MR. ERNIE JOHNSON
INTERVIEWED BY: BERNARD McNICHOLL
TRANSCRIBED BY: HEIDI SCHMITT

BM. This is Bernard McNicholl for the Coal Tyee History Project interviewing Ernie Johnson.

BM. Mr. Johnson, what year were you born?
EJ. 1905.

BM. And were you born in Nanaimo?
EJ. No.

BM. Where were you born.
EJ. Fernie.

BM. Fernie B.C.?
EJ. B.C.

BM. Was that uh, a mining community in itself?
EJ. Strictly mining at that time.

BM. What type of mineral did they mine?
EJ. Coal.

BM. Coal.

BM. Is that where your father and mother were too?
EJ. That's right.

BM. He was a coal miner then was he?
EJ. He was a coal miner.

BM. What was exactly his specific job? Was he uh digger....?
EJ. Fire boss.

BM. Fire boss, uh ha.

BM. So he had a fairly important job so to speak.'
EJ. In those days yes.

EJ. And his job was to go around testing for gas in the mines and making sure that safety regulations were being adhered to.

EJ. That's right and then he did the ( )8

BM. Uh ha, and what prompted him to come out to Nanaimo?
EJ. Climate I would say. And the fact that there was coal mines here.

BM. Uh ha. He was just attracted to a more , a better living environment.
EJ. Ya, that's right.

BM. And what year did your family come out to Nanaimo?
EJ. 1905.
BM. 1905, so they came out the year...
EJ. I was 5 months old.
BM. And where abouts in Nanaimo did you settle in?
EJ. Gillespie Street.
BM. Gillespie Street.
EJ. Down dear the No.1 mine.
BM. Uh ha, and did your father get a job in No.1?
EJ. He worked pretty well in all the mines, over the period of years.
His life was coal mining.
BM. And which did he start in, which mine when he came here? Did he approach somebody for a job.
EJ. I would say Protection was the one he worked in the longest. Well it was coupled up with No.1 it was near down below. Two shafts and one mine the Protection Mine and the No.1 mine were side by side.
BM. Uh ha. And do you remember anything about the um 1912 to 1913 um .... coal strike.?
EJ. Yes.
BM. Akind you would have been I guess, what would it make you about 8 years, 8 or 7 years old.
EJ. 7, 8, and 9.
BM. What do you remember as a child about this strike. I mean you wouldn't really know what implications were surrounding it, but you would have been an observer.
EJ. I don't know whether I should tell you.
My Dad worked all through the strike. And he was frowmed upon. All he was doing was down there was keeping the pumps going to keep the water out because the mines were water, so that when the strike was over, so he would have, so the men would have a job to go back to. And uh, we were going to school at the time, and uh, the allot of the school kids had no use for us.
BM. So basically um your father was he...
EJ. He was an alderman then.
BM. ... was he in some way attached to management.? 
EJ. Yes.
BM. And his basic concern, I don't think it was, what they um, you know they use a term but I don't want to use it, you know, Strike Breaking....
EJ... that's right.
BM... seems to be a little more better than the word that they used. Um,
EJ. I wouldn't say he was strike breaking in this respect, that he wasn't producing one ounce of coal.

BM. No, basically what he was doing was....

EJ. ...keeping the mine open.

BM. ...keeping, keeping the conditions safe.

EJ. Safe for the men, if they ever settled the strike, went back to work, and there was a mine to work in.

BM. Uh hum. So his purpose was not anything like you know like being mean or anything like that.

EJ. It was a job somebody had to do.

BM. It was a job that he had to do, and he was more concerned about making sure that conditions remain safe, so that things could um you know run smoothly or whatever when, when you know that the inevitable did occur.

EJ. Yeah That's right, that's right.

BM. And do you remember anything about um, the rioting of people or things like that?

EJ. Well, yes I remember some of it from up in Extension and one thing or another.

BM. Did you ever go out to Extension during this time?

EJ. No, no.

BM. You just more of less heard what came in.

EJ. I used to go up to Extension quite a bit, we used to go up in a horse and rig, because we had friends up there that were miners, but that was after, after the strike was finished. After the strike was over.

BM. And do you remember the um, the Militia landing?

EJ. Uh, I... hazel. Yes I remember the Militia.

BM. And were they in, did they camp right in town.

EJ. I couldn't answer that.

BM. I heard they camped right next to the Post Office.

EJ. That could be, right next to the Post Office used to be the jail.

BM. Uh hum. I there any specific event that um sticks into your mind, that you think may be important to know, or something like that.

EJ. Well when the Oscar blew up, I was going to school.
BM. Was this during this particular time also?

EJ. It was, when I was, well ya it would be, it wouldn't be at the time of the strike, mostly likely it would be after the strike. And uh, it knocked just about all the windows out of the houses, and stores in Nanaimo, and plus the school, and uh, it blew up on the other side of Protection Island, and it was loaded with powder of some type.

BM. So do you remember.....

EJ. Scared the stuffing out of everybody.

BM. Did you hear the noise and everything?

EJ. Well ya, I was in school.

BM, & EJ. All the windows broken in the class room.

EJ. Oh ya.

BM. Were you next to the window?

EJ. No, some of the people got cut, that some of the youngsters got cut that were next to the window.

BM. Um Hum.

EJ. Some of the people downtown got cut. By the store windows.

BM. So, so you um, did anyone think that it was a war suddenly starting up, or something.

EJ. Had no idea what it was.

BM. Um Hum. They thought even maybe it was a mine explosion.

EJ. It was noisier.

BM. Just really, really scared.

