

Domenic Bertot Memoir

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## **Domenic Bertot Memoir**

**B462. Bertot, Domenic** (1888-1982)

Interview and memoir

2 tapes, 120 mins., 31 pp.

Domenic Bertot recalls his experiences as a coal miner in Coal City, Hillsboro, and Auburn, Illinois. He recalls the daily activities of coal mining, company stores, wages, mules, types of coal, unions, accidents, safety precautions, and the modernization of coal mines. See J9/5/24 History Program, Oral History "Coal Mining in Illinois" Project, Subject File 1909-1977. University of Illinois at Springfield Archives/Special Collection.

Interview by Nick Cherniavsky, 1978

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See collateral file: interviewer's notes

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## Domenic Bertot Memoir

This is an oral history interview for Historical Researchers, Inc., our narrator today is Mr. Domenic Bertot and we conducting this interview at his residence at 175 Division St. in Coal City, Illinois. The date is February 4, 1978.

Q: Mr. Bertot, will you please tell me when were you born, what is your birthday?

A: September 26<sup>th</sup>.

Q: What year were you born?

A: 1888.

Q: And where were you born?

A: Coal City.

Q: Have you travelled since you were born, anyplace, or did you spend all the time in?

A: Yes. I was in Auburn a while there, but I was in Hillsboro four years, in Montgomery County, near Litchfield. That's the only one outside these undergrounds here. All my time was spent here outside of that. I'd say five years. I was one year in Auburn and I was two years in Hillsboro in Montgomery County.

Q: What of work your father did when you were born?

A: My father was a coal miner but he only worked a short time. He had what they call asthma, short-winded. He worked in the copper mines and his stomach was [unintelligible]. When I signed up to work, he wasn't working in the mine no more. He couldn't work in the mine no more. I got started in 1901, I was thirteen when I started. And all the time was spent in these undergrounds here, most of my time, well you might say all the time, except for my three years in Hillsboro and one year in Auburn there. Outside that there's all these undergrounds here. This was a three foot vein, naturally, and the work was about 65 to 70 feet down to the coal. That was how deep the coal for a three foot vein.

Q: Let's go back to your childhood. We are already in the coal mine. I want to ask you a question. How large was your family? Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: I started at 13, my father wasn't working any more then. He had asthma and I started in 1901 and then my father died and he couldn't take me no more. The other kids around here, their fathers took them in, see, between 13 and 14 they all went to work. I wasn't the only one. My father died and he was only 53 years old, he was.

Q: Mr. Bertot, did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: Yes. A brother and a sister, younger than me.

Q: Did your brother go in the coal mine, too?

A: Yes, but he started at 14. My brother started at 14, I started at 13. As I said, them days, the father would take the sons in to work. But my father couldn't, he

was quit three years before 1901 that I started. He couldn't work, he was out of the mines, he was out of the union too, as far as that. The fathers is a rule that made it nice for them. They took their son down and it made it better for them because the father was taking care of the son. But me, my father wasn't working, somebody else had to take me down, an uncle of mine, took me with him. See, because at that age you didn't know what it was all about to go down there, you see. Then the fathers took them in and somebody else took me. If the father took the son in, well then, the son didn't need to pay no union, it was \$2.50 to get in the union. If the father took the son in, the father was naturally in the union, he was in the mine already well the son didn't cost nothing, he got in with his father, he didn't pay that \$2.50. But me, my father wasn't working, and that's what they asked me when I went into the mine, the committeeman, he wanted to know if my father was working and when I said, "No." He said, "Well, you're going to have to pay \$2.50." It was \$2.50 them days to join the union, you know what I mean. So I had to pay the \$2.50, well that was all right as far as that. But as a rule, all them fathers took them kids so young to work with them, 'cause they figured if you could made \$1 or so you put them to work. Took you out of school when you was only in the fifth grade. And my uncle took me down to break me in. I was 13, I was. My brother started at 14, some of them did too, their fathers took them. My father died, he was only 53 years old. I started to work 1901. My father died in 1903. I was only working two years when he died. I was 14 then, see. My father had worked in the copper mines when he come here. He had coughing and all, his lungs were [tingly?].

Q: Did you go to school here in Coal City?

A: Yes. Went to school here, the biggest part of it I could tell you. I was took out before I got to the fifth grade. A lot of them made it all the way through. They wasn't born here. I quit when I was in the fifth grade, not even the fifth grade. But then there was night school all the time for the kids, even grownups could go. There was night school on Monday night and Thursday night and you paid \$1 a month. Well, I went to that for about two years. Course I didn't know nothing, was no good in school, I didn't learn anything, [unintelligible].

