This is Myrtle Bergren interviewing Mike Krall, March 18, 1979.

This is for the Coal Tyee Project.

MB: No that's all right, you just say what ...

MK: Well when I was working for the school board there was a fellow by the name of Bill _________. He lived up on the top of Nicol Street hill, and he was quite interested in the museum and then he asked me if I could give them a hand. They were settin' up a mine deal in the museum there, see. So I went down. I said to Bill, I can only go twice a week through the week. I went on Tuesdays and Thursdays and I used to stay down there til eleven, half past eleven, long as they wanted to stay. I was laying the track. The fella that started it took sick and that's why they come after me for it. And he was, Bill was the engineer at the Woodlands School and I used to go there and do maintenance and he asked me if I could give him some time you know. He said we need a coal car built. And I was bowling at the time and I knew young Sy Longdon, he was on the Lumber yard on _____ street towards the Mill stream. So I spoke to him one day when he was settin' next to me and I said you wouldn't happen to have any old lumber around, 2x6's and 2x12's, anywhere from 6 feet up, layin' around the yard you know. He says what do you want 'em for. Well, I said I'm workin' down in the museum. I want to get a couple of mine cars built, ya see. We haven't got any money to buy anything. So anyway, this was on a Tuesday night and I come home from work on Wednesday, there was a whole car load dumped in my yard. And I wanted heavy timber for the sills, for the foundation of the car and I went to work on it and I was working til 12, one o'clock in the morning. And then when the deadline come for the opening of the museum I managed to get it all done and finished and I had coal in my garage yet and I put a false top on and I loaded it up with coal and put it up in the truck and I took it down for the official opening that afternoon. And then we set up the machines, I don't know, have you been in there?

MB: uh, hum.

MK: Well you see a fella sitting on his hands and knees there with a great big air machine that is a coal cutting machine. It had what they call a jib on the back, about 14 inches wide and it went in about eight feet and it had a chain goin' around and it had picks set in sockets that were tightened with set screws. And that was run by air. And the machine, you could regulate the machine so that depending on how hard a cutting it was to feed it and it pulled itself down because what it was doin' cause some places the coal might only be that high but some places that had a seam of much like that and that was used for cutting. And the machine used to pull itself down and the fellas behind was timbering it, putting posts up to hold the roof up because this was cutting in there over six, eight feet. And then the driller would come on
and in the middle of the next shift and he would start to drill all the holes. Drill them around six to eight feet apart, up above and underneath. And then the fire boss he would blast it and after we got ... I worked on the pan crew and we were puttin' the conveyors, we called 'em pans because they were sheets about 10 to 12 feet long and they were quite wide and they had rockers on 'em and they had a cradle and a pair of steel wheels and what they called a pan engine which the piston on the air used to hold the whole works up, you could have 50, 60 pans on a grade and it would pull the pans up but the coal would slide down. That's the way we used to load it. But it was drilled, it was blasted, everything else and you just kept moving that stuff in all the time and you had nothing on your back. You had a lot of open areas some places it was hot. Now after you got in here so far and maybe you had about an acre of ground open the roof would break away you know at the side where the coal was there and it would start to squeeze right down and by God we had a close shave one night, it went like that and it was six feet high and it broke and you'd have thought the Island had split in half. We were all right, we just dropped everything, but the ice I was goin' off the end of the roadway, by the time I got down there, it was filled up like that. It was filling down and squeezing all the timbers right down like that. They were six feet high. All the wood was squeezed to about that much, 2 inches. Safety was the main item that you had to keep in your head at all times.

MB: That was what they called the pan wall.

NK: Pan wall, ya. That was in the low workings. That was in Number one mine and over towards Protection. I started to work in Reserve mine with my Dad and then when that finished we had to wait on a seniority deal and then we went to Number One, I don't know, my Dad went to another place in the mine where he was working with somebody else and I went on the maintenance. You see they put ya on the maintenance. I was working with an old fella that well he was practically dieing on his feet and he had a daughter used to teach in Quennell and she taught me there. What was her name?

Woman's voice: Miss Carter.

NK: Miss Carter ya. They lived right across from the old gym on the school, kitty corner, in an old house. She's still alive in Chemainus, Miss Carter. I had a lot of teachers and they were all good teachers.

MB: Now after I'm going to ask you about the other two kinds of mining? Like longwall ...

NK: Well this was the longwall mining as they call it what I'm telling you now. Well they were pans actually, anywhere from 20 to 2 feet wide and they were about ten feet long. They had brackets on one end and a place where they went in together and you had a long bolt about 1 inch in diameter and about 12 inches long and...
it had a head on it. You used to pull your bolt out and hook on into the two lugs on the next and then you bolted it up. So you could swing it a little bit if you let a little bit of slack on one side a drove a wedge in a tightened it up, you could put it around a bit of a gradual curve. I wasn't on everything in the mine. We used to put them in and they got loading on 'em you know and it was low work. I seen some places where you could hardly get a shovel in. It wasn't a high a that. We were workin' in there. Oh it was terrific.

MB: You'd have to practically lay down in that place.

NK: Well that's the way it was you see, that's the way things were and when you tell people about, I just that somebody had been able to go down the mine with a moving camera and take the picture. What's goin' on and what the people, what kind of work the men were doin' in the mine and the conditions they were workin' under at that time.

MB: You'd probably be in the wet too?

NK: Oh ya, sometimes you were wringing wet. You used to have to take a spare set of clothes so you could change at quitting time and come home, until the miners fought with the companies 'til we got a wash house and a wash house was built in South Wellington. No. 10 mine. That was when the union started gettin' in with the company ya see. To get a wash house which we did get, and you'd come home from work clean and you went to work clean. You took fresh clothes ya know and depending on, you could wear the same clothes. You weren't gonna bring them home every day. You might as well put the dirty ones on all week and let them come home and get down and then you'd take another pair, set of clothes but you came home all cleaned up.

MB: Do you remember what year around what year that would be that they got a wash house there. South Wellington.

NK: It was not to far from the end, the closing now and I can't recall when it was closed up. Do you remember when No. 10 mine finished?

Woman's voice: Well not long before you started with the Board.

NK: Well I worked with school board for 21 years and uh, let's see now, I retired when, 5 years ago. Five years ago I retired from the school board and that was 21 years ago when I was at No. 10 mine at South Wellington.

