

Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI)

Group Interview

- Date: 10 November 2005
- Location: Coleman, Alberta
- Participants: Al Fontana, Emma Fontana, Veronica Fontana, Pauline Grigel, John Kinear, Clara Marconi, Albin Panek, Glen Poulton (Blondie), Emily Root, Ray Root, Bill Skura, Gary Taje, John Yeliga
- Index: Coalmining in the Crowsnest Pass; Family histories and growing up in the Crowsnest Pass; Harsh living and working conditions; Mine accidents and fatalities; Being the wife of a miner; Impact of miners' deaths on families; United Mine Workers of America (UMWA); Work stoppages and strikes; Benefits of being unionized

Glen Poulton: My name is Glen Poulton. They call me Blondie. I came here in 1946. I was going to Hedley BC, and they went on strike. So I stopped, my mother-in-law lived here and two kids. Why don't you try to go and get a job here? I went and asked Bill Fraser, the manager. He said, you're hired. Start tomorrow. He says, you married? I said, yes. Your wife expecting? Yes. He says, I'll put you timber packer, you'll get 4 or 6 cents more an hour. That's how I started in the mines. That was 1946.

Emily Root: Outside of about 5 years I lived here all my life. My dad had a logging camp below the Crow Mountain. There's not very much mentioned in other histories of logging in the area. But I wrote a history for the Coleman Legion on its 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. I mentioned then about our logging camp, and there was pictures there of me standing on a stump. I was about 3 years old. I looked through the *Crowsnest Pass and Its People*, the big books that they wrote. There was only one place where it was mentioned there by some other families that worked up there for my dad. I did have a nice picture of him with his logging camps, but I was looking all over and couldn't find it. But at least there was a mention of the first pioneers that came here. My sister was born in 1923, so it must've been in the early '1900s that my dad had this logging camp. They supplied logs to the mine, they used them for props. If those props cracked, you'd better get out of the mine. My memory today isn't too good. But like I said, we were one of the early pioneers that came here and settled. There's all these loggers, they were every nationality – Russian, French, every European people, they all came here to work. Even in the wintertime some of the farmers from Cowlie came and worked up at the camp, because they weren't working in the wintertime. So there were lots of farmers that came up there. This attracted some of the schoolteachers to meet the young guys, and they'd come up there too. I never saw snowshoes, but it must've been snowshoes they used to go up there, because I don't remember any of them with skis. But they managed to get up there and visited and met their brides too. I can't think of any more just now, but we've lived here a long time and now I'm shaky and old. I guess that's all I can tell you for now.

Pauline Grigel: My name is Pauline Griegel. I was born in Hillcrest and lived in the Pass all my life. Just moved from Hillcrest to Bellevue. My dad was a miner, and we kept quite a few boarders at home that were miners too. It was common. The houses were small. I remember one time we had just a fairly small bedroom, there was a double bed and three men slept together in one bed, and on a single bed two men slept. That's what helped us survive, because the mines weren't working too well. I remember my dad at lunchtime, there was only one shift for two weeks, one day he worked. I think at the time the wages were about \$5.40. By the time the mine too their \$2 ground rent, because our house was built in mine property, \$2 ground rent. They charged the full 2 weeks for the washhouse even though he only showered once. Then he charged us for the lights. My dad came home with a check for 60 cents after all the deductions. My mom never did cash it. She never did cash it, because we survived. We were out on the edge of town. We had a cow and pigs and chickens and rabbits. Made our own butter, had all the milk we wanted, all the eggs we wanted. So that's how we survived. It was terrible for the men. My mom told me once they were talking. She said, if a man came into town with a pretty wife, the fellow that was hiring would say, send your wife to my place tonight to ask for a job. That's how things went then. The men of course didn't have the clothes that we have nowadays. I remember back in the early '30s, when a man got told to work in the mine, they put him up on the tippie, on the picking table. That's where they picked out the rocks out of the mine. I remember this one man, a Mr. Salva, he froze to death standing up at that picking table. That's what happened to him there. It was just terrible. But otherwise, like I say, another story that I heard that's really sickening to me, is when the Bellevue strike was on, the second one I think it was, there's some men that wouldn't go on strike. So they were called scabs. But what happened to this one family, this lady had sent her children all off to school. She went out and got some wood and stoked up the stove again, and then went outside for something. Kaboom, somebody had drilled a whole in one of the pieces of firewood and put in a stick of dynamite. It blew up the stove and everything, and the pot of porridge just stuck to the ceiling. Thankfully nobody was around at the time. Apart from that, my husband worked at the mine. He shoveled coal at the tippie, that's when they loaded all the big boxcars by hand. They had a chute where the coal came down from the tippie. They had one man to push it down to make sure it got down the chute. On one side of the chute there was two left handed men, the other side was a right handed man. It was their job to make sure the coal was shoveled right to the back of the boxcars. They had to fill the boxcars completely as much as they could for 12 cents a ton. That was in '38, 39, when I got married. That's what my husband did for a living. He didn't go underground until he got to Coleman here. That's when Coleman took over Mohawk. The men found that the Coleman men resented the Mohawk men coming to work there. My husband was a loader man by then. They had a loader installed in Mohawk. So he was the head loader man. So naturally when he came to Coleman he was the first one. They needed him, they wanted to put on double shift. But there too, there was a bigotry there. They resented my husband from coming. This one time after they loaded the coal, it was his job to get up on top of the boxcar, release the brake, and run it down so far, to be pulled out by the trains. It was at night. They didn't tell him there was an electric wire strung right across. When he got there he hit the electric wire and was knocked right down to the ground. Thankfully he wasn't hurt too badly. But there was a

