This is Bernie MCNICHOLL interviewing Elizabeth Inez FREEMAN for the Coal Tyee History Project.

BM: Do I call you Elizabeth?
EF: Everybody calls me Inez. Teachers and all.

BM: What year were you born?
EF: I was born in 1888.

BM: And were you born in Nanaimo area?
EF: As far as I know, I didn't know where I was at that time.

BM: Was your father a coal miner?
EF: He worked on the surface.

BM: What was his job working on the surface?
EF: Well, seeing that the men brought in the, there were logs to be brought in and inspectors and an Indian came in with a piece of rock he thought he brought in and my father saw it and he said, 'how do you know this is any good?' Oh he said make fire and that's how they discovered that coal would burn there. And prospecting begun up and down and they just went down to Ladysmith, South Wellington but it didn't go right down to Cowichan you know and down to Victoria. They were all farming and fishing but we had fishing in Nanaimo and beautiful scenery. Artists came to paint the view looking out to the water you see were there - what they call Jack's point, Gabriola, Protection Island in the middle, the bay coming in and the Rocky Mtns. way behind. See we only have a little hill on Mt Benson. And it made wonderful painting scene and people would come and then of course the town began to build, surveying lots started.

BM: Do you remember any famous painters coming here?
EF: I forget now ah I can't remember the names now those people who started the painting. But I knew all the music and everything, you know Mozart and all these. After I began to study music.

BM: Did you play the piano?
EF: The piano and then the pipe organ, a great big new pipe organ. They got it, it was a $12,000 organ at the United Church. The Presbyterians and Methodists joined and became United and the big Presbyterian Church was larger than the brick one so they got all this set and put a choir in and then we had a male voice choir, a large one.

BM: Do you were a church organist then?
EF: Yes. I played that organ yes, Made real money out of that. $145.00 a month and $25.00 every time there was something special which brought me up to about $200.00 every month. I was 20 years old then. My brother too, he played banjo mandolin. Just a musical family we were.

BM: What do you remember about Nanaimo time when you were small about coal mining in the area?
EF: We were right on the beach, we stepped across the road, the railroad had to be built in to places so it would get by and so on. Number One mine was right to the right of us. The old, old manager who was one of the first directors, his name was Robins and he had like a pointed lot, it was a couple of lots or so together and who else was there besides Robins. Mr. McGregor, he was one of the early managers, general managers. William McGregor. Then the miners began to come in from Scotland and brought out a bunch and then we had 61 I heard then talk when I was a youngster we all mimicked everybody else you know. Dikes, oh I don't know. And I knew a family of Rowlies and there was Neaves and there was Cowies, Nicholsons and Nichol. And then the streets - Esplanade was ours, Irving Street, the Esplanade was waterfront and these other streets were evidently named after old city alderman or famous people. There was Esplanade and Irving, Halliburton, Nichol and then it broke of on Victoria Road and Selby went one way and but we went that way down the hill to go to Central School which was straight up.

BM: Would that be where Quesnell is today?
EF: Quesnell opened 2 years and I got way ahead of that you see I was at the high school by that time I was growing up. And we had to go over to the Townsite in those days - right through town and across a little bridge that went to Townsite and there was a Miss Hitchen I think was the name, the teacher in languages and that. And I had learned how to, as they call it the Patois, listening to the people talk French.
EF: You see, there was French, Italian, German and in music you see I learned names from different composers so that you know there names were put on their music. And then there was the first piano I had; one of the very very first they had downtown at Fletchers, it was only a little one, like a little toy piano but it tinkled away and played very nice and the different Gerhard-Heintzman and those kind came in and the little ones were just used for show. Then we had spy glasses as they called them to look out to the bay at the boats coming in.

BM: What do you remember about the boats?

EF: Well there was the Titania and they're all coal boats, I just forget because we used to take the coal by tug and load the scows to go out. There was the Esperanza and there were sailing ships in those days. We could see them pass, you know we couldn't read the names.

BM: It was quite busy, the harbour all the time?

EF: Oh yes, it was busy. That's what made the town from the very first. It isn't so terribly big now because the other cities are larger. Victoria's much larger, that's the Parliament you know and the government. And then Vancouver was the big shipping point because we were across the gulf from there you see and the shipping by rail went from Vancouver east and anything going south would have to go by ship. And then the big boats would come into Nanaimo and load coal.

BM: That may change again with Duke Point you know?

EF: Well, I don't know. I don't think so it may do though the geologists at that time said the coal there's no telling just how deep that would be because they would go down, you know the machinery would take them that they could come in. The centre of the earth is still supposed to be warm because there would be a volcano in once in a while you know up through the mountains as if there was a burst of gas and flame from somewhere - we could see those from our door.

BM: You'd actually see volcanoes?