MB: And Granby was that going then?

NK: No, I never worked in Granby. Granby was all finished before then.

MB: Overlapping talk. Well they had wash houses . . .

NK: They had wash houses there ya.

MB: They had a show there too.

NK: It was quite the place. That was a different outfit. Granby Consolidated Mining Company. They had uh mines up at Anyox and everything else ya see.
But you worked across from Granby. What was that mine? Bright's mine?

Ya. Well that was in the ________ of the Granby workin's. Actually what there was. I worked for a while in the.... we went up Granby way and we went in past where the old mine was, the original. Have you been up on that road where you see the old footings and that? Well we went up further and what they did there, I was sent there later on from the other mine from No. 10, to go to a fellow's place that got badly hurt at No. 10 mine at South Wellington and so I got on there. Joe Wilson was the boss, Ladysmith and he had a brother, Bill and he got pretty badly hurt you know. He jumped on a car you know, he should have known better. I was there when it happened.

What happened?

Well, he came down he was rolling the rollers coming down. The mine was practically gettin' to the finishing stages and when the ______ came down everything was workin' because when they were pullin' the coal out there's this ______ come down, the timbers are breakin' and it's settling down and us the trip just came down with it and then he was going to get a ride up you see and I was on the low side. I was on side like that and I was standing, __________, the car was up to here on me but it was only about that far below the timbers, that's how close it was. And it was always on the move, gradually settling, and some places the cars refused to go over the track(?) and when you got the weight comin' down it heaves the track up and he came down and he was runnin' the rollers and uh next thing I know he jumped from the car, you know. He went to jump on the car and there was only that much room and it rolled him off there. I was afraid... I thought there'd be nothing left of him. But anyway, I just went ... I thought I was goin' to conk out, pass out because I went over to a road and sat down for a while and then I see, I hear. I couldn't grab the wires to cross 'em to ring the bell for the hoistman to stop because I was down lower and I couldn't reach it so uh by the time I got down, he had gone up and stopped it. I didn't go and even look cuse I figured he'd just be tore to pieces. But anyway I went and sat down in a place and I kinda had the feelin' that I was gonna pass out myself just from shock you know and his brother the boss was in there and he came up and he said what's the matter with ya. And I said well I'm gonna tell ya. I might as well tell ya right now cause you're gonna find out when you go on right anyway. What happened to his brother. But by God I seen fellas running up and down and they were taking a stretcher and I thought he'd a been tore to pieces and he was still alive... But he never worked for an awful, awful long time after that and I think later it, it wasn't too long after that he passed away. He must have been really mangled.
MB: Well when you were hurt, how, what happened?
MK: When I was hurt...
MB: Ya you were hurt.
MK: Well I never got hurt that much in the mine.
MB: You didn't get hurt in Number 10?
MK: No, oh no. You see, myself. You've got to be safety conscious a hundred percent of the time you see. And you had to keep, when you're drivin' a roadway you had to keep puttin' timbers in every four feet. Once you got four feet ahead you put posts up and a stringer across and you had 2 x 6's goin' across and the way we used to work it, I worked with a Finn fella from Nanaimo, he was a real good hard worker too. His name was Harry Ahoe and we worked together there for quite a while but we used to work the place for our convenience like to our way of working because some fellas would go in to work and they would load all the coal ahead and they would stop loading and you were getting paid by what you were producing, not the work you were doing in the face you see. And we used to drill the holes in between while the driver comes down to take your loaded out and bring your empty car back and we'd load it and then we'd carry on with the other work, you see, the timbering and that and we were makin' good money between the two of us you see. Because you'd better get a system of working where you've got coal in your place all the time continuously that you can keep on loading because you're gettin' paid by the car you see. But he was a nice fella to work with you know. You want to turn that off now or what. (Chuckle) Is it still on?
MB: Yes, it's still on. I have to ask you when you were born.
MK: I was born in 1900.
MB: And where?
MK: A place called Michel which doesn't exist anymore. You know what I mean? In the interior of B.C.
MB: I know Michel.
MK: Oh, well that's where I was born. When my dad left Michel we went to a place called Bevan up at, just outside of Cumberland. There was another place up there. It was Canadian Collieries at that time. And they had a number 7 mine they called it but it doesn't exist anymore.
MB: This was Bevan.
MK: It was between four and five miles from Cumberland. They had a mine in Cumberland then they had the mine in Bevan and then there was Number 8 mine. I don't if you ever heard of it, that's what they called the Million dollar mystery. They built a big tipple there all steel and I don't know if it produced any coal or not I can't tell ya. We lived up there and then when the mines finished there, but Dad was in an explosion up there. They had Chinamen loaders ya see in the mine. The miners had Chinamen loaders to load the coal and they did the mining, the drilling and the blasting and the Chinamen did the loading. And uh, I used to hear my Dad say about the Chinamen arguing with manager when he came
down the mine. They wanted more money. It sounded to me like maybe they were only getting two bits or 50 cents a day just for loadin' the miners coal you know. Miners did the mining and the blasting you know and my Dad told me about the fella that he had helpin' him. He was after the boss every day. He say, "Me want to show you, he wanted more money you know and he was showin' the boss, the manager how fast he would work. He got 50 cents a day or something, if you make it a dollar he was showin' him how much faster he would go. By the time he got to about 3 or 4 dollars he was goin' like a whirlwind with a shovel. Showin' you see, he was goin' to tell the boss how he'd work for the money if he gave him more. So they would get more coal you see. I guess he and my Dad would talk about a lot of things like that you know and he was in an explosion up there and a lot of fellas, I can't remember how many were killed because I was only a kid goin' to school but I remember the miners, a couple of miners packin' my Dad into the house and they just dropped him on the kitchen floor and they went back again. And they just left him laying there cause you got a horse and buggy, you had to get a horse and buggy to go to Cumberland hospital you see. So really, really tough days then days. A lot of people they don't know what the men went through then days ya see.

MB: Glyn Lewis was telling me that Hawthornthwaite got the law passed to keep the Chinese out of the mine.

MK: Well I don't remember that because I wasn't involved with a lot of stuff like that. I worked in Reserve nine. I worked on top for a year and then I went down the mine see. My daddy got pretty badly hurt and he worked in the timber yard outside but he didn't like it in the winter. Too cold, so he went back down the mine. And the morning he was goin' down on the Monday morning he said to me to go over in the store, you get yourself a ________, a couple of dummy bags, a handful of nails, a pick and a shovel. And he said you're goin' with me. And if I'd have said I wasn't I'd have been layin' on the ground. He would have just swatted me across the ears. You do as you're told. That's the way he was.