Q: What was the name of mine that you first started working in?

A: The one I worked the most in was Big Four Star Coal Company.

Q: Is that was the first one?

A: That was the first one. They had two mines. Big Four Star Coal Company. I can remember that one, that's where I started, they had two of them. And you want to know the other one? And then there was the Campbell Brothers up here. They could tell you, the other could tell you the same. They had three underground mines. I worked in one of them.

Q: Those were deep mines? Underground mines?

A: Yes. Around here it was all deep mines. And then I worked with the two brothers, they had three mines and I worked in one of the mines. And then there was Carbon Hill, that was two miles up here, they had two mines. I worked at one of them. I didn't know the company's name, though, but I knew these other ones. But the ones I started in, there was two of them, Big Four Star Coal Company, and I worked for both of them. Down at the mines, they had a company store, you know

what I mean? It carried groceries and it had a butcher shop. These other ones didn't have that. And these two mines I worked in, they wanted you to check at the company store, you had to take the check there, every two weeks that wanted you to take a \$5 check and go for groceries with that check. It was a company store it was, see. They were awful high with their stuff. But us miners, we didn't want to go there but they kept on telling us, "We're giving you work and your supposed to go to that store." In one way we were forced go and to take that check. You go to the store, they didn't want no cash from you, they'd give you a \$5 check and ask for your name and which mine you were working, #1 or #2, and you had to tell that woman, and she'd mark that down and they'd turn that in to the office that I took a \$5 check there, you know. That's how the company knew, they want you to take that check. One check every two weeks they wanted you to take, but we got away from that after, because they were awful high. Well we take a check and then they was checking all the miners, there was about 175 to 200 in the mine, and they knew, you know, if you didn't check, they'd tell you you'd better check because we got work for you, you'd better check. But then work started slacking up on them. At the beginning you had a \$5 check every pay you had to take or every two weeks and then if you got an extra one in the month you took another one, it was \$10, but you took the check to the store and she'd tell the office who it was, the name, and how much the check, and they knew that you checked and the ones that didn't check or didn't check much, they'd look in the office to check if they were working, you know, they couldn't force you to take that check, \$5 check. And she'd tell in the office at the mine that he took at check and have the name down and that way they knew that you were checking. But the superintendent here of those two mines would look in the office, he knew all the names of the diggers, he'd find out who never checked because your name was there and no check, he'd take your \$5 off on pay. That would be the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> of the month. They took the money off there you know. But you had to take a check and they took it off on you. Every two weeks you had \$5 to check, well you took two a month. We kind of got away from that for a while and they kind of left us alone, but still they wanted us to take one check a month, \$5 check, you took it. You used it in the store. They didn't want no cash because they took it off the pay of the miner when you got your pay, you know what I mean. But that was bad, that was. We kind of got away from that. But still they kept up, they wanted us to take a check, take one a month, \$5 check. But that died out and we didn't take no check at all, whatever and then they shut the store down, company store. You take the check here and they take the money, take \$5 off of your pay. That was no good neither, they were high as anything, they was. Now, you couldn't afford to go there. They kept on telling you, "We got work for you and you're supposed to take a check." That company store for quite a while and then they let up on you.

Q: What was the first job you did in the mine? Your first job?

A: It was right at the coal face. Right at the very coal face. He was an uncle of mine. Well, he was my mother's sister's husband and he looked after me pretty good, naturally, you know. He was my uncle. He was working at the coal face like all them other old timers, you know. Because you had to have experience to go down there or you wouldn't make a nickel, he wouldn't, if he didn't know how to go at it.

Q: You worked right alongside with him?

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A: Right with. It was room work, there were two men working in one place beside each other and two in the other. You had to work two men together, they wouldn't allow you to work single because if somebody got hurt, you know, so you could go get help. Your road, you was about 15 feet away on one side of the roadway and 15 feet on the other side. Naturally you had to throw the coal before you got it to the road where the car was where the track was. But I started right at the face, I did. At the face of the coal, digging like. Of course I wasn't on to it, but when I got on I had to use a pick too you know, and coal shovel, use a #7 shovel. He'd dig the coal out to begin, you know, I never knew much about it. It's all on your knees you know, away from the road. The only place you could stand up was at the roadway. And it was wet too, it was.

Q: How much did they pay you at that time?