EF: Oh yes. Away over, far away over.

BM: You saw Mt. Baker then?

EF: Yes, Mt. Baker.

BM: You saw it actually smoke?

EF: Right behind was Mt. Benson which originally had a dent of a little hole at the top you know showing that it had bin an old thing years ago. There was quartz found around and rocks which proved that that had bin an volcano somewhere. Yes, that's how Nanaimo got started. In places it was hilly you'd have to go around you know and we had what was called the hospital hill, they had to go straight up and then all the streets were going down. Commercial went downtown. Then we were on Esplanade and it was waterfront and that continued on over to what they called the Townsite. Our number was 21 Esplanade one of the first lots ya see.

BM: What do you remember as a child the kind of things your mother went through when your father was working at the mines?

EF: Oh well, we were just little tots playing around. I went to a kindergarten and it was nearby it was just up the hill and I was 5 going on 6. And Mrs. Seaton in her home had this little kindergarten and my father had already taught me how to go 1,2,3,4 on my fingers 5,6,7,8,9,10. I knew all that before I went to school. Then the addition.

BM: Was it a one room schoolhouse? or was it larger?

EF: Well it was kind of a large room in what we called the Good Templars Hall but it was so far away. The scenery ou was noted to be the best on the coast because there was Gabriola and then the Indian ranch was further down island. The natives, and there were only 4 of the real old Indians left on the ranchery as they called it when I was a little girl.

BM: What do you remember about the Indians? Was there bad feelings about them like in the pictures?

EF: Oh no. They liked the white man's clothes. Old Mary learned how to talk a little from the English you know. She was going around with high heel shoes one day and clothes on of all kinds and my mother says Mary, Mary take those off your feet. And she say oh I like it they're nice the whitemen's shoes.
BM: Do you remember much about the other ethnic groups like the Chinese?

EF: Oh yes they had the Chinese.

BM: Where was the Chinatown?

EF: Behind 183.

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EF: Was 6 feet across, now you picture a tree being that big how high would that go up?

BM: It must be really high.

EF: And then the forestry started and for every tree, a large tree that was to be taken out to be milled to be cut up they planted a new one, a little one and that's how forests were made into the present day.

BM: When you were a little girl, did you ever go around the coal mines?

EF: Oh yes, they were just to the right of us. The first one, Number One mine was right within a block and a half and the old manager, who was one of the directors, Mr. Robins, he had a pointed lot, it went like that to a point to the width of 2 lots and then beyond that was Number One mine.

BM: Was he a nice man, this Mr. Robins?

EF: Oh very nice.

BM: So he was in charge of the mine?

EF: Well, he was one of the original directors, one of the original men who put money in to continue.

BM: Did you ever sneak down into the mines or anything?

EF: I didn't have to sneak, I was taken down.

BM: Tell me about that, what was it like down there?

EF: Well, they had what is called a cage and you went in and this was after the original digging on the surface was all over but the Indians did that. That's where our names all came from. Nanoose and Cowichan. And when the mine first started ya see they had the levels where they could walk out in case of danger, but they this cage fixed up, you stood in it and went down ya see 52 feet - that's about 3 times as high as this ceiling is now. Oh it wasn't considered much in those days, it was only a minute or 2 to go down. You got to the bottom, they called that the face and the different levels right off this way ya see and the coal was brought in. They used to have all kinds of animals bringing the coal in you know, horses, not cows of course, but horses and then it went on and on until... (inaudible 34... started.

BM: Was what down there? Was it really dark and everything?

EF: Well the miners wore caps on with the red lights on. They put oil in a little thing and it stuck on their head in the first place. Then of course the flashlights came in. When they went into the mines, the old old old mine was 52 feet down and the levels went off, well that coal was used and then it went further up the island you see. But then somebody invented the safety lamp because well one man - the first big explosion in Nanaimo, some old gentleman had a pipe and he took his matches and he went to light his pipe to have a smoke while he was resting and it was 5 minutes to six in the evening - we heard the thunderous sounds from our home.

BM: What year was that?

EF: Oh well I was 1888 - that would be in the 1911 or 12 I think. And we were going up

BM: So this explosion was 1888?

EF: Yeh well mother heard the and the ground shook like it was a earthquake, just bricks fell down off some of the peoples' chimneys and everybody ran screaming, 'what's the matter what's the matter'. 'There's an earthquake or something'. Oh they were all frightened, running crying, kids crying. Mother said now sit down children until the excitement all we were on our own front steps. Sit still now and then we'll get the direction where this is happening and it was to the right of where we lived so we looked up a block. And everybody was running and let's go out. She said let's keep away until it all dies down.
EF: Was that Number One?