EJ. In the middle of the day, a terrific bang and that was it and rattled the old town real well.

BM. Something like a little bit like Duke Point going off all the time.

EJ. Well I went downtown, instead of going home to... which I should have done from school, I went downtown to see all the broken windows and that, and I got it in the neck when I did come home, for not coming straight home, they thought something might have happened to me.

BM. Uh ha, And um do you remember any other um accidents or mine explosions maybe that happened in your memory.

EJ. Yes, but uh, not that I could really comment on, I mean there was lots of fellows that got killed in the mine, friends of mine, and one thing or anothers and uh, but uh, to go in it in any detail, uh no I couldn't.

BM. And um what school did you go to as a child?

EJ. The South Ward.
BM. South Ward School.

BM. And did you go to a different school after that.

EJ. You went to some many classes then, and then you went to Quesnell School or...

BM. Uh hum. And what grades were South Ward? Were they 1 to 7 or something.

EJ. The grades were different then to what we have today. And that uh, I just forget flat uh... you went up until you went to the Central School or Quesnell School you were getting up into where you were heading for entrance to go to, to pass into the high school.

It was a #2 begginners school, South Ward.

BM. And did you ever get to high school?

EJ. No. I left in ( )#90. I left before, I left before I went to high school, I left went to work in the mines.

BM. So you basically um quit about grade 8 or 9 or so to speak, or was it...

BM? EJ. It was way before (Entrance?)( ) they used to call it I think it was 4th reader. It was run in readers, in 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th. It was 4th reader when I quit to go and work and work in the mine.

BM. And did your parents want you to work in the mines or did it not matter to them?

EJ. No they didn't want me to go.

BM. They wanted you to get educated.

EJ. But I wanted to work in the mines.

BM. Why did you want to work in the mines?

EJ. Cause all my friends worked there.

BM. So you just basically sorta followed the crowd at that time.

EJ. That's right.

BM. And did you um, have to um talk to your parents and get permission to work in the mine?

EJ. Oh no they give me permission and ( I wasn't fed up with school)? and uh, I went to the mine, I went and worked at Harewood.

BM. Oh you worked in Harewood.

BM. And how did you go about getting your first job in the mine, did you have to talk to somebody?
EJ. No, no you went down to the office, the company's office uh, on Fry Street, and they used to go down and see two or three office workers and they used to, you come back every day almost and they would tell you, there may be a job tomorrow, come back again, and come back tomorrow and, finally they told me well there was a job at Harewood for me.

BM. Uh hmmm.

EJ. So I went to work at Harewood on the Pickin Tables.

BM. Did you enjoy working on the pickin tables?

EJ. Yes.

BM. Was it a tedious job?

EJ. Oh not really tedious no, I worked the (114) and when they closed that down, I went to work in the pickin tables in No. 9, that was the big mine...

BM. Well how old were you when you first started?

EJ. 14.

BM. 14. Um, wasn't, wasn't it illegal to start before the age of 16?

EJ. It wasn't have been.

BM. And um, what was your pay scale? I mean, I mean how much were you making working at the picking tables at Harewood?

EJ. I'm just guessing, but I, we got about a dollar ninety a day. ($1.90)

My work's wages would be 35, would be uh, around 35 dollars. We worked a 6 days on morning shift, and 5 days on afternoon shift, on the pickin tables.

BM. And um, after that closed down, you went to work in No. 91 to work on the picking tables, did anywhere in your working in the mine, did you advance to a different job, or move to a different position?

EJ. Well ya, I went from the picking tables uh, down under the washers where they washed all the rock out of the coal this was slack and ( ) and various smaller grades of coal, finer coal, and we washed it all on the washers, I worked there for quite a few years.

BM. Did you ever go directly down in the mines, or...

EJ. Oh ya, I was down Protection, and down No. 91 and down in Harewood, down Reserve Mine, uh, just on sightseeing tours. Not to work.

BM. You just went down there to look. Just sightseeing, not to work.

EJ. I would go down with my Dad in Protection and No. 91 and I went down with uh
a fellow by the name of Harry ( ) (starts with "A")
in Reserve Mine.

BM. Was that Harry (Alsof)(sp?)()

EJ. Ya, Harry Alsof.

BM. And um, what was your opinion of going down the mine, I guess y maybe
goink down more as looking, your attitude would be completely different
it would be of excitement more than nervousness would it?

EJ. Well, you got quite a thrill out of it. Even going down in the cage.

BM. Protection Island cage was a very very notorious cage ... .

EJ. That's right, it broke, the cable broke when I was going to Quesnell
School, about 12 o'clock ten (or fifteen) (?) (were killed.

BM. Did they ever find any negligence in that?

EJ. Not to my knowledge no. It was just uh mishap.

BM. Is that, the cage was very rigid . . .

EJ. ( ) not understandable(?)

BM. . . . cause the shaft wasn't ( ) #149 straight.

EJ. Uh, my Dad, he was, he gone done there was about the 4th cage or 3rd
cage, that broke, he had gone done on one of the earlier ones, and he was
waiting at the shaft bottom when the cage come down, because he was an
oilerman(?), he was checking then going into the places to work. And he
wanted to make sure that ( ) #154 they were all there,
because if somebody wasn't on the job, they you'd sent somebody else to take
it over. He wouldn't know, previous to that he wouldn't know uh, whereabouts
there, there was a man or two off or not.

BM. Uh Hmm, ya it must have been a very you know.