lot of bigotry. As a kid, we were called bohunks. Any nationality, unless you were English, Scotch or Irish – they were the elite. The rest of them, you're all bohunks. Until the flu came around in 1918, my mom said they were always teased. But when the flu came, they came around begging for garlic so they could make themselves a necklace of garlic to wear around their neck to not catch the flu. That's enough from me.

Clara Marconi: Hi, my name is Clara Marconi. I was born in Bermus, Alberta. In those days my dad was the section foreman and we lived in Frank. Every time my mom had a child, my grandma was in the section house in Bermus, so we'd go there and be born there, and come back to Frank on the train. I grew up in Frank. We used to go swimming down at the river. We'd climb up the front of the Frank slide and go up to that opening of the coalmine. We'd like to go into the mine, but it was flooded, so we couldn't go in there. We lived in Frank and went to school there. Then we moved to Coleman and went to school here and met my husband, Toby Marconi, Gordon actually. We got married in '45. He worked 44 years in the mine. While he was at International they lent him to Grand Cache to open up Grand Cache for United States Steel. I went and took a certified nursing aide course in Calgary, and came back and worked at the Crowsnest Pass Hospital for 25 years. That's about the excitement of my life so far.

Gary Taje: I'm Gary Taje. I was born and raised in the Pass. I started working in the coalmines in 1971, and worked in the mines until about 7 years ago. My father moved to the Pass after WWII. Came from northern Alberta, met my mother, a bohunk, and started working in the mines here. My mother's parents moved here from Poland in the early '20s and worked in the mines.

Bill Skura: My name is Bill Skura. I was born and raised in Manitoba, on my dad's homestead farm. Conditions were very poor at that time, as there was droughts and everything. In my very young days I rode on many a freight, that was the transportation that many workers used. At one time I pretty near lost my feet. I was dragged and I tried to get up, and the wheels were touching my shoes. I had my bother's packsack on my back. I pushed myself away, and I did get up. Further down I got to Luscar and joined my friends. I worked in bush camps, construction, and other areas. I worked in a nickel mine for Inco. Then my friend and I decided to go up north to Yellowknife, to the goldmines. But on the way to Edmonton, we got delayed and landed two weeks too late. There were no more flights at that time to Yellowknife. The only transportation at that time to Yellowknife was by plane. So we got hired as rock miners in McGillivray Mine here. I landed here in November 1945. To tell you the truth, the coalmine conditions were so much different than International Nickel. They're a hard rock mine. I don't think I would've lasted here for 48 hours if it had been spring or summertime. But you get used to the conditions. I met my wife here, and we got married, and that's what kept me here. Our conditions at that time, the wages were very low. They were \$7.55 a day for coalminers, and \$8.02 for rock mining. That's what I got a day. There was no holidays, no nothing. When we did get vacation time, you had to work so many days. If you were sick or so, you would lose that month. You had to work so many days a month in order to earn the vacation day off. I took an active part in the union when the conditions were bad. I was elected in 1953 or so as a pith committee that worked underground. Instead of being

called shop steward, you were pith committee man. I was active in one position or another for 50 some years, 53, 54, that's when our local closed. I was pith committee, I was president, board member. So I held these different positions in the union. United Mine Workers of America. To tell you the truth, we got the conditions improved, but slowly. There was no pension then, when I started. Today we have pensioners that are still living and getting \$220 a month if they worked 30 or 40 years. The others are getting \$300 a month when the mine closed. That's the kind of rewards we got. I think I said enough.