EF: That was Number One's first explosion and it was one of the miner's sitting having his lunch, lit a match to have a bit of a smoke while he was waiting for his charge to go off and he went up with it.

BN: Do you remember the commotion, did it go on for days?

EF: Oh yes, terrible, the crying and the weeping and the farms and the teams, you know they had rescue teams going up and down and had to search through all the levels. My father was an original help man and he was old by that time and he couldn't go down for any mine rescue but mine rescue teams had been formed of some of the other men. It was so many years ago. But that was early times, when the explosion happened well then they had to close the old mine and they came out through Protection Mine. The miners had the lunch bucket, a large thing like so it had a handle and it lifted out the inside, you know the liquids were in the bottom and the sandwiches were in the top. But the Indians they made their own baskets out of the reeds and they went around with those baskets and they sold fish, clams and all that and then all the other things started. Sawmills and fisheries and stores. Everywhere a few people were living together a store would start up. My uncle had one. His name was James Young and William he always called it. He had a top clerk named Stacol and gave up his to Stacol and Cowie Cowie was an old Nanaimo too, the boys you know. They worked that little store too until it closed. They got too old to - I really don't know now.

BN: What kind of things did they sell in the stores besides Indian baskets?

EF: Groceries. Oh yes, Mrs. Rowe's store up on the end of, you know the Indians only had a block to come up from there ranch and she had all kinds of Indian stuff in there.

BN: Did they sell anything else?

EF: They would take the tobacco tin, dry the grasses, colour them with their own way of dyeing you know and weave them all in with the lid on. We had one of those. My father had one of those given to him. And then he had other relics like coral and clam shells brought up from way down, 52 feet down.

BN: Did you ever go under the water to Protection Island when you were taken to the mine?

EF: Oh yes, they had, oh it was all open then and they the coal cars coming but there were horses and mules they had.

BN: Did they keep the mules down inside the mine?

EF: They were in the stable right at the bottom of the cage as they called it.

BN: Did they used to think that was funny, keeping them way underground all the time?

EF: No, we all accepted it as you know it was the way of life. Mr. Madill made his money shoeing the horses. We didn't have very bad winters in Nanaimo, just occasionally snow would come late ya know and then we all had our little sleighs and could sleigh a couple of blocks.

BN: Did you remember the winters being mild or cold?

EF: Mild there would only be a cold patch maybe late in March. March winds came along.

BN: Did you ever remember the bay freezing over?

EF: Yes it did one time. It was frozen down over what you call the grain you know behind the post office there. It froze just enough to, you could walk on it, there was no skating. Skating and that was on the smaller ponds out in the five acres place.

BN: So you know the winters were about the same as they are now?

EF: Oh yes, very mild. Very mild ones. I only remember a heavy snowfall came when I was a little girl still going to school, 10 or so then and it was just a little higher than this table and oh that wasn't much, 3 feet you see. And the miners were going to work and those going to work would walk along and made a little trail along the edge of the sidewalk. Oh we kids thought that was just fine, playing around in the snow and making little snowhouses and crawling around. And then the 141 began and the boys would go and steal this 142 out of the gardens. Well yes, skiing yes, ya see, one one each foot and the ski sticks as they called them would go along on hills. We just crossed the street to the beach.

BN: Did you ever swim in the ocean?
EF: Oh did we ever swim in that salt water, I should say so. And my aunt let a little dog who would let us go and we'd get out you know and just get started and he'd grab my bathing suit and haul me out so we made a joke of it. Then we all said fun little Toodles when he wasn't in we could fool around ourselves.

BM: Did you every swim anywhere else rather than the oceans. Did you ever go up to maybe Harewood Dam area?

EF: Oh I've bin there, no we never swam there. There was Nanaimo Lakes they were fresh water lakes. The old original director, Mr. Robins had a pointed lot in the front there and Mr. Robins lived there, he was an old old gentleman and then of course he passed on.

BM: Do you remember any other mine disasters?

EF: Let me see, well Nanaimo, and Ladysmith. I think there were several and there were lots of ah people injured at the same time you know gas flowing out and men getting injured in that way. Every kind of industry there was there were accidents and that sort of thing. But we had the rocks and the bits of stuff that the old Indians had brought up from way down, way down low and we kept all those until my sister-in-law came to live in the house after I left and she threw the whole thing out. There was a fungus off a tree, a large fan like, you know grew out on the side of one of the trees, somebody gave it to my father, that went too. Oh she was miserable my sister-in-law. She wouldn't be friendly at all. She said, I'll own this place some day. How are you going to get my half. She said you don't own half. I said, oh yes I do. So I said you'll have to go down to the courthouse and it'll cost you money too. Go into the hooks. Oh I don't care I'll spend the money. Cost her $5.00 just to ask the questions. Oh I had a great laugh over that, see what ya get.