A: \$1 a day. He told my folks, my father and mother, he came to the house one night and said, "Would it be all right if I take your son in there with me?" My father and mother, they say, "Yeah." He said, "I'll give him \$1 a day until he gets pretty well lined up and a little older, naturally, and gets going." I went there. He was good to me. He gave me \$1 a day to start and then when I was working for quite a while, I was pretty well on to the work, it was a couple of years, it'd been over a year, then he says, "I see you're doing pretty good now, you're going to get more than \$1 a day now." He says, for every \$3 we make according to how many tons of coal we load, I'd get one car and he'd get two. See if we made \$3, I'd get \$1 and he'd get \$2. That's how I went along until I was 15. I could hold my own then. I was on to digging too, then. I stuck with him until I was over 15, with my uncle, and then I went to a different mine, I did. And of course when I went there, I had the experience that I could go down with the men too, at 15 see.

Q: How deep was this mine where you worked?

A: Between 65 and 70 feet, that was the vein down in there. And it was going on the wet side. On the road end that was the only place you could stand up. All the work was on your knees. Shoveling coal until you got it to the road end. And they were all working side by side, you know. Sometimes the air wasn't very good. Sometimes the circulation wasn't very good when you was inside there, but most of the time it was reasonable. As I say, the company store, they done away with it because it was awful high. But that wasn't the thing to do. We tried to get away from that. There was two pretty good mines. You could go from one mine to the other. After they closed the company store down, you see they wasn't checking much, well, the people started going to different places, there was different mines, like I told you. They tried to better themselves. I did myself. I go to different mines thinking it was better there, you know. But no matter which one you went around here, they were all the same, you couldn't better yourself none of them, no matter which one you went to. You average about two and a half to three tons in the mine, that was for eight hours.

Q: How many people worked there?

A: I think there was about 150, 175. There might have been more than 175 but it was under 200. I'd say between 100 and 200, 150 up around that neighborhood, that's what was in the mine. Because like I say, there was four of them, and them two mines here, six of them. I worked at one in Carbon Hill. No I worked two, the Campbell Brothers, these fellows here could tell you, and they had three mines, the

Campbell Brothers, there were two brothers. They owned all the ground around here, you know, and they sunk on their own ground. These mines was all a mile apart and they were all two miles away from the home. Any mine you went to, you walked two miles to that mine and two miles back. They were all two miles away from your home. From here, I worked one way down here, west of here, it's a good two miles. And of course when I was growing up, you were talking about the young, but even when you's young, all the mines were two miles from your home and naturally, two miles back. And wintertime weather's bad, when you come out you was wet, you had pit pants, you know, canvas backs from knee down and they had them doubled on your knee down, because you was down on your knees. In the wintertime they'd freeze on you before you got home.

Q: Did you have any mules in the mine?

A: All mules.

Q: How many?

A: Well, I figure on average, about 15. There might have been a little more or a little less. Had to be the average of the mules, 15, yeah. I even drove one when I was big. See the company men, the company pay them \$2.50 a day. That was the scale for company work them days and when I started to work it was 87 cents a ton for digging it. Them fellows that drove a mule, they were working company work. They was assured a days work when they went out there. They got \$2.50 in them days. We got 1.75 a ton and you had to be a good man to average three ton, you couldn't do it. You could get three ton somedays, but a lot of days you wouldn't get to three ton, you could get two and a half. Some days the harder the face the harder to get the rock down there. But anyway the miner, it's about three ton, and 87 cents a ton when I started. And the company man, that is the drivers, the timbermen, tracklayers, include all company men, they had this \$2.50 no matter when they went down there, they were assured their \$2.50. We started digging at the face, naturally, there was a lot of rock and we couldn't get three tons, we was lucky to get two. There you was, you was way under there, but that's the way it went. The company men had the best ones, they did all right, they had it coming to them anyway. But what I mean, they went to work in the morning, that was \$2.50 no matter what they did.

Q: Did this make friction, trouble, between company people and the diggers?

A: Yes, well they was all union, but they had to have company men, they had tracklayers. The tracklayers laid the track your track. They took care of that. They laid your track. They had regular tracklayers. You have timbermens, what you call timbermen, if you have some bad roof some place you get them timbermens in there to timber. And so like the drivers, tracklayers, all the pumpmen and everything, they were company men. They never worked digging coal at all. See they worked like anybody else, the rest of us. It was all alike. It was \$2.50, that was their scale. When they went down there, they were assured of eight hours and \$2.50 a day. Us diggers, we went down there and sometimes we'd have to walk behind them and everything and we'd only get two ton apiece. There you was, you was way under there. But that was it. That's why I say we was under the company men. The wages I mean. A lot of days you went down there, go along your road in the morning, you couldn't get into the place. Your road was about 150 yards and you to get in you had rock on the road. Company didn't want to have anything to do with