MB: What's the dummy bags?

MK: Well a dummy bag is a piece of paper like an envelope about 2 inches wide and flattened out. We used to just blow them up and put all kinds of muck and dirt and that in and then you put the powder in the hole you used to push these in the back and tamp them in there and if it was hard shootin' coal it would just blow all that stuff out. You had to know how to shoot the coal to get it.

MB: Well how many shots did you have to put in before like three would you say?

MK: Well sometimes it depends on what kind of a place you work in. If you work in a high place and it was someplace that had good shootin' coal where it was really hard coal, it was tough going because you had to have a cut you had to try and get a hole in the centre so that you could drill holes on both sides and then on
the bottom so the coal has got a chance to break away you see from the sides. There was a real knack to it you know.

MB: Well how much powder did you take with you?

MK: Well you got a can, we used to get a can. We brought 12 to 15 sticks so maybe 16 sticks in a can. They made a can for ya. You used to have to buy them. You had to buy that from the store.

MB: It wasn't loose powder then.

MK: No, no. It was in like a wax paper, but ya didn't use the dynamite in shootin' coal. Because it has a flash to it. It was kinda... sawdust actually, wrapped up in a wax roll.

MB: Say that again.

MK: It was in a wax casing, just a round casing about that big and I would say about 7 to 8 inches long. But when you ____ it out sometimes and a person wanted to cut it in half, they used to just knick it in the middle in the wax and just break it. If you wanted just to put a stick and a half or two sticks and a half or whatever it was, you could break it and you put that in your can with the open end up otherwise you would lose all that powder out of there because you had to pay for that.

MB: Yes that's just what I was going to say. I want to know how much like a half a pound of powder would blow how much coal.

MK: Well I'll tell you what, the only way I can explain that to you. Say for instance that that end of the trailer was the face of coal. The seam of coal could be miles square or whatever it is. So it would be high some places, it would go 18 feet high, 20 feet high in some places, only that high you see and what you did, you tried to get a hole in the centre. And once you got a place workin', you got it workin' the way you should have, the way you wanted it to work, you would make that opening and then you would shoot holes, you know on the sides. You'd get so far away, you'd drill accouple of holes there and then you'd go right back to the rib. You'd shoot them holes first and then you'd go and shoot the other ones, and then you're blastin' all the coal in. But you've got to have a cut in somewhere. You do the same thing in a rock tunnel, when you're drivin' a rock tunnel for a haulage road. You had to drill five holes about 6 feet into the centre. You fill the whole 6 up with dynamite and this was not coal powder this was dynamite. You had to get the way the heck and gone out of the road because that stuff used to fly 100, 200 feet up the road and to get that hole in there, that's what they used to call a cut. You get a hole in to start with then you put a bunch of holes right around that, like two rows on the right, 2 rows on the left and then you put holes in the bottom and holes on top. But you use a tine cap. You've got the five holes in the centre. One straight in and there's four goin' in to that end, all them holes kind of a close as you can get 'em in the back end, 6 feet. And you load them up, cause that's got to come out or you'll get nothing. It'll fly up the road 300 feet. We had littleman holes in the side every 100 feet they made a little place in the side where you could get out of the road. And you'd better get that out. The other ones would all go off in their
turn, the three on that side would go number one cap. That would go and number two, the next one would go and then the number threes on the top they'd bring the top down you see and then the number fours, you have them on the bottom and they'd lift everything all out of there. And it's all in a heap there.

MB: A real art to it them.

MK: Oh ya, oh ya if you couldn't hire a man off the street and say go in there and work in that place. He could kill himself workin' there for 20 years and he wouldn't get his shovel full of rock.

MB: Well would you have to have certain papers before you could do this.

MK: When I worked with my dad for a year, they used to call 'em backhands. I think now they've got 'em that you'd be a helper or you'd be a .... there's a name for it. I can't think of it now. Anyway what happens when you're shootin' it out like that, you have to have a system of shooting because you'll never get anything out. Never.

MB: Well I can see that. You'd have to know what you're doing. What would you be called.

MK: Well in the rock work. You're a miner regardless of what you did.

MB: You weren't called a powder man or something like that.

MK: No, no, no. Everybody shot their own.

MB: Oh did they?

MK: Oh ya. Every place where they had coal.

MB: This was in the rock? oh coal.

MK: When you built a rock tunnel, it was to mainly make a haulage road. If they had a seam of coal going away different areas and they want to make a decent road to get down there and get the coal out faster, then you'd be workin' in a rock tunnel. And I used to get workin' with all kinds of guys in a rock tunnel.

MB: Then with the coal, didn't the fireboss used to do that?

MK: Ya. Well the fireboss did the blasting in the rock also and the coal also but you used a different powder. You used dynamite in one and you used, it was more like a sawdust stuff in it you see.

MB: They marked you down for your caps and everything?

MK: No, well I can't remember now whether they marked you down for caps or now but you paid for your powder and you got dummy bags as they called them. We used to fill them up with the dirt you know and tamp them up behind the powder. It doesn't take long to learn if you work with a man, how much judgment you're going to have to get how much powder you're going to want. And sometimes there'd be two sticks, maybe three sticks, maybe two and a half or whatever you want. But you had to try and get enough in there that it would get the coal out because if it blew the thing out this way you didn't make no money that day. Because all it done is left what they call a bootleg, a big hole comin' off this way but it didn't push anything out that way. So your place was empty. And then you had a harder job to straighten the place out again. You always tried to work your place so you had a good opportunity for shotin' the coal, blasting it ya it had to have a place to get out of.
MB: You've got a Draeger ticket too.
MK: Well the manager came to me one time and there was 5 of us and he wanted to get what they called a Draeger team which will go in a mine after an explosion see. Where you took the mask and everything. We went through the whole course and I got that and then I got a first aid ticket and then you could go and sit for your miner's ticket. But it was just a verbal exam. You went before the mines inspector down. He used to come in twice a week from Victoria and you would go there and he would fire the questions at you. You know what you would do the first thing you went in to a place and all this sort of stuff and the first thing you've got to do is make sure the place is safe, you see, you've got to keep it timbered. If your timber was too far, if your opening was too far ahead, you've have to timber it otherwise you're just going to kill yourself in the place ya see.