EJ. And I remember one, MMM-MMM I remeber them talking one time about one
fellow who was going on the cage with his pipe, and his pocket, and somebody
spoke to him and said come on get off of here, you can't take your pipe
with you you got to leave it there's a place on the pithead where they used to
leave all their cigarettes and pipes and one thing or another. So he walked
over put his pipe up there, somebody else stepped on the cage and that's the
cage that, that was the cage that went down. It was just by the grace of God
that his pipe was in his pocket and he had to store it.

BM. Uh Hmmm.
EJ. Otherwise he wouldn't of....

BM. The man must have been very uneasy for a few days, just think you know fate.

EJ. That's right, just fate.

BM. Um what was the reason for um not allowing the miners for not smoking in the mine, was there a particular reason?

EJ. Gas.

BM. Gas.

BM. It was very combustible.

EJ. They had already had some bad explosions in the mine, well it, practically every mine on the island had a bad explosion even in Fernie where I come from there were lots of bad explosions and fires.

BM. Had that become part of the way of life at the coal mine or was it?.... the disasters?

EJ. Oh ya that was it, there was a bout 3, 000 people working around No.1 coal mine at one time and they ( )

BM. Do you remember the hustle and the bustle of No.1, was it a very busy almost exciting place?

EJ. Oh ya, very busy. Cage came up and down there, like there was, run, run, run, that was about the size of it.

BM. Was it, um management just forcing people to work, and work, and work....

EJ. No, no, no, no.

BM. Or was it just a very efficient...?

EJ. The fellows enjoyed working and that's the way they were.

BM. And um, Did you ever you know go down into the mine, to work or.? 

EJ. No.

BM. You just stayed at the top surfase. And did you ever go, to the job besides the washer?

EJ. Yes, I worked on the washers and then later on I got a job on the Blacksmith's shop, striking it, in the Blacksmith's shop.
EM. Um could you tell me what striking is in the Blacksmith's shop?

EJ. Well, you have a Blacksmith and he has uh, there's a fire there and they put iron in it, uh, we used to make all the iron with all the mine cars. That is the big ones, the 20 toners. We used to make all the grab irons, the handrails, and footrails, and various parts and pieces and they're all made with uh, a Blacksmith and softens them by heating them and the man that was striking, he was uh, he used a sledge hammer to, to shape the iron that they took out, when it was white hot.

EM. Oh so you would be sitting there with a sledge hammer pounding it flat or into the shape they desired.

EJ. Into the shape that they wanted. Pendant or.. we were just told to.....

EM. Is that very typical?

EJ. AT times it was, it all depends on how big the job was. If if was a big job.....

EM. I would think the hardest thing to make would be rail.

EJ. Oh we never made rails.

EM. Oh.

EJ. Grab irons add thing like that. Steel rails no, there was no way they could make steel rails. They used to cut them and make various things to use. Parts of steel rails for various things, it was just a case for cutting them and burning them, to doing other jobs around the pithead of the mine.

EM. Did you enjoy that job?

EJ. Oh ya, very much.

EM. Did it pay very good?

EJ. Oh not much differenceuh, you might have got oh 30 cents an hour or something like that. 35 cents an hour.

EM. And did you remain in the Blacksmith shop for some time or did you go into different .....

EJ. No, and then I went handling on the locomotives, which is cleaning out the, the fireboxes, or helping the hossler I should say.

EM. Did you say hossler?

EJ. Yes "hossler" (spelled it out)
EJ. And that was when the n locomotives came in at night after they finish there shift, you'd clean all the (clinker) out of the fire, and bank the fire and then take all the ashes and that to the ashbox in the bottom, and clean the front end and...

BM. What are um clinker.

EJ. Clinkers are what's left after the coal the burnt in the firebox.

BM. Oh yes, so its just sorta of ash.

EJ. Sort of a lava.

BM. Oh ya.

EJ. It's really been burnt ot a high degree that just turns almost like the molten glass.

BM. Oh ya.

EJ. And then I, after that I went down the locomotives ( ), and I had 14 years from 26 to 40, or about 26 to about 39 something like that. I had 13 or 14 years on the railroad, firing and breaking in a conductor(?)( )

BM. Well how did you get on to the railroad.

EJ. Now uh, the fellow by the name of Dave Pride. He got killed on a car accident up by the quarterway, and he was working on the railroad. And there was a man ( ) , don't think it was. I'm not sure whether it was Dave Pride that got killed and I got his job, or whether it was another % fell a, in fact I can't think of his name either. But anyways there was uh, a fellow got killed in a car accident out by the Quarterway, and he worked on the railroad and I got his job.

BM. And what was his job.

EJ. His job at the time was brakesmen. But uh.....

BM. Isn't that just um brraking the train of something like that.

EJ. That was switc hing tracks.

BM. Oh I see.

EJ. You put them on different uh......

BM. Is that , is that switching cars is that uh, um, just changing the rails direction.

EJ. Changing, ya, he looked after the switches , he would go to the way house, and uh, the traffic master would give you the orders, you go down the
washers(?)( ) and pick up a trip of ( )$253

and then you say, well I'll put them on the shovel track, or put them on the long track, or put them on the sea wall, and uh, you'd just line up the switches and put them out there, and pack them, ....

BM. So working on the rail, wasn't like working on the railroad but it was the company.....

EJ. Massive railroad.

BM. Company railroad?

EJ. Company railroad, company land.

BM. I'm not thinking like the E&N. type railroad, this would be the one associated with the coal.

EJ. Just coal.

EJ. We were hooked up to the E&N. and we used to pick coal up from the

( )$263 Junction and uh, see the track connected up with the boat that use to come up there by the name of the Canora, it use to take 21,50 ton cars.

