

**Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)**

**Oral History Interview**

Interviewee: Tilly Herman

Interviewer: Don Bouzek

Date: July 14, 2003

Location: East Coulee

Index

-community life in a mining town

-life as a miner's wife

-community buildings

-mine accidents

**What were things like for miners' kids in East Coulee?**

My name is Tilly Herman. I was born in Drumheller. In the '40s my mother married a Mr. Stankle with 4 children. We moved to East Coulee because he was a fire boss. The Elgin Mine closed down here, so he went to work at the Murray Mine.

It kept you pretty busy. With the men working different shifts, you had to, if they were afternoon shift, have dinner early. Fix their lunch pails, and away they'd go to work. If they were midnight, you'd have to do the same thing, only have breakfast ready for them when they came home in the morning. Day shift was fine.

Oh this was before I got married, ya. He worked steady midnight shift. He liked the midnight shift. So we didn't have too much contact with him. We'd have to, we lived across the tracks there. We had no water, so we'd have to haul water on a wagon from the

station. We had little chores like that to do. And baseball games. But we didn't see too much of my dad.

**And what was life like as a miner's wife?**

Well as I said, keeping the men, their lunch buckets ready and their dinners or breakfasts when they came off shift. And look after, most of us had gardens, looked after the gardens. And if you had children you looked after them. Oh yes, washing. And this was the hard part for us, because we had to haul our water. It was hard work.

Oh it was maybe a quarter of a mile, not that far we lived from the train station. They had a well, and it was the best water in East Coulee. Then later on Mr. Shafer did haul water. But then it was whenever you could get him, because he was trucking. But I know it was embarrassing for us. My sister and I had to haul the water in carbide tins that we painted, on a wagon. Of course they'd rattle and make a lot of noise going down there. We were just embarrassed by it, but we'd have to do it.

I didn't move to Drumheller until '80, but when we were in East Coulee we played ball. The women played bridge games. There was organizations which some of them belonged to. Certain groups had birthday parties. Whenever anybody had a birthday they'd play cards and have cake and coffee and stuff like that.

The miners would put on Xmas parties every year for the kids at Xmas. I think that's about all they did.

**What are the less happy memories?**

The worst mine event that I remember was the two Meyers boys being killed in the mine shaft. They were coming up off work and something happened to the... cable. It came up

so fast it hit the top and went right back down again. The two boys were killed. That was about the worst accident.

There was a strike. We lived across the tracks. Of course we couldn't get any coal from the mine. So my husband and brothers went up the hill. There used to be an old mine there. They took shovels and a sack and brought down coal so we'd have warmth for the winter. The strike lasted quite a while.

Most of your friends moved away. You didn't have the things to do that you did before. You'd have to find other things to do. Come to Drumheller and go to a show. The children too, the schools closed down and they'd have to be bussed to Drumheller to the school. If they were curling or playing ball or anything, you always had to be ready to take them, because there wasn't that much to do in East Coulee.

**What was your daily routine like?**

When the mines were operating? I'd have to get up about 6 o'clock if my husband was dayshift, and get breakfast ready. If the kids were going to school, I'd have to get them ready for school. Then work in the garden, clean your house. If it was a night that you played bridge, that's what we did.

Oh yes. We'd have to hang it out on the line. No washers or dryers in those days. And do your regular housecleaning. Of course after a while we moved down by the riverbank and we'd just have to go over the dyke and go swimming. We'd take the kids down there for swimming.

He's in charge of a group of men that go down into the mine. My husband went down the shaft, but the other mines they go in. They supervise the men what to do. How many

boxcars they have to bring out. He looks after the men. If somebody gets hurt or something, he has to bring them out and stuff like that.

**What entertainments do you remember?**

The baseball games, no it wasn't anything to do with the mines. It was how many youngsters or boys that you had to play. They had a pretty good baseball team. If they played other teams, I don't know if they played from Drumheller, Sunday we'd always go out and watch. It was a big event, ya.

That's right. The roads from East Coulee to Drumheller were gravel and a lot of dust. It was really dry. Everybody didn't have a car. I remember going to the outdoor movie theatre, and everybody would try to be the first one out so they wouldn't have to eat the dust going home. Then you had to cross the ferry too. There was a ferry at Cambria, and you'd have to wait till it came on your side before you got over. It was quite an experience when we first moved down there.

**Could you tell us what community buildings were in East Coulee at the time?**

When we first moved down there, there was about 4 or 5 mines and 2 little schools. One small one and one larger one that the children went to. They had 4 grocery stores, a theatre, a bakery, and a drugstore, 2 garages, and a pool room, I forgot about that. It was quite a going concern.

Next to the theatre was a little gambling house, I guess they called it. And the bars of course. There was 2 hotels, and on a payday they were really going strong.

Whenever there was a death in a family we'd get together and go over and see them. Then when the funeral was, we'd always put on lunch in the community hall. There was 2 community halls, which I forgot to mention. The Hungarian hall and our community hall.

Each one of them had dances. On certain occasions, like Xmas, Halloween, New Years, JC's always put on a dance once a month. We'd do as much as we could for anybody. It didn't matter who it was, as long as they belonged in East Coulee.

We always said hi. Some of the older women couldn't speak English. But their children could, and it didn't matter to us who they were. We all got along good. Some of them would tease some of the Hungarian boys or Ukrainians, but it was just all in fun. There was never any conflict or anything about that.

Yes, there was quite a few families stayed there. They'd come over from the old country, and they didn't know anything else to do. They stayed as long as the mines were open. Some of them, if the younger ones found jobs elsewhere, they would take them.

I forgot there was cafes in East Coulee too.

I think there was a Hungarian and, there was two. There was one behind the grocery store, the East Coulee Trading, there was a restaurant behind there.

There was a transport there too, I forgot about that. Things come back. They had a transport there, and he would bring the groceries in from Drumheller when they'd come on the freight. That was after the station closed down in East Coulee.