BM: Did your brother ever work in the mines?

EF: No just on the surface. He wasn't old enough ya know and he went to school - we all went to school.

BM: Did your parents encourage you to get a good education?

EF: Yes, my father was wonderful. Yes, he could do mental arithmetic like I don't know what.

BM: How far through school did you and your brother go?

EF: Right through high school. Then you had to make out for a trade after that you see. And he took up electric you know electricity.

BM: Did anyone ever go to college? Or university?

EF: Well, no in those days you see they didn't need to and I went through music actually piano and pipe organ at the church.

BM: Was church an important function? Very important in the community?

EF: Yes, there was Presbyterian, Methodist and Catholic, Lake Indian Mission.

BM: What was the most dominant?

EF: Well, they joined together, the Presbyterians and the Methodists joined and made the United Church and the Catholic, they worshiped the pope you see. It was pope with them and it was the Lord Jesus or the Holy Spirit with the other people, they didn't believe in having a person as pope, that was Catholic. Oh the arguments and the carry-ons there used to be. And my people they came from the East and one of the, oh what was his name, I don't remember being only a little girl, I only knew the name was McArel. That was my mother's name. McArel.

BM: So they came from back East, did they come from Nova Scotia?

EF: Nova Scotia. Cape Breton, that was the originals you know. Oh I've been across Canada and home by the other way, Montana, Saskatchewan. You know the road went zig-zag until it all went ...and then I divided on the 49th parallel. The governments began then, then they racked about who owned this and that. It went right through the middle of the 3 lakes. The Great Lakes they called them. Then there had to be a great, where are they going to divide these lakes. Michigan then was American, Ontario and Superior were Canadian. That was old geography. And then Cape Breton over on the east coast was situated just something similar to B.C. and Vancouver Island. That was another royalty. And South America and the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal. Oh I remember all those and the old Indian races, I can remember that so well.

BM: So these Indian races, what happened?

EF: Well, they built their canoes out of a cedar tree and they paint them and they
EF: chiselled the insides out you know and then they'd paint the outside with tar and something that water wouldn't go in you know they stole stuff from the company and all that. And they had a way of boiling up this tar or whatever it was to make stuff to smear their boats with and then they'd put on the whiteman's paint, black.

BM: Did you ever go into an Indian canoe?

EF: Oh yes, lots. The Indian races were something to see. They'd come from Cowichan and from North and all the way down behind the post office. And they when it was time to go, the shot would go off and they'd start and they'd paddle, the women too you know and the ones on the beach "go it Nanaimo". We just nearly died laughing at them. "go it Nanaimo and Cowichan come on and they'd paddle around there and go all the way around you know and then back and then the shot would go off. Then they got some little kind of a prize. Some white...

BM: Did Nanaimo ever come in first?

EF: Oh Nanaimo Indians, oh my yes. Nanaimo, Cowichan. Then the timber you see started. There was one great big tree on the way to Alberni it was 6 feet at the base. We had four large maple trees in our garden and my father took the two outside ones cuz the branches went over the fence. A lot of property to them you know and he had to take those 2 out you know. All the time I was growing up we had 2 big maple trees in our back yard. Two swings going yeh.

BM: Can I ask you when you met your husband?

EF: Oh we all grew up in the same town and yes that was Harry Freeman. His father had been an old sea captain then retired. Any my father was interested in the water and he copied the Indian's way of making a boat and rafts and all this and sails. Mother's canvas was made at home and put up the framework and then the ropes hold it up in the boat. That was all made square but it looked like it wasn't when it was let down with the ropes. When I was a little girl I used to go in the sailboat with my father.

BM: When did you marry Harry?

EF: That was, oh I was 13 and he was 30. Oh that's a few years ago now.

BM: Was he a coal miner?

EF: No he wasn't, his father was a seaman.

BM: Oh yes. What did he do for a living then?

EF: He just studied everything about the water and how the town grew and all that but he wasn't an actual miner at all no.

BM: What was his occupation?

EF: Well, I don't know what you'd call it now. We all went to school anyway and passed and that. Oh just the general knowledge of everything.

BM: Did he work for the city?

EF: No, he lived across the five acres lots in a nice little home, for a time. Of course there was so much to study and all these funny names, Cowichan and Nanaimo and Comox and Parksville you know it was all Indian and then the white names began to come in. My name was Martelle, it was French Canadian. My father, my brother he spelled it with one L - Martel and I married Harry Freeman. Harry Neville Freeman and they lived down on Watt Street just past the Catholic Church on the top part. And the water works was opposite their house. Well Haslam saw mill had started by that time but there was one old stump left on the road between Nanaimo and Alberni that was 6 feet across - that's the stump so that was meant, I think it was a cedar and that must have been a tremendous tree. There were signs of the explosions even up on little mountain there were rocks and things that were found that must have come from down below. That was how the old town started many years ago.