BM. The Canora (sp?) it was a railroad.

EJ. It was a railroad barge dealy.

BM. Like the CPR.

EJ. It was side by side instead on behind the other and use d to come in there once or twice a week.

BM. And where would this Canora Boat go to?

EJ. I think they used to take it over to New Westminster, something like that they took it over there to Vancouver but I think it was somewhere around the New Westminster Area. They would load it on to tracks over there and then it would go East, West, North, South wherever they wanted coal.

BM. Who was Nanaimo's biggest customer,? coal, would you have any idea?

EJ. Oh I guess Frisco was one of theirs biggest.

BM. San Francisco.

EJ. A lot of coal went to Frisco in the old days.

BM. Hmm.

EJ. Seattle, Frisco, uh the gas, the gas company in Seattle they had scows in here, where they used come in there real steady, with the coal for the gas company in Seattle.

But Seattle and Frisco was the uh in the old days was tow of their biggies.

Buyers...
BM. And what did you do after you worked on, what was it, the tracks or whatever.

EJ. Train,

BM. Ya.

EJ. Switching tracks, (mumbled), I was on there until uh, I went into the store. I was 39 or 40.

BM. So you started the store in....

EJ. I started in 1919 for the company, and I, oh i had uh, they shut a mine down one time, and I got layed off, along with 2 or 3 other fellows, X in around 1930, and I went to work at the Rock Bouy (?) on Newcastle Island, and then uh, there was an opening coming on the railroad and I held my seigniority and I got back on the railroad, and then I worked there until I went into the store. 39, 40

BM. Would you have been in the coal mines at the time, when the unions started to organize?

EJ. Yes, I used to go to the union meetings.

BM. Uh ha. Was there any problems with management like if you were heard to be an union organizer, or going to union meetings would there be reprimination from the company?

EJ. Well, I don't think it hadn't got started, ... enough to get into much of that. Union had always been going uh, 2 or 3 years I guess I'd been in it no more than 2 or 3 years, when I left them, and they were just starting to get organized. They had one previous to that in '12 but then it all fell through and in 1912, and 1914 deal, and then the union didn't get back till many, many years after that, before they started organizing it.

BM. No, but what I was thinking of um, would the company blacklist you if they ever found out that you were organizing or was it something of in the past for this kind of thing to happen between management and labour?

EJ. No, I don't think they would blacklist, I could be wrong but uh, I was the union representative for the railroad, And I used to go to the union meetings and one thing or another, and uh, ....

BM. What would you say was the main reason for the workers wanting to organize? Was there one particular main goal to achieve that they wanted to um, you know
EJ. Well I think most of them ... same old story, more money.

BM. Just more money, I heard some people say they just wanted to be recognized as an organized body of you know, people. That was their main concern, just sorta like you know um sorta the betterment of themselves, financially, and you know, be more prosperous of something.

EJ. It's a hard question to answer, you'd have to go into that pretty deep. I used to go to these meetings, 2 or 3 guys pretty well run it, ... and uh,

BM. Weren't these organizers or people that came to organize, where did they come from.

EJ. Well most of your people that came up in the management in those days, were either from Scotland for England.

BM. No I mean the two main men that were running these union meetings, were did they...

EJ. Local, local, local men.

BM. And who was the person that was getting you attached to which union, what was the name of this union, affiliation.

EJ. Well it used to be the United Coal Workers.

BM. Uh ha.

EJ. ( ) 349. Office you know.

BM. Did they have their office in Calgary or something?

EJ. No, I think it was pretty well local. It might could have eventually ( )353 those mine workers.

BM. And um what about living conditions, from about when you were a child to about the time you quit in the mines. I mean when you first moved here did you have things like hot and cold running water, sewer, sidewalks, electricity.?

EJ. No we didn't have uh, hot and cold running water, it wasn't too long after that, that we got it, uh, we didn't have sewer, you had a little house way down at the bottom of the lot. What was the name of that (spoken softly) somebody in Eaton's catalogue or something ( )367 that's all there was.

BM. Uh ha.

EJ. You wanted to go to the outhouse, a way you wanted.

BM. With a catalogue.

EJ. Well a catalogue was left in there, and then you used to tear the sheets out of them, and then uh, whatever, whether it was sun shining, rain or snow or what it was, you galloped down the lot and into the little outhouse.
BM. It must have been a little humorous some days.
EJ. That could be too.
BM. It would be worse on hot days though.
BM. And um, what about um, shopping downtown, what facilities did you have for shopping.
EJ. Well that was different story. Then you went into a shop, you went into a store, there was uh.

BM. It must have been a little humorous some days.
EJ. That could be too.
BM. It would be worse on hot days though.
BM. And um... what about um... shopping downtown, what facilities did you have for shopping.
EJ. Well that was different story. Then you went into a shop, you went into a store, there was uh. We had uh Mrs Rose and uh on Haliburton Street uh they had lots of clerks and um you didn't do your own shopping like you do today, a clerk served you for everything, if you had 10 articles you'd tell them what they are, and they would go and get them and bring them down. (Today you shop you only take them out and pay for them.)

But there was no problem shopping.
BM. Was most of the stuff done on credit then?
EJ. There was a lot of credit, 2-week credit.
BM. 2-week credit.
BM. And, were a lot of things delivered to people's houses?
EJ. Oh ya, ya, they had lots of things. Oh I worked for awhile there too.
At a,

BM. It must have been a little humorous some days.
EJ. That could be too.
BM. It would be worse on hot days though.
BM. And um, what about um, shopping downtown, what facilities did you have for shopping.
EJ. Well that was different story. Then you went into a shop, you went into a store, there was uh.