that. You had to get some cars and load it out. They tell you that belongs to you, it's on our road from the switch to the face where you dug. They figured that was the digger's area. If any rock went down on the road, you had to clean on your own hook. Sometimes you loaded two or three cars or rock before you even got near the coal. You lost a couple of hours. Nine o'clock, nothing yet, then you start digging. You was on your own hook then. Maybe you only made about \$1.75 that day. You lost all that time loading that rock. If you ask them for something, they'll tell you, "That belongs to you. That's your road from the switch." From the main road to the switch you went on. Them road's would be about 100 yards long inside, maybe more than that. And you have quite a bit of a road in there. That rock, you know, would break away sometimes. You'd go home and the next morning it had come down. It's always on the road, it was. And you'd have rock on the road. No use going to your boss because he'd just tell you, "That belongs to you." That's the way it was. You'd have to load it out and sometimes it'd only be a little pile and you didn't mind, it was only one car, you'd lose maybe half an hour. Sometimes you'd go down there, you couldn't get to the face, what you going to do? You had to get it out. If you go home, come back the next day, it there for you again. The company wouldn't go load it out for you. That road from the switch on into the place where you dug, that was up to you, you see. They got away with a lot of things, these fellows could tell you the same thing, the company did.

Q: How did you get down to the vein? A cage?

A: Yeah, I'll tell you. Where I worked, there was two mines. There was one mine used to heist up with the cage. Sent men down in the cage and heist the coal up, that was #1. The other mine that I started out, they had a slope went down, you walked down that slope and you walked back up again. And this one that I'm talking about here you had the slope we walked down, they'd heist the coal up with a cable three cars at a time. There were 10 cars. He'd heist them up and they brought them to the top of the tippel. And the mules at night, they left them up and then in the morning before seven o'clock they left the mules on the slope again. Before starting time, see. Now with the cage, no slope, them mules they kept them down. They were kept down until the mine closed or they died. That made it bad that way. That's where they cage the coal up and the men. They put six men on the cage at a time, down. And when you come up at quitting time, six men got on that cage up. But they didn't bring the mules out, they was down there to stay down there. There were about 15 or 16. But some of the mines were I worked the slope, at night when they were done working, the mules would come up like anything. They had a barn for them and a pasture. And in the morning they had a mule feeder, see. So when they come up, the mule feeder was there a couple of hours before they come up, putting the feed in the boxes because you knew they was coming up. In the morning the mule feeder had to be there early so they could feed them before they went down again. And they got onto that just like a person [laughing].

Q: Have you ever worked with mules? Did you work as a mule driver?

A: Yes.

Q: In this mine, or in other mines?

A: Not in this mine. I worked in #7 over here for a little while, not very long, #7. I drove a mule the first time, I never drove. I used to take them up at the bottom, leave them inside. I never drove one. I never did much driving mules. I know what

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you're getting at. I tell you, I drove a mule in Auburn though. Because in Auburn, I tell you what it was then, that was April coal, but then it was solid work. You never even used the machines there. Well, when I started there, I had to drive a mule.

Q: What mine was it at Auburn? What was the name of it?

A: The name, now listen, I couldn't tell you. I'll tell you exactly where the mine was. It was 18 or 20 miles out of Springfield and, uh, I kind of forget, what were we talking about? What did you say?

Q: You were working as a mule driver in Auburn.

A: Yeah. I worked as a mule driver because when you started there, you couldn't go dig coal, no, you had to be a mule driver. The scale, you had to put your name down there when you started to the committee, that you started driving a mule. And when any of the miners quit or got hurt, the committee would look at whose turn it was to go into the coal. Because then they would double what the driver made inside where the coal was, you see. As I say, when you started driving, he'd want to know your name and there were names ahead of you. Well sometimes those coal miners quit or something and the committee would look and tell you when it was time to go dig coal. But I never got that far. I only stayed there about a year. But I drove a mule. That mine was right in town by the C&A Depot by the steel track. On the north side of the C&A track. But it was right inside town, Auburn. A lot of French people lived there. I used to board with French people, by the name of Macaroon.

Q: Did you drive a mule?

A: Yes. I drove a mule in Auburn.

Q: Did you like it, to drive the mule?

A: Not very well.

Q: No?