John Yeliga: . . . and I'll tell you, I had never seen hills as big as the one I'm living on, and that was tough. I went to work in International Mine the day I was 17. I went to afternoon shift. The next Friday I was a 17 year old kid, my dad took me in the barn, I had four beers, and he chased me home. I worked underground, I worked in the tipple, and I drove truck. The one underground that used to scare me, the place was so low that you had to crawl on your belly to get through. I was a timber packer at that time. The only way I could get a timber in there with me is I took a timber dog and a piece of bradish, tied the timber to my leg, and I crawled belly first and pulled the timber behind me. Either that or you packed the timber about 900 feet the other way. We didn't want to work any harder than we had to. It was kind of tough.

Glen Poulton: You'd better tell them what a timber dog is. Like I told my wife. And I got an extra sandwich every day until somebody squealed on me and said, it's a piece of steel that you ram into the timber. You pound it in, you pull it. You can't pull a round timber. Boy did I get it from the wife.

John Yeliga: I was a bucker. This is one of the jobs you had when you first started. You didn't know nothing about the mine. Young fellows took you down there and you had to go up the chute and start the coal coming down. If it wouldn't run, then you got on your butt on the chute and you pushed. You done that all day. In time you got a little different job that made it a little easier. But it was good. It was nice and warm in the wintertime, nice and cool in the summertime. I spent I bet you 40 years underground, and it was nice. There's no getting away on that. I run the cleaning plant the last time I was at the mine. A locomotive engineer, believe it or not. I had training by a brakey for about 20 minutes, and I was a loading engineer running a diesel, a yard engineer. My biggest job was to learn how to start it. You get a few scares. I even got to run the tipple as head. . . what do they call it? I did that job, and I done a second operator job, and I run the locomotive. I done it all. But I was born a prairie chicken. After this thing is over I'm going to show you a picture, and I don't know if any of you prairie chickens ever seen anything like this in your lives. . . . That's one team run by one man. Saskatchewan. Outlook would be the closest place, Broderick is the original place. That's only four miles east of Outlook. That's about enough for me.

Ray Root: My dad homesteaded 1916 about 40 miles north of Lethbridge. In 1924 he went to work for the Irrigation Company out at Vauxhall. They called it the Canada Land Irrigation Company. In 1932 my brother and I and my father was working on a bridge that had partially caved in. We went under the bridge, and my brother bumped the bridge

timber, and the bridge fell and pinned my father under it, and broke his back. That was 1932, and I took the job that he was hired to do. But I was working just because he had arthritis and I was helping him. So the company allowed me the job. I worked for about three years. My younger brother got married, so I turned the job over to my younger brother, and I went to work for them by the day. In 1940 jobs were getting pretty scarce, so I come to the Crowsnest Pass and went to work for the International Mine up here. I worked for the mine company, and in '49 I went back down to the Irrigation and took the job over again. They had changed over to the government, and the PFRA was what it was called, Prairie Farmers Rehabilitation. I worked there until 1960. They were always good to me. They treated me wonderful. In '62 I fell down the chute and broke my leg. I was on compensation for about two years for the broken bone, and I had blood clots form in my legs, and I couldn't hardly walk. The mine company said, you'd better get another job. I went to work for Charley Drain, which was MLA for the government at that time, Social Credit. They were laying telephone cable in the Medicine Hat area. I worked for Charley for about two months and he said, Ray, there's an opening with the Liquor Control Board in Blairmore. He said, we can get you a job as a clerk. So I went to work for the Liquor Control Board. I worked for about eight years for the Liquor Control Board, and I became 65 and retired. Since that time, I just took odd jobs or whatever, and made a few dollars here and there. And I went on pension, and I've been on pension ever since. I've enjoyed life. In '92 I was on pension, and my younger brother said, Ray, we're having a senior meeting at the Legion. He said, there's a party on, you'd better come up, I've got somebody here I'd like you to meet. That's when I met my wife. Her mother worked for my mother in 1942. I never knew the girls. I met Emily, she was on council before that, but she was at this senior party at the Legion. I met Emily. When I went in that day, they were selling tickets for supper for two up at the crossing. So I bought a ticket. The girl that was selling tickets said to me, Ray, you win, you gotta take me to supper. I said, I'm not that lucky. But anyway, about an hour and a half afterwards she come up and said, you're the winner, you gotta take me to supper. I said, no, I'm taking Emily. That's the end of the story.