MB: A miner's certificate, you get that first, eh?
MK: There was a special knack to mining. See a lot of people thought of well miners just a miner you know. He's down in a hole in the ground just shovellin' the coal out. That's what they thought. But it's a different story when you get down there.

MB: I can see that. Well some of these people who came out from Italy never saw a mine before.
MK: Well a lot of 'em worked in the mines there too.

MB: I was talking to Dominic Armanasco and he said he never saw a mine before he came here, but he went down, he didn't know the language. He had to work with his uncle who could tell him what to do and then he got his miner's certificate. How would he get it I wonder?
MK: I guess by that time, there's a lot of fellas there was a lot of foreigners. My parents were Czechoslovak, my dad but than all the family was born out here in B.C., everybody you see, my dad came out here when he was I imagine I'd say a teenager around 18, 19 years old, he came out from Czechoslovakia. He went all through the states workin' in the mines. You could out see, they were bringin' people out that way to come and work in the mines. He worked in the mines in a place called Black Diamond in the States. Washington. He worked in mines in Virgininia. He worked in mines over in Pennsylvania and then he went back home to the old country again. Then he got married and he came back out and he went in to Michel, which doesn't exist any more. You've heard of that place.

MB: Sparwood.
MK: Well now it's Sparwood.

MB: Well what year did he come out in the first place?
MK: Oh gee I wouldn't know that.
MB: It would be what in the 1800's, 18 ...
MK: Let's see now. Well he was out before that but he was mostly in the States and then when he come out the next time, after he was married well and I was born in 1909.

Woman's voice: But you weren't the first one.
MK: No there was....
Woman's voice: You're the third Mike. Two Mikes before you died.
There were 6 alive in the family and I don't know how many...

Woman's voice: Your mother had 12 altogether.

MK: Ya 12 altogether. Some were still born and stuff like that ya know. And we had one sister that I can remember, she was burnt to death when we lived in Bevan. See we lived in company houses and they went out in the yard and my dad used to keep a couple of pigs for killin' pigs and sausage you know and all that sort of stuff and she went out and there were burnin' a bunch of rubbish and she was ...it was summer time you see and she went out there and caught on fire with her clothes you know and she come running into the house. She was so badly burnt that she didn't live at all.

MB: What year did you come to Nanaimo?

MK: Uh... Ya we came in here the day before 24th of May in Nanaimo on 1919.

Woman's voice: How many years were you in Bevan? You were only in Bevan a couple of years.

MK: Ya, well it wasn't that long in there. In Bevan. I can't tell ya for sure how many years because when you're kids we didn't keep track of the time.

Woman's voice: I bet it was about 1916 that you came to Bevan, from Michel.

MK: Well it could be that. I started school in Bevan. You see, that's where I started school in Bevan and then my dad came down to Nanaimo and we came down here the day before 24th of May 1919.

MB: Did he get a job right away?

MK: Oh ya, he was workin' in the mines right away cause they had a lot of mines around here.

MB: What mine did he go to work in?

MK: He went to work in the Reserve mine. And that was, it's somewhere it wouldn't be too far away from Duke Point there. It was on the Indian reservation actually. When you go over Nanaimo River bridge, and if you turn left and follow the river down, I guess the railway bridge is maybe gone now. They had a railway, they used to run a passenger train from down where Johnson's terminal is now on the waterfront and that was Number One mine there, you see and uh they used to run a passenger train from there out to Reserve mine and that was on the Indian reservation property. And that mine went mostly towards South Wellington way. Oh there was mines all over but there's lots of them, they were workin' before I come in to Nanaimo.

MB: There's one I want to ask you if you know. There was in 1888 or something there was a flood in South Wellington, ?? were killed, drowned, and it was Ike Aitken was telling me his mother's father was killed in that.

MK: Ya well see he would know. My dad didn't work in South Wellington.

MB: No. I was just wondering which mine they'd gone into. They went into another mine, old workings whatever it was.

Woman's voice: They worked right around the lake, Beck Lake in South Wellington didn't they?

MK: The mine itself, South Wellington mine, the original mine as far
as I can remember. The tunnel went under the railway tracks just not too far from the station and it seems to me when we worked in Reserve there was a boundary line. You see there was Canadian Collieries runnin' that and there was Western Fuel runnin' the mines in Nanaimo, the Reserve mine, Wakesiah mine, Protection mine and that was the Western Fuel Company, but the Canadian Collieries was running the South Wellington mines. Now I can remember workin' in Reserve mine that it only went so far and that was the boundary line between the coal seam between the Western Fuel company and the Canadian Collieries. You see they were encroachin' onto other people's property. Well what they would do, they would work the faces up to the line and then they would start and they would rob everything they could out of there and they would cave it. You see it would cave all down and then nobody could get in there to say much you stole of their property or what you did and that. Some places there are where companies got involved in court troubles. They overstepped their boundaries.

MB: Never heard of that one. I heard of stealing but not where they covered it up.

MK: Ya but this is what was goin' on lots of times.

Woman's voice: Mike said when they worked in Number One mine down here you're out over towards Protection, and the boat was going out.

MK: You'd hear the rumbling of the boat. It carried through the mine.

Woman's voice: I know if I had ever known what went on in a mine I would never have let him go down.

MB: I was wondering about the wives.

MK: You couldn't get a job anywhere. You either worked in the saw mill or you worked in the bush or you worked in the mine. Because all the business people in Nanaimo at that time had their family workin' for them. You can't kick about that because you name it Wilson and Sons, the whole works of 'em, even like Dakins old Dakins, I can remember him way, way back and I remember one time when we got in dire circumstances in Nanaimo and my dad wasn't workin', he was in the hospital. He got hurt in the mine again bad, he had his hip broken and Mr. Dakin he had something to do with the city too.

Woman's voice: Ya he was on the council I think.

MK: The city was givin' assistance to the family. There was 6 of us at home goin' to school you see. It was a family affair. Every business in town had the family workin' for them. Everything was and Son, Brothers and Son, Mansons and Son. You see End of Side One.

Side Two

MB: ...went to school now. This was the first time I've ever heard that there was such a thing as a truant officer. Cause there was a lot of people I've asked that....