BM: Do you remember the strike, the big strike before the first world war?

EF: Yes, was there ever. And then there was those who wouldn't go to war, deserters you know they wouldn't they didn't believe. My father didn't believe in having wars and going out and shooting other men. He said that isn't going to settle any controversy at all.

BM: What do you remember about this strike? The attitude of the people and the workers?

EF: Well those who wanted more money were in favour. That's how the old town started. The unions started this strike business.
BM: What about the unions? What was your father's attitude towards the union?

EF: He didn't like them at all. He belonged to Summet Lodge and that was kind of a gentlemen's place where you're going to join together you know, masons and do kind works if possible and all that sort of thing. Oh yeh, my father was a real old timer.

BM: Of this strike, do you remember what the union members did to other people that worked?

EF: Oh they called them scabs and they tried to stop them from going to work, put picket line up so they just had to close for a time till they got over all this rubbish. Oh I remember the strikes though as far as I can remember, I was a little girl. But I went to school and of course we didn't have to have strikes of teachers and I went right clean through the 9th grade and then high school. But I had learned, my father was a wiz at arithmetic and then of course we knew French. Parlez-vous Francais? And we learned all that before we went to school.

BM: Was there a lot of violence, like these strike...?

EF: Oh my yes. Oh yes. Some of the miners you know would be picketing as they called it. Wouldn't let anybody go down and then the men had to come up from there and to get out through the picket line. Oh it was really terrible. Oh for weeks that nonsense went on.

BM: Did they go around breaking windows and things?

EF: Oh did they ever. Oh yes, they didn't get to our place probably because. My father kept good watch on it but they'd go out to people's houses and stone the windows. Oh yes it was very bad. The Chinese were the labourers and some kids went up there and set Chinatown on fire to stop them from working.

BM: Why didn't they want them to work?

EF: Oh, because, they were called...The strike was on, everybody was supposed to stop.

BM: They wouldn't stop?

EF: They had to. you know people had to have the Chinese had although my father we didn't need anything from the Chinese people at all. And when there was a strike on we just ah mother would just tend to the cooking, she always had a good supply of flour and sugar and eggs and we had chickens. And we could live you see without bothering with the strikes. Of course the farmers went in you know - you could buy meat you know, lamb and beef and anything like that from the farmers themselves.

BM: What was your opinions you think of the miners? Did you think highly of them?

EF: Oh, in those days they were just considered ordinary labourers. Nobody worried about them at all. In Chinatown you see they had - it was up from our place about 4 blocks up and they were open all night, gambling and carrying on and you could hear them you know. You could hear the Indians bohoho with their paddles you know. Yes they'd have parties all night up there in Chinatown. Oh I remember my parents and my brother - don't you dare go near the Chinatown and mothers says we'll go up a block or two and hear them shouting and singing and then come home.

BM: Do you remember anything about bars? Did you ever go in the bars?

EF: No kids weren't allowed in them.

BM: No I mean when you were older?

EF: Oh no. No, no my mother made mine at home and then she made a ginger ale and grape wine. Oh no, my father never got pie-eyed as we say.

BM: Was there any crime in Nanaimo that you can remember?

EF: Yes. Thefts and crime. There were children stolen and fights.

BM: Who would steal the children?

EF: Well, all different people like and sold them.

BM: Were these Chinese children?

EF: Well, I don't know them all foreigners. The Cowichan Indians and natives and we had the, they were all natives you know down in Cowichan, Duncan and so on.

BM: I understood they once had a red light district in Nanaimo.

EF: Oh they did, it was called Fraser.

BM: Do you remember anything about it?
EF: Oh yes, they were pretty wild. They drank and carried on till they didn't know what they were doing. Police used to patrol through there all the time you know at night. And of course, we were growing up we had to be in bed by 9:00. Boys used to go around wondering around at night after the curfew went you see. But at my home, my parents kept strict watch on us, bed at 9:00.

BM: So they weren't thought very highly of?

EF: Who, the bad ones? Oh no.

BM: In the red light district?

EF: Oh that was a bad ones, that was a terrible place. We'd go out in the gardens, what was the name. Nanaimo's first show of exhibits was held in the end of a little car - a train car, it was situated down here, one of the fill in came and the green was over this way.
Bar they called them and the Indians even went up the Manson's Store and then somebody began bootlegging to the Indians - that's where the little boys ya see made a lot of money. Yeh.

(Other woman) - My grandfather went to work on the bicycles - he did that in his spare time he was on the railway - he's an engineer and then on Sunday they went to church all day, and then they'd take their bike. I can remember those old Indian potlatches.

BM: Do you have any specific story that you remember that was really funny or interesting?