Q: I'm wondering if some of you can talk about the union, and its importance to you in safety, etc.

Bill Skura: Like I said before, the conditions in the mine were at times very bad. The unions at that time didn't seem to be as strong as they are by far, and mining is way different today than it was 50 years ago. We worked in the conditions, like traveling. When McGillivray closed we had to travel to Vickery. At times we had to travel in open truck. One time this truck came in and we were picked up at the number 3 highway at the Esso. The truck had just hauled a bunch of cattle, and you know what they left. They expected us to ride in it. I was on that shift and said, no bloody way are we getting on that truck until it's washed. Some were ready to go, but I said, no bloody way. We stood our ground, the truck driver went back and washed the truck, then he picked us up and nobody got docked hours. We had quite a few wobbles with the conditions in Vickery Creek when it just opened up. The washhouse was very poor, very small. You'd walk past each other, guys would step on your toes, and you know how that hurts. I think it was 1962, the bus used to take us on the top road to the washhouse. Then they decided that

we'd have to walk the stairs from the bottom to the washhouse. This was spring, and there was mud above your ankles. Not only mud, but mixed with coal dust and what have you. My shift refused to walk through the mud. They took us on top the way they took us before. I told me fellow workers next morning not to get off the bus unless they promised to either take them on top, or promised that they will fix that area before they used it for us to go to the mine. That morning the men refused. There were a couple fire bosses on the bus. They stuck with the men and they got fired. We had some good fire bosses. I forget how long we were on strike, but we were a few days on strike. We won that time employment insurance, I think it was \$4 a day at that time. But this is how tough times were. We had wobbles in the race horse, because of washhouse conditions also and other conditions. We had our battles.

Glen Poulton: All I can say is that if it wasn't for the unions, there'd be nothing. There's some good and some bad, but I can't complain on this union. We've had good men, we've had some that didn't know how or didn't want to. But I've been here as secretary treasurer, Bill's been the president, so have I. We've been together to Miami, Pittsburgh, all over. But like I said before, it was work that we enjoyed. I know I got hell from the union, because the fire bosses were on strike and I went home. But they didn't belong to our union, and I still went home. Boy did I get hell that afternoon from Jock. I went to work the next day, but I didn't like to go through the picket line. But like I said before, I've been through the ranks and I'm proud to be what today... we wouldn't have nothing. That's my motto of the union. I'm glad that I was in the union. It was sometimes good and easy work, and sometimes it was tough work. My job was when a fellow miner passed away I'd help the wife get her pension. Them days you never had nothing but now, it's not much, but they get a pension if they should pass away. We got quite a few yet with our pension plan here that are still living. But that's about all I've got to say. I'm still proud to be a union man, and always will be. But one thing I will say, Bill, how many times did you sling beer to keep going in the family? I think every one of us miners. I worked for the liquor board for about 18 years when the mine wasn't running and through Christmas to make extra money. I think you were a beer slinger. I know Bill was. So we did a lot of odd work too. When you got \$4 a day you had to find a job to keep going.

Bill Skura: The mines didn't work steady. There were layoffs, we had to listen to the whistle. If it was three, you stayed home. If it was one, you went to work next morning. So the times were damn tough. There were times that we got laid off for two or three weeks. There was no sick insurance. You finally did get sick insurance and I think it was \$4 something a day. It was very little, hardly paid your utility bills. So it was tough.

Clara Marconi: There were many strikes. I can remember my husband, of course he was a fire boss, and he was at the mine. They had this strike, and he was in one of these little shacks down here at International. There were people shooting at him because he was working. Then when the whistles blew continually it was a mine accident, and everybody, all the wives and kids and everybody, ran to the mine to see if their husbands were okay. My grandfather worked in the Hillcrest Mine, and he was killed in the Hillcrest explosion.

Q: What was it like being a wife at home, was it scary?

Clara Marconi: Yes, very. My dad used to work in the mine, that's why we moved to Coleman. My dad was a track layer. He would send us out, we were 12 years old or something, to sit on the bridge by the house and listen for the whistle. We had to sit there every night and wait for this whistle. If it blew three and if I missed it, I was in big trouble. So I'd run to the neighbor and say, did you hear the whistle? Then they'd tell me, and I'd go and tell him what they told me. If I missed the whistle and he went to work and there was no work, I was in big trouble. Anyway, we got married in '45. When we got married, things were so rough, he had a little Model A, and he sold it to buy a stove. We lived in three rooms, and eventually we had three little kids. Three rooms, three kids, two great big stoves. We used to walk around the tracks to pick up the coal so we could keep the fires burning. I used to do that at home with my mom and dad, go up and pick up pieces of wood so we'd have wood for the fire. It was rough, but it was good days too. Poor but happy.