MK: Oh ya they had a one time.

MB: What happened to you now, when did you say you left school?

MK: Thirteen. Well I'll tell ya when I went before Beavor Potts that's what I told him, I was 13, I mean 15, but he says to me I'm standing in front of his desk and he says "How old are ya?"
I says, "Fifteen." As brazen as heck ya know. So he turned around and said I'm going to tell you something son. I've got your Quennell school records in front of me here and it says on there you're only 13 so I'm gonna give ya some advice he says, you go home and get all your books ready and be back at that school on Monday morning. That was in the spring. I went 'til June, summer holidays and I got a job on the pickin' tables at Reserve mine and I never ever got a call to go back to school. And I was only 13 then.

MB: Because some of the others have told me they quit and the teacher would say "Where's so and so today?" and someone would get up and say he's got a job, he's earning 2 dollars or whatever it was. But nobody's ever said that the truant officer...

MK: I wasn't with the truant officer, I got this letter from Beaver-Potts. I had to go before him, this is the point. Unless they had a truant officer that found out that I wasn't in school.

MB: Well they had one that went around to the school. And if a person was off and no sick note of anything, they would look into it.

MK: The truant officer, he would go to the school you see. I had a teacher who was named Miss Woodman.

Woman's voice: She died when she was 90 something.

MK: She just died about last year or so.

MB: What age were you supposed to go to school til?

MK: 15. Ya at fifteen you could quit.

MB: I wonder when that law came in because you, by 15...

MK: You could go to high school.

Woman's voice: You were supposed to be through the normal school and be able to go to high school because I went to high school when I was 15.

MB: But there must have been others in the same boat as you.

MK: Oh yes. There was lots of people that way.

MB: Had to be called up in front of Beaver-Potts.

MK: Oh ya.

Woman's voice: I remember Dick quit when he was 15 and he went loggin' in the bush and he was on a donkey.

MK: Well ya see, mind ya at that time there was an awful lot of people that were living around and I know in the Nanaimo area, God how many kids did the Millers have? Was it the Millers?

Woman's voice: Eleven and they used to be sitting on the fence down by the company's office waitin' for the miners to come out of Number One mine and they used to say, any sandwiches, any cake, well usually some people would take more than what they needed for lunch and when they were comin' out all those kids were sittin' on the fence like ducks. Got any cake mister? Ya got any sandwiches mister? All these kids are sittin' on this fence and they were gettin' all the stuff from the miners bringin' what they had too much in the bucket see. Cause I used to get after her lots of times, I used to get after my mother. She fill your bucket. Always figurin' oh boy you'll be dieing hungry in there you know, and that's the worst thing you can do. You can't eat that much because when you go and lift something heavy you're bringing it all up out of your stomach.
Woman's voice: Our kids used to wait for his bucket. They've told me, the kids have told the women, people grown up, they've told me when they were kids they used to wait for the miners. No sandwiches tasted as good as old sandwiches. I'd put an extra one in you know so they'd have their sandwich. (Overlapping talk)

MK: Where the Princess Royal school is now on _____ Street, that was a playground there and there was only about three or four houses there and the Millers lived in there and that was an awful big family. And them kids were down there every day around three o'clock. The men were coming out of the mine. And everybody would open their bucket up and the kids they had a regular time. I betcha they didn't have to buy any groceries.

MB: Did this go on in every mine do you suppose?

MK: Oh I think so yes. But down there you see the Millers were the big family. By god they were getting fed with the miners, because like I told her. I used to get after her. She was putting this in, "Oh, you might get hungry". You might get hungry but you don't. Because if you overeat if you go to lift anything you're burping it all up again.

Woman's voice: In the mines in England they went down when they were eleven. "Cause I came from a mining district in England, around Whitehaven and that's where all their mines were. It was in Cumberland.

MB: Did you ever drive mules?

MK: Oh ya, I drove mules and horses too. They had some beautiful horses. I told her many times, a hundred times, it's just too bad somebody didn't have the idea of thinking about goin' down the mine and have all this stuff on film. I know a fella, he's still alive, lives out at Cedar, ___________. When I went to work with my Dad, he was drivin' a horse and he was handling 5 places, going turn for turn. He'd go:in and he'd take the load out and he'd give the empty in and you keep all these guys and the idea was that everybody had to get their turn unless you didn't have anything to put in the car at the time but if you were workin' the place the way you should you would always have coal. Some miners used to shoot and they'd clean that up, then they'd start drilling you know, and they weren't working. You had to keep your place full of coal all the time. But he had a nice horse there. The horse, he hardly ever talked to him. The horse gets to know every place he goes into on turn. He goes in a he walks up to the car, turns around and he puts the chain on, takes it out to the siding, he turns around and he walks in front of the empty car on the sidetrack the siding and as soon as he hears the chain hit the link on the car he goes into the place with it. He's just like another human being workin'. You see he's doin' the same job a double shift every day. He go out in the morning and at quittin' time the driver brings it down to the stables, they had a stable round there with stalls and they were fed there all their hay and oats and carrots and everything.

MB: Underground?

MK: Underground. They never came out of the mine until they were dead.
or got killed or something like that.

MB: What mine was this?

MK: Well pretty near all of them. I worked at Reserve mine and if a horse got his leg broke, like say we were goin' down a hill, there were some places on a grade. They used to put what they called sprags in the wheels to make 'em slide so the car wouldn't run on top of the horse. You have to go down gradually slidin'. But what would happen if a horse did get hurt bad they would shoot it. They didn't shoot it in the mine but what they did they had a cap, a blasting cap that they used for dynamiting coal and that and the firebosses would come if the horse had a broken leg and in agony, they'd put the cap in its ear and turn the battery and it would blow half its head off. Then the would load it into, dump a car over and 3 or 4 guys would come in and they'd roll the horse into it and it would go out of the mine and by buried in the ash dump. From the boilers, they used to dump the ashes. They buried 'em in there.

MB: But if they came out ...

MK: They never ever came out alive.

Woman's voice: Some of them came out and they were blind.

MK: The only time any animal came out of the mine was if they went on strike and the stable man would have to be down there. They was allowed to stay there to feed 'em because depending how long it was going to last. But if they could foresee that it was going to be quite a long length of time, then they would bring all the animals out of the mine. And all up where the high school is, all that area, the whole area above Wakesiah avenue belonged to the coal company. They had a farm there, they grew their own hay, oats and you name it, everything. And they used to bring it down there to the mines.