EF: I have. They used to give the Indians to live in their own homes and this old Mary put on everything that was given so she had one long down and then a shorter one and then another one on top and then a bussell on top of all that and I was going to town one day and there was a really long string behind her and I stepped on it, I was only a little girl then about 12, and she turned around, 'who do that'. I said Mary look you haven't got your clothes on right. "oh no she said I didn't know. I gathered it up and here she had it all wrong with the longest one underneath and then the top one and then the other one and somebody had given her an old bussell thing and it was on top of the whole business. I said Mary you can't go downtown like that What's the matter it's good whitemen's clothes. I said no you come home, I take you home she went back up cuz the Indian ranch was not far. Mother I thought she'd have a fit. She said what have you got there Inez? I said well this is what you would call a mother munch. She says take off your stuff and I'll pick out what you got, put it on right and then give you some more. She had to take everything off, give it all back, well then she brought samples and pins they found on the beach and for instance way high up there were clam shells that the beach had been a way out somewhere else. And there was the big tree going to Alberni and it was 6 feet at the butt at the bottom, you know where it was cut down. And that started the mills, and there was Haslam's mill and Coburn's something.

BM: What do you remember about the mills?

EF: Well, the saw mills went down through the town between Town and Townsite. And the mines went from from Number 1 underneath the ground through Protection and on over to Newcastle and it was an 8 foot seam and after it was all taken out the geologist said there would be cold air forever but people would not need it by that time. And sure enough they haven't. Now you see the electric stoves came in and gas but my mother always used the old old stoves.

BM: They're talking about mining it again.

EF: Well, you know, that's the end of the coal mining. As far as I, cuz you see I grew up and went to modern schools and of course we all spoke a bit of French we had. You could have your choice of languages and we had enough touch up of Latin and French in school. But my name is Spanish - Inez. It is Inez Marjelle which is French Canadian.

BM: So are you French Canadien then?

EF: That would be I suppose, that's when I was a little girl, I don't know how names ever got around the town.

BM: So your maiden name was Martelle?

EF: Martelle. That's all I know. Elizabeth Inez Martelle and my mother's name was Campbell.

BM: Is there anything else that sticks in your mind about coal mining and things related.

EF: Yes, where we lived, the old Number One was to the right of us. As we went along thrice we cut up sideways, Pinson went up this way. We went along to old Number One which eventually was all filled in. We remembered the days when the miners and the men who worked in the office and that sort of thing passed our place and then cars came in you see. The old mine was covered over, filled in with rubbish and stuff and it fenced around and then it came up on Protection on the other side, that was under the bay. Well, there was enough of that 8 foot seam going on that nobody known how far up under the gulf it is. Whether it's still there or not. There was the great big caves, they called it the caves where the winter storms come in, washed away these long thing oh it was twice as long as this room and one little bit of tougher rock or something was right in the middle hanging over and you could go in there and walk around. After they began building things properly. But Nanaimo's trees as I said this one big stump 6 foot at the base - we had 4 big maples they were wild trees too in our yard and then they got to be so thick they shaded too much. My father cut down the 2 outside ones.

BM: What do you remember about parades? Were they big?
EF: Oh the parades. The injuries they have the canoes. We all went down to the post office to see the Indians and their canoes and having their races.

BM: Did you ever have Mayday parades?

EF: Yes. The town with their funny little bands they used to have the silver cornet band and that was a great day for everybody the Indians included.

BM: What did you used to do on that holiday? Go to the parade first?

EF: The parade was usually early, and we'd have lunch downtown or go home for lunch if you wished. They usually ended with a dance in the evening. We had, my father had a sailboat and I would go with him and then as I grew older and got tired of the sailboat we used to sit down behind the post office on the bank there and watch the boats all around.

BM: Well, is there anything else you can think of?

EF: The Indians would take a silver dollar and beat it all down to make a bracelet and then the scraps and odds and ends would make a ring. And I had all these rings too. In the early days we had bicycle races and the horse races. The water used to freeze — where they had Nanaimo River, Nanaimo River used to freeze over one time and there was skating on the river and the old lakes you know. When there was a frost and the moisture and it turned to rain there'd be huge icicles.

BM: I could ask some more about the disasters. What do you remember about those?

EF: Yes, there was one, it was all over, like thunder. Everybody ran out ya know, what is that, what is that and then after the smoke cleared away the men went down, my team went down, which my father was one and they had to have their safety maps with them and they crawled around they found where the it started. They found the matches and the pipe this man was lying dead there. During his little interval lunch he had taken them out of pocket. They used to come in block if you remember the matches all came in little blocks. He had one of these blocks of matches only a little faint one but it was enough to set up the explosion. He was found dead there bucket in his hand he was just going to come out.