Veronica Fontana: We grew up through the '30s when the big strike was on. That's when all the parades and everything were going on, the union was pretty strong. The men were fighting for better working conditions and shorter work time. When they won the strike, they were working five days a week and they got 8 hour shifts. During the strike time, we were all kids going into the parades. We had Violet Manakay and George Peer, they were the leaders of organizing the kids for concerts, which kept the people occupied during their idle times. We'd go on these parades, they'd take us out on the parades, and we'd sing these songs. But there was a separate community. There was West Blairmore and East Blairmore. East Blairmore was all the foreigners and all the big families, whereas in West Blairmore all the pit bosses and that had company houses. What we used to do to turn around and try to get their attention, they used to take all of us kids out on a parade and we'd sing those songs. Shall I sing it? Just don't throw me out. One was where we'd hang all the bosses on a sour apple tree, and the scabs to keep them company. We'd go marching up and some of the women used to come out of their houses throwing rocks and sicing dogs on us. We'd keep on going. We had good times then. We had Violet Manakay, she was quite an organizer with kids. She was a singer and she played the banjo and piano. So that kept us kids all in order. ? Peer used to do the tap dancing. They used to make these concerts, silver collection, that used to help pay for some of the relief for the people. We used to have wonderful concerts. There was the Campo sisters: Vickie, Mary, Dorothy and Rosie. They used to sing, they were beautiful singers. And we had all the accordion players. There was Mike Mohalski, Aldo Binoni, John Sekina, and the concerts were wonderful. The people used to just pack into the hall. People just put 5 cents in, and it added up. That helped provide food and clothes for some of the people who really needed it the most. Then the big strike was on in Corbin. A lot of the union people from Blairmore all got onto a truck and went to Corbin to help them fight their strike. That's where the big battle started. The RCMP were on their horses and they had a whip. They used to chase the women off the parade with the whip. A fellow with a tractor from the mine used to come and try to scare the women off with his tractor, and used to chase them right off the road. However, nobody got hurt on that, and then they shut the Corbin mine down. So that was the end of that issue in there. But the one in Blairmore continued.

There was Sam Paterson, Eric Tyburg, Harvey Murphy, they were the big organizers for the Pass. They all wound up on the councils and the school boards, which made it good for the working class kids. They provided free books and pencils for school.

Q: Is there any truth to the story about how they taxed certain kinds of dogs?

Veronica Fontana: Oh ya, you used to have to have a license for your dogs. But you were only allowed a certain type of dog.

Q: Apparently they licensed the purebred dogs that the mine owners had, and not the mongrels that the workers had.

Veronica Fontana: I don't recall that one. I'm forgetting where I'm at. However, everybody, the working people got along very good there. They managed to get Tim Buck to come into the community. They had built a boulevard down the main street in Blairmore. We were all out there, they brought all of us kids out. Tim Buck shook hands with us. He had a bottle of champagne and he christened the boulevard, called it Tim Buck Boulevard. But that only lasted until the unions were going strong, and then after when different people went on councils and that, then they disposed of the boulevard. You don't hear too much of it anymore. In order to scare the people, they burnt crosses. There was one big cross on the top of Turtle Mountain and another one up at Goat Creek. They looked like great big lamps, you couldn't tell that they were fires. All these foreign people were terrified, because they thought it was the end of the world. But that was just to scare them during the strike. However, they seemed to maneuver out of it. Then there was the war scare that was coming in, that was around 1936, '39. The mine had to go to work. They wanted fuel for the war. So then the men got their contract to work five days a week and eight hour shifts. But they didn't work that many. You were lucky to work three days a week on those shifts.

Emma Fontana: I'm Emma Fontana, but was Emma Rogers. My mother was a Gillespie, I don't know if there's anyone remembers my granddad Gillespie. He was a good Scotsman, father of seven girls. My mother was the oldest. His work was in the mine. I don't know too much about that, I guess he was too busy working and my granny was too busy looking after six and seven girls. Other than that, I was a Rogers, my maiden name. My dad was Jack Rogers, and he worked at the tipple at McGillivray. I can't think of anything else.