BM. It must have been a little humorous some days.
EJ. That could be too.
BM. It would be worse on hot days though.
BM. And um... what about um... shopping downtown, what facilities did you have for shopping.
EJ. Well that was different story. Then you went into a shop, you went into a store, there was uh. We had uh Mrs Rose and uh on Haliburton Street uh they had lots of clerks and um you didn't do your own shopping like you do today, a clerk served you for everything, if you had 10 articles you'd tell them what they are, and they would go and get them and bring them down. (Today you shop you only take them out and pay for them.)

But there was no problem shopping.
BM. Was most of the stuff done on credit then?
EJ. There was a lot of credit, 2-week credit.
BM. 2-week credit.
BM. And, were a lot of things delivered to people's houses?
EJ. Oh ya, ya, they had lots of things. Oh I worked for awhile there too.
At a,

BM. And would you remember andy um, sorts of uh, diseases common to coal miners like, I know that there is the uh, you know the other one what's it, the coal dust gets in your... the rock dust.
EJ. you didn't have much of it no, ya.
BM. There were no other diseases that were common, like did coal miners always seem to have a cold or something...
EJ. No.
BM. They just seemed to be healthy all the time.
EJ. Most of them would be pretty healthy.
BM. Uh hum.
EJ. There always uh, I would say... hearty enough and tough enough that uh, (mumbled)

outside of bar and accidents(?) in the mine, they lived to be a fairly ripe old age.
BM. Uh hum.

BM. What would you say about safety conditions in the mine?
Um were they fairly good, or were they something to be desired?

EJ. Well, I guess in some respects there was something to be desired, it was pretty well left up, say up to the fire boss or one thing or another he used to check on days off; he would be down there checking the place, he checked them pretty regular and he'd, on uh someplace in the face of the mine he would make a note of the date he was in there, and inspected it there. And whether was any gas showing or any problems with gas.

Gas was the main problem.

BM. Uh hum.

BM. Um did they have any special precautions that they had. Did they have special boots, equipment or anything like that?

EJ. Oh ya. Not so much in boots, but they had safety lamps and one thing or another to check it. Then they got electric lamps, the miners, uh.. they use to pack fish oil lamps at one time, but then it was real dangerous.

BM. Uh hum.

EJ. But that was before my time.

BM. Uh hum.

BM. And did you have special things like uh, along the track did they ever have anythings like, what did they call them, manholes?

EJ. Oh ya, ya.

BM. Cut out of the side of the wall.

EJ. Manholes to step into if a ( )#447 was coming, that's right.

BM. And did they have a run away track?

EJ. Ya.

BM. For when they were winching them up, they would, if anything went wrong they would go in this place.

EJ. In some places they would have run away tracks, and they kicked the switch, and left it on the run away track, and then if it was, everything was Ok., they would kick it on the main track.

BM. If someone got injured, like um they broke a leg, um, and this person had to be taken out of the mine, obviously, you know other certain serious injuries
but you know they weren't fatal but you know serious, um what would be the procedure, How would this man be tended to? Would there be someone that was qualified?

EJ. Oh ya, they had first aid, first aid attendant, stretchers, and one thing or another, And then they had a mine rescue station right near the Pithead. You just brought him up and into there in Nanaimo, and if they couldn't handle that, alot of it was minor injury you know what I mean, and if they couldn't handle it at the mine rescue, well they had fix good first aid men, and then they took them to the hospital.

BM. Uh hmm.

BM. And were doctors always readily available for miners.? Or were they....

EJ. REALLY w readily available.

BM. Uh hmm.

BM. How did miners pay for their medical expenses? Like were doctors expensive then?

EJ. You paid a dollar a month.

BM. A dollar a month.

BM. Um did you just pay a dollar a month all the time even if you never got hurt during that year?

EJ. That's right, there was a dollar a month taken off you paycheck, for doctors.

BM. Was that something that was automatically taken off.? 

EJ. Automatically.

END OF SIDE ONE
BM. Some, you had to pay this dollar yourself, so even say over a .5 year period you never got sick, injured or anything what would happen to this money, you kept your paying?

EJ. Once it went to the doctor.

BM. So um, what was it, just um, all the miners were hiring ......

EJ. All the miners paid into this fund for the doctors and they paid a dollar a month.

BM. So this, this large fund would um accommodate, for the law of averages out of 200 people, 3 people got hurt, there would be enough money to pay for his expenses.

EJ. That's right.

EJ. A dollar month was cheap insurance, for that.

BM. So basically it was an insurance policy of some sort.

EJ. Now when it comes to X-ray, I've still got my X-ray receipt there and uh, I paid 5 dollars uh, in about 1919, or 1920. And that was suppose to be free X-rays for the rest of my life. But I guess that's gone by the, now, but I still got that receipt.

BM. So um would be allowed to have a free X-ray today?

EJ. I don't know. Well I guess today, no, no, I mean your doctor wheel and deal with the government, and doctors and old age pensioners and one thing or another, I don't think and X-ray would cast me anything.

BM. Uh hum.

BM. And uh, what about, did they have a lot of um, um, I mean would these doctors also available to families?

EJ. That's right.

BM. So it would cover the coal miner and his family.

EJ. Yes, that's right.

BM. Uh hum.

BM. Did they have um, many dentists or was that something that hasn't come along yet?

EJ. No dentist was a different deal. You had a fair amount of dentists in town, but you went to his shop, and uh, get your teeth fixed, and you pay him.
BM. Well you basically relied on the old kitchen plyers.