BM: Was there a lot of people killed in that one?

EF: There were 34 miners killed and, a big excitement, carry on ya know. I was home from school that day, getting on towards supper time when all at once this shake of the house came and it sounded like thunder. Goodness sake, we're gonna have a terrible storm. The shop's door came down and that was all. Then the people began running, running and mother went out to — what's the matter. There's a fire somewhere, look at the people all running. So she said come in and don't give in to that mess, we don't know where it is. It was all clearing up and then my father came home. Did you hear that noise and rumbling — he said an explosion underground 52 feet down and I had an Uncle Will who was at work — he was a machinist and had been fixing a pump and as he was coming home he passed a place where the miners were still there and one of them was found with his matches in his pocket and they thought that's where it came in he lit the match and away went the first big explosion. So they filled in the old mine. I can remember I was only a little girl. They trucks and things went up, all kinds of rubbish and stuff down there and it all cleared over and put a fence around it. Then down at Departure Bay there was another odd thing. There was a fence around a little spot there, a kind of a hole in the middle and somebody told my father that that was called a sinking sand. As fast as they would dump stuff down in that hole and that was still there last I remember. They had these explosions occasionally in the mine you know. The miners would forget and go to light the pipe. And matches were forbidden. They'd sneak em down to have a little smoke.

BM: I guess they wouldn't know better.

EF: That's what caused the explosion that killed my uncle, ya see who had gone down to repair something or other and as he was coming out the explosion happened just as he was about to go on the cage to come out. It was only about 3 minutes to up at that time. And then he was found right there stepping onto the cage. (204) By the time that mother and I said, she said, my there's a big noise, I wonder what's wrong. I wonder if Uncle Will is there and sure enough he was just as he went to get on the cage.

BM: Was that a sad moment?

EF: Oh, terrific. The whole town wept and carried on over that. Terrible! Then the funerals, you know, the masons, the Oddfellows...

BM: I've heard that some of the disasters, the funerals carried on for days.
Oh yes, well that part of the mines goes off there then they had 216 goin down old Number One. They had to go across on the scowl and down Protection and then in turn that got all worked out. But then my father he said they never will come to the end of that, coals will be under the gulf somewhere down there. They never will and they used to take their ashes and dumps and dump everything and go down and then there was one place, but it was fenced around and if you just threw anything as big as your hand, a chunk of paper that weighs a little bit, in the middle of that it would slowly go down. They kept a fence around it and little kids weren't allowed to go near it. But I was older by that time and went with my father to have a look at this place and that's where how I came to see it. And then there were things brought up, that proved that the land led the water was all under there someplace. The clams and the things from the beach - peace of tree. Ossifies he called it or something, a hard old tree. Then there was this great big tree - 6 foot stump on the way out to Alberni.

Your husband Harry, can you tell me exactly what he used to do - did he work for the coal company?

No. Yes, for the company but he took up mining, surveying.

So he would go find out where the coal was?

Yes. Prospecting actually they called it you know and that's what he did. He worked for the government.

Do you remember any stories he told you?

Oh, it was my father that had the stories. Harry was one of the younger ones ya see. There's lots of funny things. There was the big tree for instance on way to Alberni - you could drive through it. It made a place to go through and a car could go through that way on the highway too. So in the years before that, and that Comox is an Indian name and NanOOSE and Cowichan - they're all Indian names. The Indians were pretty keen after money, they wouldn't take paper money at all, they wouldn't have paper money like a dollar bill or a five dollar bill. They wouldn't have that. Row's store, ya know they sold groceries said oh it's surprising how the Indians live. Of course there was always the Bay and the salmon and herring and that sort of thing. Some of the old Indians didn't eat meat at all. Mrs. Seaton the kindergarten teacher had 6 children when I was a little girl and she taught music and a,b,c's. From the time I left home I was in 2nd grade through goin into 3rd grade. You see I learned Parlez-vous Francais. You said Oui for that. I spoke French quite fluently when I was little. French - Canadian.

Did you ever go to France?

Yes, Paris. London, London was 5 or 6 big cities together. That was before airplanes begun. Song(312). I was out at a do one time and it was a ladies tea ya know, and she'd taken her knitting with her and I was goin with Harry Shrim and he was a real wag, he was always pulling off some. And she sits down on the chair next to me. So when she was gone he picked it up and he started to knit and of course you know he has it all zig-zag. She came back, 'whose had my knitting'. I don't know, what did you leave it there for? 'You did it'. Now she says I gotta pull it all out.

Was it your husband that did that?

Yes. She pulled it all out. Well, he was only young then, full of the dickens he was.

What kind of pranks did he do?