Al Fontana: To generalize, to start with, I didn't know exactly what you were searching for. But I was young and going to school here in the early '30s. From '30 to '40 when times were tough elsewhere in the country, the mining area was thriving. The Crowsnest Pass here was an envy to a lot of people, because there was steady work and lots of coal that had to be mined. People lived very well. I'd like to go back and mention a bit about Emma's grandfather. He was the leader of the union back when they had their own union here, before bigger unions moved in and established their operations. He has written some very good articles for the Coleman Journal, and I have all these articles that were written. He emphasizes the difficulties that arose when parties moved in, such as



Veronica, my sister-in-law was mentioning, they came in and took over and put the local union out. There were a lot of advantages gained by it, but there were a lot of disadvantages as well. I think for years there was an emotional atmosphere within the employees at the two mines. My dad, incidentally, was on the other side. He was bringing in the bigger companies and establishing them here. He was also a rock miner. He came to this country in 1916 when he was 15. He was turned down flat when he asked if he could have a job in Canmore, because his relatives that were there at the time had told him to come on over, with the experience he had with his granddad driving a rock tunnel from Switzerland into Italy. That remained today as the longest tunnel up until the time they drove the tunnel under the English Channel. So with that experience, the mine manager said, son, you don't even get a job on the tippie here. You're not old enough to work. A while later they did have competitions in skills of mining, and one was on rock drilling. You must remember in those days that there were no machines to do the job, it was done with hammer and steel. He won the competition there. The mine manager who told him that they don't want any sunny boys there, that he wouldn't get a job, told him to come to work the next day and he'd have a job. He circulated from Canmore to Bankhead all the way through the BC area and into Alberta. I think he did very well, but he got out of the mine and got into the hotel business.

[new tape]

Q: Do you remember May Day celebrations?

?: We used to have rodeos here.

Q: Does anybody remember a train that took people to Fernie?

[missing portion]

Gary Taje: ... until the mines went down, and Local 7292 lost their contract in about 1985. It was a stat holiday in all United Mine Workers contracts until about 1985. When the unions changed in the '30s, during the big strikes there was a takeover from the American unions to the Canadian communist union, and created a lot of disharmony in the valley, and created a lot of the benefits we enjoyed later on. That's where the May 1<sup>st</sup> holiday stemmed from in the collective agreements. . . .

Huge gains. Helen mentioned the Corbin strike. The secretary treasurer of this local was from the Vegreville area. He was involved in the farmer's union. During that strike he set up a wagon train and collected food all the way down to bring to the striking workers in Corbin. When he got here he settled here and became the leader of the local here for decades. John Sanishan, from Vegreville. He's not with us today.

Q: Can you introduce yourself?

Albin Panek: My name is Albin Panek. I come here in 1923 from Bankhead. I was 6 years old at the time. What else can I tell you? Started working in the mines about 1935. I

worked there till 1970, then I quit the mine and went to Phillips Cable to work there for 10 years. Now I'm retired.

Q: What did you do in the mine?

Albin Panek: I did everything, from haulage man to mining coal to fire bossing.

Q: Can you tell us about how you got fired at one time?

Bill Skura: Remember when we went walking in that mud?

Albin Panek: Ya, I got canned that time. I was fire boss at the time, and they started a new mine at Vickery. There was two busloads of men went up. We got up, and there was about a foot of mud there. All the guys looked at that and said, we're not going through that. There was Bob Campbell and I. They says, they're going home, we'll go home too. So that was the end of our story. We got the ticket after that. It was kind of rough going. After that I went mining coal for a while. Then they hired us back, we went mining. Then I hurt my back and quit and went to Phillips. I had a back operation and went to Phillips Cable after. Spent a nice 10 years there, and then I retired. I've been ? ever since, 1980. That's all the story.

Q: Did anybody else have injuries of themselves or their families?

Pauline Grigel: This wasn't with the members of the family, but rarely a month went by that a man wasn't killed somewhere in the Pass. And nearly every week too, there was always somebody hurt, some seriously and some less. But there was always that. You dreaded the sound of that whistle, but you get used to it. You live with it, and this is it.

Q: When a miner was killed, what happened to his family?

Pauline Grigel: My husband was killed back in '53 in McGillivray Mine. There was three men killed at the time: Sembiuk, Colibus, and my husband, Frank Griegel. They were killed by a bump. That's when the floor rises. At the time my husband was mining in a place that was low. He was kneeling down, it was such a low place. So when the bump came, it just broke his neck and that was it. So I was left a widow at 32.

Q: Did you have children?

Pauline Grigel: Five. Three boys and twin girls.

Q: So how did you make out?