EJ. Well some of it was almost that bad, but not quite.

BM. And um, what about um transportation. What was the most common mode of transportation then, for workers?

EJ. When I worked at Harewood, we used to, we used to travel up to Harewood mine in uh, coal truck, and it had a bench on each side of it, and he wasn't hauling coal he's slide these tow benches in it, one on each side, and all the men would climb in it, and uh, there was, in fact the benches were longer than the body of the truck and two or three men used to sit out... the ten that was sitting on the inside, balanced the three that were sitting on the overhang. And we used to go up there, and uh, and... adult, he'd pay five dollars a month, a boy paid three dollars a month.

BM. Uh hum.

BM. Did that take a good chunk out of your paycheck paying for this transportation?

EJ. Well took three dollars a month out of your paycheck, for a boy, when I started, I wasn't very long there, before they told me I'd have to pay four, because I was a big boy.

So, the other boys were paying three dollars, I was paying four, and the adults paid five.

BM. Uh hum.

EJ. But you can figure, he about three miles to go. At least three miles there and back, in his truck, and its morning, afternoon, and night. And uh, the most he's going to add is say, the night shift was a slow shift, there wouldn't be ten men working the night shift. He would have say, give him an average of twenty men, and if they were paying five dollars, that's a hundred dollars a month. And in those days I guess, with his truck operations if would cost him something. He wouldn't make no fortune.

BM. Weree these all private runs, um..

EJ. Ya, they were coal cars, trucks rented in ( )$50 coal, and then they would do this as a side line.

BM. Did they all these um, sometimes they would have these things that were more like busses.
BM. What did you call it?

EJ. Bamford's ( ) they were here for a long time.

BM. Bamford was the name of the people they were in the ( ) business, and they brought in a couple of these Caravans, and then they used to ..........

BM. Oh you call these little busses, Charlvangs(?)

EJ. They took in about 25 men.

BM. Oh I thought they were called jitney's.

EJ. No, no, they call, the miners' jitney's would be what I was talking about at first.

But then the Caravan was a real fancy job.

BM. Oh Charobang, it was more like an original bus.

EJ. Ya, more like an original bus.

They were the talk of the town when they came in.

BM. And was there any sorta of um public transportation, for the other people in town?

EJ. No, no. Shank's Pony.

BM. Shank's Ponxy. Your feet.

EJ. Or a taxi.

BM. Or taxi. You had taxi cabs then?

EJ. Oh ya. There was no uh, you could ride a horse and rig when I young.

But I mean there was no, there was no uh, bussess of any kind.

BM. And for long distances, it would boat or train then.

EJ. Train, ya, the E & N train. Or the other boats they use to have to.

BM. Uh huh.

BM. And what about, entertainment facilities? What would you do on your spare time?
EJ. Well, we had two or three theatres here.

We had the (#71 theatre, and then it turned into
the Strand, and then we had the Dominion Theatre. And then they changed
it into the Capitol. They had the Opera House. They used to show pictures,
movies in them, silent movies, and then they used to have wrestling, and
boxing in them.

BM. Where did they hold the wrestling and boxing?

EJ. In the Opera House, and also in the Saint John's Ambulance Hall.

BM. And where was the old St. John's Ambulance Hall?

EJ. It was on the Esplanade. Down right the uh, near the (mumbled)
well right near the machine shop.

BM. Uh hum.

EJ. Ya.

BM. And what about sports? Was sports a very big activity in this town at
this time?

EJ. Yes, very big. Soccer and that uh, Nanaimo won that, Nanaimo had some
of the best soccer teams I guess there was anywhere in Canada.
They won the Canadian Championship about three years in a row, and uh the won
the Intermediate Championship in B.E. three years, the same three years.
They won the Junior the same three years, and they had three sections of
juveniles, course second and third division, and they won them all for three
years. They had every Championship that was possible, with the exception of
one. That was in the early twenties.
Soccer, Cumberland, Granby, South Wellington, Nanaimo, uh, that's all you'd
talk about. They had good lacrosse teams, and one thing or another, but
nothing they had spring leagues, summer leagues, and winter leagues, in soccer.
And soccer was the game.

BM. Uh hum.

EJ. We imported soccer players from England and Scotland and uh..

BM. Was this professional soccer or amateur?

EJ. No, no, no, amateur, they give them good jobs around the mine,
uh, nothing to do, and nobody to boss them, with reason, And as long as
they played good soccer, uh they had a job there.
BJ. Same with the other companies though. Government coal mines they had the same deal, and South Wellington, if you were a good soccer player, ya, they found you a job. And uh, you got reasonably well paid and they use to pay them so much, and not pay them, uh, 5 dollars, 10 daibars, if they won a game, and 5 dollars if they drew a game, and nothing if they lost. And they did if like that for the players.

BM? So these soccer teams were more for the company's prestige than the just the satisfaction of being a team and playing for your own team's sake.

EJ. Well, still, still the company employee... (before one another, they always talked football, football, and uh, every weekend all them hot and bothered to go to these football games and there was nothing else, that's all we talked about and that all we said(?) about. And that's why we really enjoyed, so it kept them happy, looking forward to the football games each weekend.

BM. Um, what about bars, were there a lot of bars in this town?

EJ. There were more bars in this town, than any city in B.E.

BM. And what would you do when you go in the bar. You know it's obvious you'd have a couple of beers wash down the coal dust or whatever. What would you talk about? Coal mining?