Woman's voice: That's where they used to put the horses cause we used to go up and see them and they were blind.

MB: And I guess the young animals were born in the mine, too, eh?

MK: No. NO. They had a few mules but later on it got to the point where ... I worked on some jobs at the high school when I was workin' on maintenance at the back there and we were diggin' up bones from the horses and mules that were buried there. There'll be a lot of people that will never know the experiences that a miner goes through you know.

MB: Well this is it. This is why we want to get down in your own words.

Woman's voice: Are you going to make a book of it?

MK: Well you see I practically stated on the pickin' tables and I went down the mine to run a winch, I drove horses, I was ridin' rope, as they call it on the haulage and then you, I was drivin' in rock tunnels, I did every job in the mine but being a boss. And I didn't want to go to become a fireboss. I didn't want that stuff. You're workin' 3 shifts all the time. But I did every other job besides that.

MB: You were eh?

MK: Everything. A fireboss he's the guy that does all the blasting.

MB: Yeah. But he didn't have the one ... oh I see He'd change off.
MK: He would go around, he would have a certain section that he looked after for blasting their coal in that place and then he'd go I don't know maybe he had someplace to sit down and then he'd take notes. He used to take note of how many cars you loaded and everything else. How many cars of rock you loaded, how many cars of coal and if you got to timber, he's the guy that put it in the book that went to the office from there you see. He's the guy the fireboss.

MB: Like when you came, well I guess there wasn't any union then.

MK: No, no. Well I'm gonna tell you now, there were no unions while I was workin' in the mines 'til one day, one Sunday night, wasn't it? A fella come to my place and his name's Bill Atkinson. He was killed in a car accident later on. There was him and another fella from Extension, I can't remember their names and they came to my house about 10 o'clock at night, wasn't it. And uh, I answered the door outside and what the fella said, he says "Can we get down in the basement?" Well I didn't have much of a basement in the house in____, anyway we went down and there was a furnace, but it wasn't too high. You could stand in between the joists. And this is when they were signin' all the men up. You see, they were gonna start a union again. You see the company broke the other one I gather, but this is the one that started by the United Mine Workers of America. And of course their headquarters were in the States and so then finally on the one Sunday night they had a meeting in the Eagles Hall on Easton Street and the place was overloaded oh right down to the bottom of the steps outside. And that was the start of the union. The United Mine Workers of America again. And do you know I don't know how many months it was before the union got the company to go along with 'em. If they want the miners or they want the coal production, they got to go along with the miners. We weren't askin' for anything out of line as far as I was concerned they wasn't. Because you were underpaid to start with and if you went with a complaint to the boss, the only answer you got if you don't like the bloody job take your tools and go home. That's the only answer you got from them. You see. But once we got organized, that's when I quit. We got a wash house at South Wellington.

Woman's voice: And you came home every other day.

MK: I was going to work on afternoon shift and when I go there here's all the morning shift men out because the boss wasn't feedin' somebody just right or they had a complaint and if the boss didn't settle it then, they weren't (the miners) asking for anything out of reason. The company was so used to usin' you like an ordinary labourer, slave labourer then as a human being. And do you know it ended up that companies were gettin' better off with coal production with goin' along with the men.

MB: Well is that right, that every other day like ...

Woman's voice: I said to him in the end what am I makin' a bucket for? I'd go to work and I'm comin' back home on the bus with the mornin' shift. If a guy had a legitimate complaint, everybody went out of the mine.
MB: How long did that take before they ....
Woman's voice: It took about nine months.
MK: Ya, it took quite a while before they got used to dealin' with the union again ya see. And in the end they got it workin'. They got it all workin'. But you see they had to treat the miners right. 'Cause the only answer you got if you were goin' in to make a complaint. He tells ya if you don't like the bloody job take the bucket and go home.
MB: Somebody told me ...
MK: But everybody would go home mad.
MB: Yes. Somebody was telling me that in those days when they didn't have a union if a man got hurt or even killed, they were almost afraid to tell the boss because it meant a whole crew and they'd loose a day's work.
MK: Days' production.
MB: And he nearly cried when he told me that.
MK: When I lived on Haliburton street, my next-door neighbour was killed just up above, not too far from where I was workin'. And the funny thing is I was workin' with a fella, a Finn fella, Henry Ahoe, one of his daughter's lives in Ladysmith somewhere, Hindmarsh?
Woman's voice: Yeah, they used to run the paper.
MK: They used to run the paper. She was the daughter of this fella, Henry Ahoe. Now he was a hard workin' man and a good man too, to work with. You made money with him. He wasn't a man that would be tellin' a lot of jokes, dirty jokes on a guy, he was just a straight human being and a good one. And I got to workin' with him ya see. And by god we were makin' good money. He was a hard worker and this is the kind of a guy you gotta get with if you wanta make money 'cause you were gettin' paid by the car. You see at one time when I worked with my dad you got paid 92½ cents a ton but at Number 10 you got a dollar and a half a car which a car was pretty near a ton and a half or more anyway. But that's what you got. And we made good money. He was a good man to work with you see and when you're goin' in there, you get paid by the car, naturally if you got a good person you try and make as much money as you can. You never wasted a minute in a day. You go a have your lunch and go right back to work. But you had to know how to blast the coal, keep your stock of coal in the face ready to load all the times, drilling and blasting, the fireboss came around three times a day to see if you had any holes to blast.
MB: Were you going to tell me something about somebody that got hurt when you started this?
MK: Oh yeah. He was working with his sons just above us. Funny thing is you seem to sense that something's wrong after you've been workin' in the mine. Everything was so quiet, you never heard nothin'. Never heard a car runnin' away, you didn't hear no noise, you didn't hear no blastin' and finally I went up the road and I can't see no haulage guys around, nobody around and I went around and finally I met a fella and I says, "What's gone wrong?" He said, "Mr. Marner(?) was just killed in that place there you see? And everybody went home.
Woman's voice: There was one thing about that that I didn't like. He was killed in the mine and his son came home that was workin' with him and he come over to our place and he said would you go and tell my mom that the old man got badly hurt. So I went and told her. And I don't know what was goin' on but he was dead and why that kid said that he was just badly hurt. But anyway, she went to pieces naturally, so I come over home and I phoned the doctor, Dr. Alan Hall, and I said to him "Well Henry told me when I went out again that he was dead, so I went over and phoned the doctor and I said you'd better come and tell her. He says "Well you tell her". I was a nurse you know. He says, "You tell her". I said:"I don't think that's my place. I haven't got anything I can give her if she just absolutely goes beserck. She's in a real state right now." So he came and told her. And after that they made that compulsory that the doctor go to the family if anybody was killed in the mine.