Pauline Grigel: Well I got compensation, \$175 a month for six of us. You learn to do it. At the time I had a big garden and I had a cow and chickens and rabbits. You just make do with what you can. When the girls got old enough to go to school, then I'd go out and work a bit. A little bit here, a little bit there. My first job was in the hospital, but that was

temporary just to fill in for a couple of weeks. But after that I went out cleaning houses, washing walls, painting, wallpapering, whatever I could do to make a few dollars, 85 cents an hour. After that I started working at different stores. When I was working at Thompson's in the grocery department, they were offering night classes at the school, so I went and took a typing course. So I learned to type there, then after that I got a job in the hospital in the admitting office. I worked there for three years and then I got a job at the medical clinic and worked there for 3-1/2 years. After I got all my kids through university I went back to school myself. I went to Lethbridge College when I was 52 years old. But it was worth it.

Q: What did you take at Lethbridge College?

Pauline Grigel: I took secretarial, accounting secretary. That helped me. After that I got a better job. I worked at Marshall's Building in Blairmore. Then after that when they advertised for a receptionist for the government established ID #5 down here, I applied for it. Because I lived here and knew the area so well, I got the job. So I worked for them until amalgamation. Then after amalgamation I was in the town office until I retired. So I made a go of it.

Q: So you said when your husband was killed you were given compensation. Did that come from the company?

Pauline Grigel: No, from the government. The workman's compensation board. It's \$25 a month for each kid and \$50 for me. But I had to pay for everything out of that. I'll say one thing, Coleman Collieries didn't give me anything. They didn't even let me know that my husband was killed. I found out by the grapevine that my husband had been killed. None of my kids remember their dad. The twins were 3, then the boys 5, 9 and 11. One of the girls claims she remembers the coffin being in the house, because that's when we had the wake at the home. But they don't remember their dad. But I was lucky, I had good kids, and got them all educated. But like I say, a far cry from when we had to go stand outside in the winter, get bundled up and wait to see if that whistle is blowing or not. Boy you sure had to listen for that to make sure. Then even at Mohawk once when they were having problems, we didn't know if the afternoon shift was working at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, if ? whistle, no work. If it didn't blow, you had to hurry up and get the bucket ready so the man could get to work. But thankfully, we survived.

Bill Skura: Shortly after, there was two more killed in that same area, at 101 level. Again in a short time there was two more got killed in 5 level by a bump. George Riapose and Sekora. That year there was nine killed in Alberta and seven of them were killed in McGillivray.

Q: Was there any way of protecting you against a bump?

Bill Skura: For 5 level they said it was the weight. We were so far down, and the weight of the overburden caused the bumps in 5 level. In 101, the pole seemed like it run north

and south and in this area it dipped and come back up again and down like a V. The pressure bumped the floor. There was a lot of methane gas in that area.

John Kinear My name is John Kinear. I was born here in 1948. I worked my way through college working underground in the mines in various capacities – as a bucker, in the preparation plant. I've been studying the mining history of both sides of the Pass river at that time, and this particular story surfaced here this summer, the bump that killed Riapose and Sekora. The McGillivray mine did in fact have a mile of cover pressures. A lot of time the floor came to the roof on its own gradually over a period of time, and they'd have to reopen it. A lot of bumping, a lot of real tough mining conditions. Some men walked, some men didn't. In the case of Riapose and Sekora, a fellow prior to him named Bob Watson refused to work in that particular spot, and he was run off. Riapose and Sekora didn't stand up for how bad the conditions were, and there was a bump that trapped Riapose. Sekora ran for help and ran back, and there was a second bump which killed Sekora. He was found, when they finally dug him out, leaning up against the post with a rosary in his hands. This is some of the legacy of the early days of mining underground here. As Bill has spoken to, the union involvement and a lot of negotiation has brought mining to what it is today, an extremely safe industry. Albeit not underground, but with a much more admirable record than we speak of here today.

Q: What's the economy base of the area now?

Gary Taje: Still mining based, there's the mine in BC employed a lot of the people who lived in Crowsnest Pass, the commute to Elkford, Sparwood. Other than that, a little bit of light industry, tourism. Basically quality of life is why people are coming here now. People are selling their homes in Calgary, moving here and retiring. That's our economy, we have no resource based economy here any longer. We lost the sawmill a few months back, got bought out by a bigger company in Cochrane. That was pretty much the end of our resource based industries that we'd been relying on all our history. There's some small industry, like Arctic Spas, makes hot tubs west of town. For industry that's about it. A little bit of service industry for the mines. Not a strong economy. It's healthy and we do have a future ahead of us based on our quality of life. People moving here from other areas, retiring here. We have some potential resort type development happening, which may or may not go, but which will reshape our economy and push it to a tourist based economy. We're the last mountain pass in the Alberta corridor that isn't a park. It's beautiful. In the winter we have a lot of people come here for skidooning, and throughout the rest of the year quadding, fishing, hunting, recreation based, skiing, cross country skiing more than downhill.

