to put that car back on.

BM: How did you get that car back on the track?

WB: Sometimes by lifting it and other times by on the main hook you'd have a set of dogs you'd call it they were dogs, a flared fan type thing sitting over the track. It was like a fan that fitted over the track and by leverage by using wood and different things you'd jack the car, put the dog under the wheel and ..

BM: This would help it get back on the track, and get it moving along again?

WB: That's right. Most of the time you would lift it with what we used to call a piece of lagin. That piece of lagin was something like a rough 2 by 4 but otherwise you'd lift it with your back and your hands.

BM: Even when it was full, that's pretty heavy!

WB: That's right.

BM: How many tons would be in a car? About 15 wasn't it?

WB: No, no, no, no they were only 1 ton cars but the car would probably weigh 100 pounds and a ton of coal oh about 3,000 pounds and a man could lift it.

BM: Really.

WB: Sure.
BM: Well I guess a little bit anyhow.

WB: The wheels were only set so far apart from the center of it.

BM: So they were in the centre so it sort of rocked a bit?

WB: Well it didn't rock but when you lifted it, it was the leverage factor.

BM: Wouldn't it have been better to have the wheels on the outside, they wouldn't fall off as much would they?

WB: They'd still fall off the track, you know I mean, the railroad track you'd gotta keep working at it otherwise it gets out of.... and the wheels on some of these cars you know after years of running in the mine. Not only that the wheels would get kind of flat in places. The reason for that would be that when you were driving a mule....

BM: You were mentioning something about a mule going down an incline?

WB: Yes, they used to put in what they called sprags. A sprag at that time was a piece of wood or a metal sprag that you put in the spokes of the wheel so that the wheel wouldn't turn and that acted as a brake. Now if the incline was long or deep you put a little sand on the track, well if it was long or deep and a car would be coming too fast you put a little sand on the track - same as the railroad, the railroad people put the brakes on. Or a big truck on ice, they spray sand on so that they get more grip. In some places, like when you were driving a mule, some inclines that you were working on with a mule you'd put in sand boards which was a piece of board that was put up against the rail, maybe oh 4-6 feet long and it had sand on it. Before you were going up you'd sand that board so you'd know when you come down with a trip, the car with the sprags in it would hit that sprag board and slow it down.

BM: So that was the only ways you could slow the cars down? Did they ever have something like an emergency brake?

WB: No, no brakes on those.

BM: You just had to ride it through.

WB: That's right.

BM: Did that ever come into any accidents because of that?

WB: Yes, there could be, that's how some of the animals and mules got killed.

BM: Getting in the way of a trip?

WB: That's right or you didn't get the sprags, all the sprags in it at the time.

BM: Oh so you had a time to get those sprags in?

WB: That's right.

BM: You had to be quite quick?

WB: Right. But it was an art you learned. The first time when you started you missed quite a few but you learn. You learn not to get your hands caught in them either.

BM: Did you ever get your hands caught in it?

WB: I got my wrist broken once with it but then again there was lots of ways you could get injured in the mine.

BM: What about mine safety? Would you say that it was safe to work in the mines as it is in the woods today?

WB: Not in those days. I think it was a lot safer working in the mines than it was in the woods. Depend on your own outlook - some people would never go into a mine and other people would never go into the woods.

BM: Besides the fire boss (because we already talked about what his job was - your father was one) what other safety measures did they have?

WB: Well they had a man come around, the mine inspector, come around, the mine inspector would come all through the mine and inspect the mine and they used to have, in latter years, they had what they used to call the safety committee to check the mine.

BM: Did they have any special equipment for the men to insure their safety like...?

WB: The fire boss had it with his light, him woof light which show up the gas. And if it was up to a certain percentage they just wouldn't work in there or they wouldn't fire any shots - they would direct more air into there to clear it out.
BM: Did the men have any personal safety gear they had to wear maybe like special equipment...

NB: No.

BM: Did they ever wear a hard hat?

NB: In those days no. Those came in later, in the latter years. In those days they used to wear a cloth hat, with a little peak on it, a piece had come down and you wore a heavy belt to carry the light back.

BM: And no special shoes, like steel toed shoes?

NB: Nope those weren't in then. Just a heavy boot with hobnails in it.

BM: And hobnails is just sorta traction.

NB: That's right.

BM: If a miner was injured—like broke a leg or like yourself when you broke a wrist, was there someone that was a qualified first aid attendant or something of that sort or someone that had a first aid ticket of some sort?

NB: Oh yeh, in those days, the coal company used to run first aid lessons in the old St. Johns Ambulance Hall on Esplanade. Now that's where now the little piece of hall that is left is where the ah oh I'm trying to think of the name of the stevedoring outfit that's in there. Well that was a big hall at one time and it get burnt down but every Sunday, when I was younger we either had to go to church on Sunday morning or we went to first aid. So rather than go to church we went to first aid, but most of the miners in the mine at that time had first aid or the fire bosses were all first aid people.

BM: And they would have a first aid kit down for immediate injuries?

NB: That's right, they had stretchers and first aid splints and all that.

BM: They would call for the ambulance if it was....?