MB: That was the doctor at the mine?

NK: Yeah. Dr. Alan Hall.

MB: Dr. Hall, Dr. Giovando. Both of those were mine doctors.

NK: Alan Hall, well he had a stroke but he comes to the miner's do all the time and he always ...

Woman's voice: And Dr. Brown.

NK: Dr. Brown. They were our mine doctors. They were good though you know. You see you got, you paid like for the doctor. You paid a dollar a month or something like that. A dollar a month of your pay went toward the doctor you see. But they were good though.

Woman's voice: You could get them anytime. If the doctor knew you and he was your family doctor, and most people only phoned them when they really need them, they would come no matter what time.

MK: Through night or anywhere.

MB: Did you have to when you took your first aid, did you have to have any experiences taking anybody or looking after anybody?

NK: We went through the courses. I tell you what happened. The boss was after us, I worked at Reserve mine and they were looking for 5 people. There was myself, there was Bill Hall, and there was the other fella that drank acid there, George Potter and finally died.

MB: What acid did he drink?

NK: Well I'll tell you what happened at Number 10 mine they used to get real nice drinkin' water. A lot of fellows used to fill their water bottles for down the mine, some people didn't take tea or coffee, they took a bottle of water. Instead of cartin' it from home, they used to get it at the lamp house. Well they had good water there and they had some in a bottle there. They had a big 5 gallon glass bottle in there and that was full of acid for the batteries. They used to fill the acid you know in the batteries. Anyway I don't know what happened, I wasn't on this shift 'cause I was day shift them and he decided well he would have a drink fill his bottle and have a drink before he went down the mines. Took a drink there and first you know it was acid. He didn't live very long. Drank a whole glass full. But they made 'em change that after that. The changed the rules right away then you see.
You couldn't blame anybody but the person themselves you see. I never took anything out of the lamp house I always took my own _______ from home.

MB: And there was no smell to that stuff.

MK: Well you see he just poured it in the glass and put it down his mouth. He never even had a chance. He just took it to his mouth

MB: What was the law after that? What did they change it ...

MK: They weren't allowed to have a, have the acid on the counter. Like they had it on the counter. They had the lamp house there and they had this big bottle. They used to have to fill the batteries up with the acide.

MB: Did you in emergency when you worked as a nurse, I suppose you saw people coming in too badly hurt.

Woman's voice: Oh yes, I worked in Nanaimo hospital you see. We got miners in all the time. You could have a ward of 14 men in there and 10 of them would be miners.

MK: See the main industry was you either worked in the mines or go work in the bush. If you weren't a fisherman.

Woman's voice: I met him in the hospital because he was in through an - well it wasn't an accident, it was an infection that he got. In the mine. That was where I met him.

MB: That must have been a pretty bad one to be in hospital over it.

MK: It was my whole hand and my arm was startin' to get infected all the way up you see. And I went to the doctors and Giovando says "Well you'd better go to the hospital". I had a long cut goin' across here and another down here. What was I doin' that would cause me that?

Woman's voice: It was just caused with something pressing on it. Were you hammering or ...

MK: Lot's of time in the mine you see when you got up on the flank and you were putting your timber up, like you put your legs up and we used to work in the sides and you put your timbers up and you've got your stringer as they called it, then you put 2 x 6's you know periodically about two feet apart. And you wedged that with wooden wedges, with a wooden hammer. Because when you're blastin' you wouldn't want that to fall out again. You had to brace them all.

Woman's voice: It went under compensation anyway,

MK: It went under compensation but I'll tell you what I was doin'. I was workin' with two old guys, old Alf Carter and old John Anderson and they had a 5 foot saw and no handle for the other end. They've got a handle on one end and nothin' on the other end. So a lot of times you just put a nail through the hole and you pulled with the nail on the tail end of the saw. You always put it on top to help you push take the strain off your fingers a bit and I guess I did that down there for months and months and finally I guess I must have bruised the flesh and it got infected. Then she come in one day and she was bendin' my arm up and it broke open here and I had an arm up like that all along. It run all over the bed and the floor. Well it was just a continuous pressure on that saw on the metal.

MB: There's something you told me now when you say they wedged those timbers in and how they spun out when you blasted?
MK: Not always. If you put 'em up right, like some fellas maybe put their wedges in tight enough to start with. What you did you braced your timbers. You braced your timbers with a 2x6, you cut it to fit at the top and you nailed it in there. Now once you've got them all like that you were o.k.

MP: I saw in the mines report there that one man got killed. It was a freak accident. The timber came out and hit him on head. Sprung right out. But they wouldn't necessarily do that. They weren't nailed.

Woman's voice: Were they nailed?

MK: Well yah. Well they were nailed together. They had braces nailed. You used to have, you used it depending on the height of the place. If the place was about 12, 14, 16 feet they had to put up 2 sets of braces. They put a brace up where you could reach the timber just comfortable like you know and if it was 18 feet high, then you had to put another brace up and put another plank up to get up that high ya see. The general public, as a rule, their impression of the miner was he was the lowest down grade worker in the country. But he had to have it up here if he wanted to come out alive every day out of that mine.

Woman's voice: That's no different than the logger is it? They take their life in their hands every day they're in there.

MK: Yeah, yah.

MB: But he says they got such low wages and people looked down on them.

MK: The miner was the lowest class of worker there was. Yet they had more experience than a lot of people just workin'. Otherwise you could go in one day and you wouldn't even come out.

MP: Well this is what we'll make people realize. Was there many Czechs here when you came?

MK: Oh yeah, there was quite a few people. A lot of people were comin' out from the old country. There was Polish guys, there was Czechoslovak.

Woman's voice: Not Polish.

MK: Oh yeah. They were bringing them out from Europe to work in the mines you see.

MB: Well then they all had sort of their national groups? I know the Finns had theirs, the Italians.