Roy Root: I had worked for the irrigation, and jobs were short. I heard that they were looking for, and I come to the Crowsnest Pass from Traverse, a small town about 40 miles north of Lethbridge. I came up and the day before Christmas I went to the mine office. The guy at the office said, what are you doing here? I said, I'm looking for a job. They said, Christmas is coming tomorrow. I said, I need a job. He said, good, you come to work in two days time, you stay after Christmas, between Christmas and New Years you come to work. I said, okay. So on Tuesday morning I come to work and started

working at the International Coal Mine. I worked there about two weeks and they said, you come from a farm? I said, yes. They said, we need someone to drive a horse bringing rock out of the mine from the B level. They're driving an entrance from B level to A level, and we need somebody to drive the horse. I said, that's fine. So I worked there for about a year and a half before they finished this rock tunnel. They were well pleased because I would work Saturdays, Sundays, anytime they asked me to work. The bosses got so that they knew this, so they give me the job of boss over the timber packers packing timber to the miners. I took the job. A lot of the younger generation from Champion and district, they knew that I was boss over the timber packers. They'd come up and I said, sure, I'll put in a good word at the office for you. They hired five or six relatives of mine. We worked there and they liked them all. In 1942 my brother passed away. I went back to Traverse for the funeral. Of course the war was on. I never thought too much about it, but after the funeral I came back to the mine. My mother and dad were here then, and I came back up here to go to work. Here they had an order that I was AWOL from the mine for a few days, and they reported it to the army. The army called me into Calgary. So I had to go to Calgary and enlist. They signed me into the army right away, and I was two years in the army. They sent me to Camp Borden, Ontario for overseas training. When I was 15 years old, a bucking horse come over backwards on me and the saddle horn poked me in the groin and broke my pelvis bone. When I went into the army I reported this and they said, oh you're fit for overseas service. They sent me to Camp Borden, Ontario taking training for overseas service. When I got down there I took motorcycle driving, everything getting ready for overseas service. We were out on brigadiers inspection and marching, and my right leg was bothering me and I couldn't march, or people behind me couldn't march. It would throw everybody out of step. They kept hollering at me. Finally I stepped out of ranks, and they paraded me to the MO. The MO just wrote on a piece of paper, unfit for overseas service, and give it to the sergeant. The sergeant went down and they called me in for the next morning for medical. The doctor said, you know you can't march. They said, we're sending you back to the mine to work. I lay around there for two months waiting for them to get a bill through to send me back to the mine, government stuff. They sent me back and I went to work in the mine, timber packing. Finally they said, all you miners that have worked here six months can apply for miners license. So I did, and I passed for a miner. I went to work as a miner. They were short of miners out at #5 mine, the International. So they sent me to #5. I went out there and they give me a partner and we worked in the mine. About six or seven months went by, and I was in a room of our own. I was the top miner there. We had a cave-in, and my partner was killed, Roland Snell. I was injured, and I didn't go back to work at the mine for six months, my back. When I went back to work, I worked there with John Yakavik six months. My old job with the irrigation come up while I was working in the mine. My brother had this job in irrigation. The old boss that was in charge retired and my brother took over his job. I went back to the irrigation and I was 18 years on the irrigation, and the PFRA took over. After the PFRA took over, all the old staff that worked for the Canada Land and Irrigation Company knew more about running water than these new people from office work come out there and took this irrigation over. Of course when they come out there they couldn't tell us too much about running water. Finally they fired my younger brother, and he went to Calgary and got a job. They was giving me a rough time, so I quit and come back up to the mine to work. Soon as I come up here, some of the old timers were still around. They

said, Ray, there'll always be a job for you. I started back to work for the mine company and Vickery Creek opened. I went to work up at Vickery. I had a son that joined the navy. He wanted to get out of the navy, so I finally got the mine to send in a notice and let him come from the navy. He come and they hired him on. I was still working. Sad thing, they had a cave-in and he got killed. But I stayed with the company for about 6 months to a year. I finally fell down the chute one day. I was mining coal, and I slipped and fell in the chute. I fell down the chute and broke my right ankle.

[END]