NB: The company had it's own ambulance.

BM: So there was always an ambulance on the premises?

NB: There was always an ambulance there.

BM: So all you had to do was bring up the injured get him in the ambulance and they would be rushed to the hospital wherever medical aid was.

NB: Right.

BM: Do you feel secure that the safety conditions were as you would expect?

NB: Well, it's hard to say; some people expect a lot and some people expect a little but ah in the overall picture safety regulations weren't too bad. The mine inspector kept most of them in line.

BM: You really didn't have any qualms then?

NB: Wasn't much, in those days ya didn't worry about nothing.

BM: It was just your job?

NB: That's right, you went to work.

BM: Also down in the mines, miners talked about earth noises, like creaking timbers and the coal would creak and things like that, was there a particular time in the mine when this happened more frequently?

NB: Well, it was going on all the time actually. But ah more or less didn't take too much notice of it unless something was out of the ordinary, I mean, everybody was kept to the dangers of the mine, in the mine and but ah most of the time I know in one section of the mine where I worked at south the coal was anywhere from 5 feet to 12 feet high and ah they gradually took all the coal out as they were coming back they went to the end of where the coal was at and they were coming back and gradually as they take it out they let everything cave behind them. Well the more open space you got the less chance they got of holding the roof up so down it comes. But ah, oh you get a few scares but normally if you driving a mule, this is where the intelligence of a mule comes in, they knew it before you did something's was gonna happen. And they'd be wanting to get out of there and this would alert you to a lot of danger.

BM: So the mules would be aware of a cave-in going to occur?

NB: That's right.
BN: So you got to learn a mule's instinct and trust it and you wouldn't sit there and rely on human skepticism. If the mule got out you got out too?

WB: That's right, right. As we would say that maybe spare men working in a place like that and it we used to call the roof would be working, moving all the time and the timbers cracking and what have you. But an experienced miner would just about know when the would cave-in. And the mule, there's no way he would go in or if he was in there and you didn't have him tied up, he'd be off but a lot of times when those conditions were there we would tie the mule up and you'd see him sneaking out, farther out so he'd get out to a place of safety.

BN: And then you would follow him?

WB: Sometimes, yeh, sometimes no. You had to stand on the more or less instinct of the miners and experience and they know when one starts coming.

BN: I've had some miners say that there was a certain period during the night that it was more active? Is that true?

WB: That was true.

BN: What time of night it would you say there was more stress?

WB: Somewhere between 3 and 5 o'clock in the morning.

BN: Well I thought if I could get enough people to say exactly the same time there must be something true about it.

WB: It used to work, as I say, but it didn't bother you too much.

BN: Would you ever be in some workings where it would be over your head, the ceiling, and a couple of weeks later you'd have to crouch?

WB: That's yeh, in fact that could happen overnight, the timbers would be broken.

BN: So the ceiling could lower by almost a foot overnight?

WB: That's right, the pressure.

BN: After riding the rope what was your next job?

WB: I quit the mines. I went to work for Safeway Stores.

BN: What year did you quit the mines? You said you started in 31.

WB: About 1941 I think.

BN: That was during the war then?

WB: 1940 the war started. 1942 I went in the army and come out in 1946.

BN: During the war years did you work in the mines? Because if you worked in the mines you were normally either asked to stay in the mines or you know...?

WB: I was in the army at the time, I could have come home to work in the mines. In fact a letter was sent, it was on my army file that I was a miner and I was to return home when I was in Red Deer, Alberta and the Colonel there at the time told me he said, you quit the mine didn't ya? And I said ya. Do you want to go back there? And I said no... He said where would you like to go? And I was transferred to ottawa and it was quite sometime before that paper caught up to me again because he didn't put it in the file.

BN: So your Colonel really didn't want to ask you to go back to the mine so he transferred you to a different place so you could stay in the army without this paper bothering you all the time?

WB: That's right.

BN: Were they in a way pressuring you or...?

WB: No, no, no, no.

BN: They sort of bugged you a bit about it?

WB: No, no they didn't bug you for that, if you were a miner and they sent for you you were supposed to be sent on leave, On what they call miner's leave, you were still in the army but you went back to work in the mines. But you were still in the army, you never got discharged until after the war because then they need you again. There would come a time when the mine didn't need you the army would need you back... But you couldn't quit your job. You didn't have the freedom you thought you had.
BM: So if you worked in the army and went back to the mine you would probably be making less than if you were actually working in the mines?

WB: Oh yeh, yeh, but as I told ya I quit the mines and was working for Safeway Stores and I didn't have any intention of going back. Previous to working in Safeway Stores I could have gone to work in the mine at Number 8 mine. Timberlands.

BM: Were you in the mines when they started talking about organization of unions?

WB: At that time when I was in the mine, the miners' union came in and my name was signed up to the miners' union yes.

BM: Was there a lot of difficulty in organizing this like you know if management found out that you belonged to a union would they dismiss you or whatever?

WB: Earlier on there was that but I would say the snowball grew it got to a point they couldn't fire everybody.