Well, anytime anybody wanted to know where the townsite was he sent them down the other way. Oh, he was noted for that. Everybody said, don't have anything to do with that Freeman kid, don't ask him anything. Oh dear, I'll never forget those days it was so funny. And he had an older sister ya see. She was married and her man got killed in the first world war. There used to be a lot of trouble with the Indians you know - they fought like the dickens to keep the whites off their property.

What kind of fighting did the Indians do? On the property?

Well, they just guarded it and wouldn't let anybody come in. They had night men to watch.
BM: Did they ever cause the white people any harm?

EF: Oh yes, some went down but they wouldn’t allow anybody to any foot on their land at all. That’s where we got Cowichan and Nanoose around – they’re Indian names. Nanaimo, well, I don’t know what that was. Spanish or something. Then there was a strange thing, a Swedish family lived out on Fry street and the little boy was Imo Poikenen. Now you wouldn’t know would you if you heard that name, you’d think it was a crazy name like we used to think. They didn’t name some of the streets you see after the alderman of the day.

BM: You said that your father was on city council?

EF: Yes.

BM: Who was mayor at that time?

EF: Bate. Mayor Bate – he was in for seven years.

BM: Your father was an alderman then?

EF: Yes, he was.

BM: What was his name again?

EF: Martelle.

BM: Was he well known and respected?

EF: Yes. Then of course there was only 2 of us, my brother and myself, and my brother’s name was Robert, Robert Archibald.

BM: Do you remember the Dunsmuirs?

EF: Yes, oh yes. I would say so.

BM: Did you ever visit their house?

EF: Yes, oh yes, sure, yes. Everybody knew everybody in those early days.

BM: So you were sort like a higher social class.

EF: I grew up just in native Nanaimo. Yes there was a blind man. Miss Hitchen was blind too and she had a seeing eye dog to go downtown and he could take her to the stores and the Kirks, she could speak you know and say what she wanted. The little dog had a carrying thing on his neck and she could get her little bits of stuff on the way home. He was a seeing eye dog and he’d stop her at the crossing. He knew enough when the traffic was going to see he’d wait until the other side got open and then he took her across. I went right through school, high school and all. You know in the old days teeth were soft and I had so many gold fillings. My mother was a nurse she looked after me.

BM: Can you think of anything else?

EF: Let’s see, what else was there. The Indians wove down baskets, and they carried them on their backs and the little boys took great pleasure in putting something else in their basket, any old thing they could pick up. And the old girl’d say, oh you bad boys. That was all the Indian she knew. Oh there was one old Indian there, he was 104 or something.

BM: What was his name?

EF: Qualicum Tom. You know Qualicum and Nanoose and all the Indian names. Then there was snake .. somebody had found a little garter snake over there on. Gabriola, Jack’s point, John, Jack. (454) And then Hogan’s farm, they came and farmed opposite us, on Gabriola. And then you see the mines. It got worked out under Nanaimo, they just used the cage for men to go up and down on and then that finished and then Protection Island, it lasted for a little while more and that was all underneath ....

BM: How far did Protection Mine go out?

EF: Well they figured it must have run out as far as the Gulf of Georgia but by that time electricity and everything had come.

BM: I mean when they had it dug out, I heard they got as far as Snake Island.

EF: Yes, they did. The levels, as they called em went underneath and as they were completed they’d blow them up.
BM: When you went under the mines did you ever hear the boats go over?
EF: Yes, you could hear it quite plain. There used to be the old Joan to go to Vancouver and there was Protection Island, Newcastle Island.
BM: Did you find it scary going down to the mines?
EF: Oh, we were all used to it. My father took me everywhere with him. My brother was one of the first when the little single airplanes came to town.
BM: A little bi-plane?
EF: Yes, the little fellas, that's the very first ones that came to Nanaimo. Oh yes, it's been quite a study because we had Nanaimo and Ladysmith and Cowichan and NanOOSE, all Indian names.
BM: Ladysmith was named after a South African place.
EF: Yes, well there was a war down in.....
BM: Yes, the Boer war.
EF: Down in South Africa.
BM: Did you ever go to Ladysmith?
EF: Oh yes, it was only 15 minutes ride from Nanaimo.
BM: Did you used to go by horse and buggy?
EF: Oh no. There were the old horse racing but no my brother had a car for us and my father didn't care about riding by that time and my brother started to mend him.
BM: What about entertainment, I heard there was a lot of opera houses here?
EF: Yes.
BM: Did you used to go to the operas?
EF: Yes. Mrs. Dr. Drysdale had a retired operatic soprano and they lived over on townsite. Dr. Drysdale had met her when he was in the same orchestra many years before. And she was 70 years old and she could still hit the high C. I knew her very well.
BM: Did you used to go to the operas?
EF: Oh yes we went to see her. Oh she was still in operas by that time. We never did have these wonderful operas like they had in the cities you know.