MK: You had every nationality in the country workin' in the mines. Except they wouldn't allow a Chinaman workin' in the mines. They did a one time a way back and a miner was workin' in a place but he had a Chinaman loadin'. He did the mining and the blastin' and all that and the Chinaman did the loading. But he was under the ... you were responsible for him. It's the same when I was workin' with my dad before I got my ticket, he was responsible for me. You see he kept me in a safe place. Say you want to learn, you just have to work in there one day with a miner and you know already what ya gotta do. If you want to go home alive that day.

Woman's voice: And like he says you can tell when you're going to have a cave-in.

MK: Oh yeah. The place starts to work ya see. But usually you don't get that where they're going into a big place. There might be
acres and acres of seam of coal and they're drivin' the roads. We used to drive them about 80 feet apart. If you were driving a slope down or a level, every 80 feet you're driving a place off one to the right one to the left. Say you had a 5 acre piece of coal there. You were cutting it up into big blocks 80 foot square. Now when you reached the end or it petered out, then you came back and you would take a slice off the back end. Then you came back and you took another one off and this is the way you were goin' 'til you came back and I've seen timbers that diameter turning and twisting like that like a haystack. With the weight comin' on, but when you was workin' with experienced miners, it don't take you long to learn. Just one day in a place where it's workin' right and if it's goin' to cave, you know when to go. It keeps workin' more and more and more all the time and it gets worse and worse and then you finally got to be ready to run.

MB: There's no amount of timbering will keep it up.

MK: Nothing. I've seen timbers that big and when the weight com on, it would just come on like one of these I don't know what you'd call 'em, the timbers come out just like all straw. The timbers just come out that way. You know. It's gotta go somewhere. When it starts to move and it gets so far, and the timbers are beginnin' to.... they can't hold the weight, now when it drops like that it just about blows you off your feet.

MB: Is it true that the cave-ins all happened between midnight and six o'clock in the morning?

MK: No, not necessarily. It depends on how much area you've weakened. You're comin' back with your coal all the time. The more you come back, the weaker it's gettin' and the timbers are gettin' workin' more and more and more crookin' and crackin' and finally you can hear it goin' and it's goin' continuously and then you run for your life.

Woman's voice: What mine was that that flooded? From the Nanaimo river?

MK: From the Nanaimo River?

Woman's voice: Yeah, the men were drowned in it. Remember they got up onto a shelf, some of them but some of them tried to swim from ...

MK: Oh no that was up Extension way. They went back into the old workin's there somehow and I don't know .... Sheppard

NB: John Senini, he was, he saved this other fellow.

NK: I was in there after. We were sent to do some timbering after they got the water all out. If they would have stayed. If he would have just had his, this Sheppard was a man, he was a fighter a boxer at one time and he was a guy that when he was cornered, he wouldn't give in, no way. He was in there with his nephew, wasn't it? And the water broke in from another old workin' up at Extension and it come down and it found its own level. Now if they had stayed there for a while, they would have got them out. Put ya see Nelson, knowing him, there's no way he was goin' to stay in there. And he made an attempt for it and he didn't make it. And if they'd have just stayed there, maybe in a few more hours time they would have got 'em out because they were startin' to pump the water out. There's just so much water come in.

I had a good scare in Number 10 mine, when I worked with Dave
Stupich's dad there. He was a hard worker. And you were gettin' paid by the car and when you get with a man like him, you gotta work with him and you're makin' money. You're in there makin' money. He's a real nice guy to work with. But we were sent, we went down the mine, there was a road that went in on the right and there was another road went down parallel and they had an electric fan there running. I don't suppose you'd ever... we used to hear it in Nanaimo from South Wellington, this electric fan. It was suckin' the air out of the mine like, suckin it into the mine you know and it comes back out again. Well we were sent up on this place and it went down towards that bank towards, is it Beck Lake? or whatever they call it. It was on the bank there and the compressor was running around there and it was water cooled you see. And we were workin' in there and we had to put up timbers right against one another. You couldn't hold nothing up, it was always coming down. And we were up quite a ways, I guess about 200 feet and these conveyors or pans as I say, we put that in so that instead of takin' all the brushin' up, we would get the coal out of there and uh load it in the cars and get it out. I used to go down because I was younger than Dave. So I used to run down and change the cars, take the loaded car, run it into the siding, take the empty out because it was flat, it wasn't hard pushin'. I'd push the car in. I'd worked in there about a week. All the posts were right up tight together and the roof the same way. And the water was warm that was comin' down. It was the water that went through the compressors to keep 'em cool and it was comin' down there warm. We was on afternoon shift this particular week and I went down to change to car and every time I went up, I was packin' up some laggin', packin' up some boards and material that we needed to block the sides up you see. It was stacked up there and I left Dave up there all the time you see. I said I was the younger guy so I'd run down and change the car. I was comin' back in with an empty car, pushin' it up to the end of the pan and I seen the wall of water comin' down through the road you know, I said, "My God," I says, "Beck Lake's come in and Dave's gone." And I run for my life. I run right outside the mine. I left him in there. I figured there no use gain' for him. He's finished. And I run outside for my life 'cause it was comin' all over the place. I run outside of the mine and I was soakin' wet already then. And I sat down and a guy said what's the matter with ya? I said, "By god, old Dave's gone." Dave Stupich. I said, "beck's Lake's come in." The way the water come through ya see. That's the only place that would have any water. I sat there for a while and sat there for a while and the rop rider from the out­ side he went down with a trip you know, and he came back out again with a load and I thought to myself, What the heck's goin' on here? I thought there's be messages comin' from the bottom that there was water comin' in from everywhere. So I walked down the road a bit and I went into the sidin', everything was normal, no water, walked around the corner and everything was normal there but everything that I had packed up the hill was all layin' at the bottom end. And I walked around and I hollered for Dave
but it was quite a ways up you see and I got no answer. I thought well he must have gone. So I'm all be myself and I got around the corner and I could see a light, a headlamp, and he was still alive and I hollered as soon as I seen the light and he said, "Yeah, I'm all right, I'm all right." When the water broke in he just grabbed a post and hung on, see and the water was comin' down the road. I was sure glad he was alive you know. By god we had a narrow escape there ya know.

MB: He had presence of mind.

MK: Yeah, he just hung on. Hung on to the post ya see.

End of Side Two

Transcribed by Lynne Bowen