BM: So more support of the miners went to the union and the company couldn't fire everybody at once or there wouldn't have been nobody to work?

WB: Right. Things changed quite a bit when the union came because they, the bosses couldn't do everything they wanted to do, they didn't have the power they had prior to the union.

BM: What kind of change did you see when the union came in?

WB: Well, the working conditions, the men were treated, I would say, different. They got more respect from the bosses because the bosses couldn't bully them or so you got more respect as a worker.

BM: Did the pay increase?

WB: The first contract if I can remember right we never got any pay increase, it was more of an adjustment of the pay scale because there were so many different pay scales in the mine that they had to reclassify the workers into different categories. If you were a rope rider or a winch boy or a mule driver skinner you were on the haulage and there was miners, there was rock miners, coal miners and there was oh all different categories of men and wage scales were set for them and I don't think that anybody, some of the miners were just got a raise in pay, but I'm not sure but it was said at one time that there were about 12 different scales of wages in the mine of maybe 1500 men. Some men working right alongside the other doing the same job would get different money, on a different pay scale.

BM: Did all the miners think that was fair?

WB: No one actually took a decrease in pay?

WB: Some of them did, yeh some of the men took a decrease in pay, to get the adjustment, but after the first contract, the next contract that came up the union more or less got an increase in pay, not a percentage increase, they were asking for not a dollar an hour, a dollar or two dollars a day. That 2 dollars for 8 hours work, 2 bits an hour increase.

BM: And after the you went to Safeway and the army, You never went back in the mines?

WB: Oh I went back to work for Safeway Stores worked for them for 37 years and retired.

BM: Do you remember any particular disease that may have been common to miners?

WB: Not too much in the mines here. The rock miners, 322, they were what they called rock men, they did most of the work, rock tunnel work in the mines, they all died young fellas. They all died from it could be rock dust. I don't think any of them, none of them are alive now. But they all worked in the rock tunnels. They were big paid men in those days. They were the highest paid, yeh.

BM: They had the most hazard then?

WB: I wouldn't say the most hazard but they...

BM: To their health?

WB: Yeh, but that wasn't a consideration. The last mine I worked in was Northfield Mine and I went to work there in I guess 1934, they were clearing up a shaft up at Northfield. My Dad was a boss out there at that time and he went to work there and I worked at the top at that time as I can always remember in 1939 I think it was one of the coldest winters we ever had and I was working up at the top there and I asked to go back down in the mine to get out of the weather. I worked in that mine until just before it closed.
How were the winters when you were a boy up until the war, what kind of winters did you have, cold ones a lot of snow?

Sometimes, sometimes not but they seemed to be a lot colder and have a lot more ah cold winters than we do now.

A lot of people keep saying they had a lot of snow before and the winters were colder and warmer summers?

Yeh, but ah I was working in Northfield Mine on the day that the water broke and the mine flooded. I was in the mine. That was quite a scare.

So you had an explosion or inflection of water...?

No, no, no, no. The water broke in Northfield Mine in the south level, I don't know whether you saw the article that Larry Jones wrote in the time. Well, he had an article about that. That was 1937 because a week after that there was men killed in the flood in the Beban Mine you know. It was in the same period, about a week after. Northfield Mine was an old mine that they went back into, then they hit one of the workings of one of the older other mines. All around Wellington and up there there's shafts and tunnels all over. In fact they'd been working under this water for 2 or 3 days before that before it broke out of the roof.

It came through the roof, they were working under an old mine level or whatever.

I guess the maps didn't show that piece of it. But ah the water broke in. There was a real mad scramble to get out. The part of the mine that I worked in at that time was up the hill what we used to call up the incline. And water we knew if we got to the air shaft, and there's a ladder right up through the mine to the air shaft to the surface, and you could get up through there but when we got to the air shaft there was no water so there's no work, so we just kept walking down to the shaft bottom and when we got down to the shaft bottom I guess there was 2 feet of water running through there and I can always remember Jock Sutherland, he was a Scotchman pit boss, standing there and he didn't ask for the men, we asked where the mules was at. What'd you do with the mule?

Just because he didn't know what to say or...?

No, he just wanted to know where the mule was at. Told him we left her up the incline. She was left on the highest part of the mine but it didn't flood like at that time I was quite concerned that my 2 brothers and my Dad were down in the slope of the mine when the water was all running. That part of the mine was at 2 slopes and a dish in the middle A slope and an incline and the men were up to their neck in water coming through that siding in the bit up to here. They were very fortunate that day that the mine was open far enough to take all the water. That was on a Friday afternoon and we were back to work again Sunday night cleaning up everything. They were very fortunate that day that nobody got drowned, because there was quite a lot of water coming down. I saw a 16 foot timber about 18 inches thick go down over the hill like a log in a river.

Well we're almost out of tape and....ah...

But my Dad was a real man in the mine, he was in the mine rescue and the explosion, rescued men in Wakesiah and helped rescue the well he was in the mine rescue team and the men were all dead in Number 10 mine in that explosion. My Dad I guess was one of the first men in that mine rescue - when he worked for the company he was more or less a troubleshooter, when something went wrong they'd....