EJ. Oh I guess most of it would be coal mining, because it was the coal miners that went into the bars. They were heavy drinkers (but I mean uh, I wasn't a drinker, but they enjoyed their beer. It come from England and Scotland and they enjoyed their beer, and they enjoyed it just as much as when they were here.

It was the same in Fernie, when I lived up there, great places for drinking beer.

BM. So your family was Scottish then was it?

EJ. No, no, (north England) but I mean uh, I wasn't a drinker, but they enjoyed their beer. It come from England and Scotland and they enjoyed their beer, and they enjoyed it just as much as when they were here.

BM. English? Ya.

BM. That was a......

EJ. Jordies!

BM. Pardon?

EJ. We were Jordies.

BM. Jordies??

EJ. Ya, that's what we called them.
BM. English?

EJ. English.

BM. Hmm.

EJ. Jordies, that come from North( )#123

BM. UH Hmm. What about social class distinctions in town, like would there be sorta like, being socially elite group that sorta thought they we un, youknow we would call them snobs or something like that. Was there that kind of circle(?) in Nanaimo?

EJ. No, not to my... I never noticed it. Not to my knowledge of any kind. Everybody worked for a living and everyday, there was no, no none of this uppity, uppity class.

BM. Uh ha.

BM. What about um, um, can't remember what I was going to say, about um, um, would you say the church was a important influence in the town. Like did everybody go to church on Sunday.

EJ. Pretty well. I went to the Haliburton Street Methodist Church for many many years, and uh, just about all the young fellows well alott of older people too, church was recognized alott more in those days than it is today. Today, very few men that go to church. But in those days everybody really seemed to want to go to church.

BM. Did the church um hold any sorta like um, not political, but sorta of a very, very, influential hold on the community. Like you know, if if, if the community started going in one direction, the church didn't like it, would they have enough force to um, you know to force a move in the community of some sort?

EJ. Well that a hard question to answer. I never , Inever noticed them using much of their influence, but everybody ( )#149 of the church seemed to a , what they wanted to do, they did. You know the people did. And then the church suggested it of something like that.

BM. Um what about um politics? Was um, um, political things um very important in town. Like, and election, would that be a very exciting time?
EJ. Well to some of the fellas it was an exciting time. I mean you have your Liberals, and your Conservatives, and one thing or another, and uh not maybe, uh, oh the odd fellow went into it pretty deep, and you know, he talked, he tried to talk other people into seeing his way of it. But not very often. You generally followed in your father's footsteps. If your father was a Liberal, well uh, you were a Liberal, and your offspring were Liberals.

Today people are Liberal today, and Conservative tomorrow, and NDP next day. You don't seem to stay with the rule of the road like they use to.

BM. No.

BM. And um, what about other ethnic groups? Do you remember much about the Chinese Community in Nanaimo?

EJ. Well I used to see them when I was going to work. One behind the other with their pigtails. When they used to come up from No.91 mine, and up past Manson's Store, and heading for China Town. We used to go up there, on China New Years and they were always easy to get along with and uh, they gave us a lot of what we used to call Chinese nuts, and I met along of Chinese, and made a lot of friends in both Harewood and No.91 and uh on the railroad and everything. Chinese people, and I always get along with them, no problem.

BM. Was that area noted for its Chinese Opium Dens? Did it, or was it.....

EJ. Uh, we never noticed it.

BM. But were they there?

EJ. They could have been. And then when the fire broke out, I guess it burned up a lot of that. When the Chinatown burnt down, that was the end of Chinatown. (mumbled)

BM. Uh huh.

BM. And what do you remember about the um, Fraser Street area. The Red Light District? Do you remember anything about that?

EJ. Not too much. I... about for about I worked at the Telegraph Office and I used to go down there and deliver telegrams.
EJ. Just then I was in my teens, and uh, I used to have to go down there, where the, If I took a telegraph down or phone the express office 6 times, and say um, will you have your messenger go to the store and pick me up this, and pick me up that, and deliver it down here. And I would take it down to various houses down there. I remember some of them, No. 63, 65, and one thing or another, and I remember some of names of the Madames but uh, Well they always give me good tips. You'd get uh, whatever you did for them, ..

BM. Were they very um, um you know, the girls were they very respectable as possible, and you know, very proper, not sort of like a rowdy....

EJ. No, when you was them on the street, they were very respectable, you'd never know whether, you'd just think they were ( )

uh, she must be really good as they come. You know what I mean, used to see tow or three of them walking on the streets and uh, when I worked in the ( ) there was uh, some of my workmen friends over there, they used to go down to Fraser Street quite often,

( ) one or two on the railroad.

BM. Uh hum.

EJ. I don't think they created too much of a problem.

BM. Would you say that the communities mood was more like um, lets get this place out of here, or was it more that an accepted thing of some sort.

EJ. Well at the time it was accepted, then it started change, and then finally they did get them right out. But uh, getting them out wasn't the answer either. Cause it doesn't stop it.

BM. Uhha, in this way it was more confined, and it could be kept in a respectable as possible sense , ...

EJ. Thats right.

BM. now its more, its become something of um the criminal aspect.

EJ. They had to have in there, a doctor's certificate, or inspected about every.. I don't know how long. A week or two weeks or something, they kept them maybe the way they should be kept.

BM. Is there anything that you remember that you want to tell me?

EJ. Off hand I can't think of anything, I mean uh, I don't remember alot of the things like I used to remember, and I guess I lost interest in alot of the things that happened in the years ago.

BM. Um why did you quit working association with the mines, to start your hardware store?
EJ. Well the fellow that run the hardware store his name was Ray Falflow(?) (sp. ) he phoned me up at eight o'clock one morning and I was having breakfast, he says I want you to come down here I want to have a talk to you. And I went down and he said, I would you like you to come in here and take over the business. The doctor tells me I have a bad heart, and he said I don't know of anybody else in Nanaimo that I'd sooner see in here than you. And he said I'll offer a deal that is second to none. Which he did. So I went into the hardware business well after just about 40 years, and uh, I still go down there and still run up and down those walls helping my Nephew. And I enjoyed every minute of it. Well uh, ... it made life worth living.

BM. You always have that um stuffed lion in, mountain lion in the window with her cubs, how did it happen to get there?

EJ. Well E Ray Falflow's (not understandable)(

) he had a wolf there, which I think is still there, he had the lion and the lion's cubs, he was a great friend of Tom Rurreys (sp. in Victoria. And then he used to send down a lot of uh, cougar heads, and deer heads, and one or another, to get mounted, I got a lot of them up at the fish and game club now. ( ) and one thing or another. I sold a two or three heads to some fellow here form Germany, he run a beer garden, and uh he gave me fabulously price for about three of my heads. If you ever come to Germany I want to walk in and have a look at them, he says, I'll have them on the wall.

BM. Were they bear heads?

EJ. There was a bear head, there was a cougar head, and there was a cougar head. He took 3 of them.

BM. Yes they prized bear heads in Germany.

EJ. In Germany this here, Price didn't.... I said you go to Victoria and you see Tom Rarrey, he's the taxidimant you can go down there, and you can pick up anything you want of him. And he come back, and he says nope, he says I want them out of here, I want them out of your shop, I don't want to get them anyplace else. So finally I said well, ... he says how much? I said oh I don't know that thing there maybe cost me a couple hundred bucks, to get that thing mounted. Well that's cheap enough he says I'll do better than that. And we went through it the same way and uh, I said Ok. then if you want them
that bad, there you are, So he took them and I took his money and uh away he went.
BM. How much did you sell them for, quite a bit, more than you expected.
EJ. Oh ya, way more than I expected.
BM. He had more wvalue...
EJ. ... money, I guess he had lots of money, and that it didn't mean too much to him. But uh...
BM. Um you would have run this store, I guess even with the last decade of new coal mining era. Did alot of coal miners come to the hardware store?
EJ. Just about every coal miner in Nanaimo come in to do business with me. I had lots of friends.
BM. Um what type of things did they um buy? Um getting new tools for their jobs or um...
EJ. Oh no. Uh, most of their tools, as far as mining went, most of them were handled by the company store store. The company had its store, and it looked after the picks and that, hatches and saws, and various thing the miners would use in the mine. And they had a store there, a supply store supply them. No, no, all I had was fishing stuff, and hunting stuff, and a full line of hardware uh, if it was possible to get it in Nanaimo, I would say pretty well we would have it. I don't know if you have travelled around Nanaimo, to talk to anybody, they use to always say, if you can't get it anywhere else go to Ernie Johnston's.
BM. That, the store that you have is a very old time building its sorts like sort of the turn of the century architecture styling. You got the old shop counter still in there, has it ever considered to be historical landmark, you know to be restored to its original....
EJ. I don't know, when I first, there's a picture of it Reg Goodman's wife (sp. ) her father worked in there, it was a cobbler, a shoe maker, it use to be a shoe shop. It use to be a grocery store. And uh, there was a Hickman use to work in there before Ray Falflow went in ti. I can, there's pictures that uh, I don't know if Mrs. Goodman still got it, or wather its in th Bastion, um but it was, and it shows you the store taken maybe in the late 1800's, her father is on it, and the clerk, and I think the owner of the building, kthe owner of the business. And uh, the whole deal there was uh, in it uh, there was a board( ) sidewalk out in front, and there was an alcove( ) hung over the board sidewalk, and there was button boots, remember the old button shoes they
used to wear. They were, there was a bunch of screw ( )
hooks down there, around posts you can see still there in the store, they had
them screwed in, in all these button hooks and you can still see them.
BM. It would be interesting you knew to keep something like that, you know
it would be good for the tourist trade to have some, old hardware store that's
set up, like the hardware stores used to be.
EJ. Ya well when I went into this store the ceiling of the store was just a massive
uh, three right eights inch pipe, with crossovers and elbows and all that.
AND they had on it uh, buckets and uh, axes, and everything from the ceiling.
You could hardly see the ceiling, for the stuff hanging from it. It was quite
unique and uh people used to come in uh, well I want that, and I want that, as
they used to point up to the ceiling, and you had the ladder in there, and you
had a hook on the stick that if you could lift it off with the hook, fine and
dandy. A lot of the stuff that you don't see today that we sold from that ceiling,
and uh, when I was pulling them down, uh a friend that worked for Wardill
( ) across the street, he came in and he said your pulling
donl heirloom, heirlooms, he said, leave them there. He says uh, people will
come into see them one of these days, and pass everybody else up just exxx to
look at your shop if you leave them up there. Maybe I should have.
BM. Well at that time, they were just to be a tool that people wanted.
EJ. Gs ya, but even today, to see an old hardware store like that, I've had
people come up from Los Angeles, I've had people come across Canada, I've had
people there from everywhere, and uh, they told me to better come to Nanaimo,
come and see the shop.
BM. I was in there once, you know, delivering something there, all the sports
equipment, I was really quite surprised how rustig it was.
EJ. Ya, very rustig.
BM. Well I think we've pretty well finished, I can't think of anything more
to talk about, and I thank you very much for a very interesting talk.
EJ. Thats fine.