A: No. Like I say, when you started in Auburn, like the big mines, you couldn't get into the face because all the bit coal had twice as much as the company wages. When I started in Auburn in 1922, Len Small was the governor then, and then we was on strike in 1922, we was out three months. I could tell you. We used to come out the first of April in them days. We was out three months and then went back, I went to Auburn and the scale was up, we were getting \$6 and something before that. We went back in the fall we got \$1 a day as a company man. That was eight hours. When I started in Auburn it was \$1 a day and diggers naturally got added scale for the loaders too you know. But I drove a mule in Auburn quite a while there and the mine was right in town there. They used to tell me there were a lot of French people there. Well, I boarded with the Macaroons, they were French. But I didn't work too long and came back home again. But this is why my time, I work three years at Hillsboro, Illinois, that's near Litchfield. That was Montgomery County. And there was the difference. Auburn never had no cut machines, solid work, had to know what you were doing there when you worked the coal vein in Auburn because it wasn't everybody who could do that. Shoot the coal. But in Hillsboro, they have cut machines there. They cut the coal six feet deep. The rooms

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is 28 feet wide, and they shot three shots, it was eight foot coal in Hillsboro that was nice work there. And nothing to it there. And then you shot two shots there and two men had coal for two days. But the machine cutter six foot there you know. That was nice work. But then, like I say, my home is here and I come back, that's all the outside work I did. About a year in Auburn, three years in, otherwise all around here there's nothing but mines all different places. You see dumps all over even where they shut down. These fellows tell you the same thing. Well this prairie down here, all them places ...

End of Tape 1, Side 1

Q: Mr. Bertot, your parents, your father, was born in this country or did he come from the old country?

A: No. He wasn't born, now listen, that I wouldn't say. When he come here he had worked in the copper mines and he come here and started in the mines, that wasn't very long.

Q: But he was born back in Italy?

A: Yes, oh yes.

Q: How old was he when he came here?

A: Let's see. I can't exactly say. My father, he couldn't have been very old because he died in 1903. I was 14 then. When he died, he was only 53 years old. See he worked in the copper mines before he came here. His stomach was lined with copper I guess. The doctors told him he couldn't live. So he quit the mines before I started, about three years before I started, in 1901 when I started. I was in the mine two years when he died in 1903 and I started in 1901.

Q: Approximately how old was he when he came to this country?

A: Oh, he could have been maybe about, around 25 years old, I guess. Because, yeah, he was young because he died, he worked in the mines there when he come. He worked in copper and then he went and worked in the mines here. He must have been around 25 because he got married here too. But as I say, I was 14 when he died. He was only 53 years young then.

Q: Were there many people from Italy in Coal city?

A: Many she could tell you. All kinds came from Italy. They come to work in the coal mines. I tell you exactly what happened there. The people that come from the old country to begin like when they were young. They'd get married and come here. They all heard in the old country about these coal mines around here I guess. And they come and had relations here, and these relations here would send for them from the old country, see. They wanted them to come to this country and these here they'd send them a ticket. They'd send them a ticket to the old country. When they got here they used to call them greenhorn. They sent for them to come here, they would, and they'd start in the mine, naturally they would. They all come from the old country. Lots of them come from the old country to these coal mines. That I can tell you and anybody else could tell you, yeah. Well, they get here. They come by themselves. They were worried back there. Now when they get here and get

lined up here and get some money and got onto the work and send for their wife or maybe their children. They sent for the family to come here, anybody could tell you the same. I remember that good. Like I say, there'd be a lot of them here. In the old country, I guess, they didn't have much or nothing. You want to come here, then they'd just send you a ticket and send some money and have a region here like in Italy. You could get a ticket for that. Send them a ticket because they never had any, get them a ticket to come here, to around here. It was only in the coal mines. They went down there. They was satisfied. But naturally, a fellow's time in the coal mine, somebody with experience, naturally the ones that knew them, they'd take them in with them because a grown-up working down there, it'd take a week and a half or two weeks to get onto, even if you were a grown-up, to get onto the work digging. You couldn't go down there only about a week's work and start in like that other person who had the experience, see that was it. They'd go work with somebody, they would, until they got onto it. Then they send for the family.

Q: Did you have many any other nationalities, German, French here in Coal City?

A: Croatians?

Q: Did you any many have other nationalities, German, French or...?

A: Oh. Well there were a few Bohemians, but not very many. Not very many. They could tell you all the same. It was mostly Italians. Yeah, I tell you the truth. That I know. I remember. It was mostly Italians and there was a lot of them coming over. As I say, the ones that was here working in the mines that had relations over there, they'd tell them, well, if you want to come to this country, these coal mines, if you want to come down by themselves, a lot of them come down by themselves to start a new life, and that's the other thing too, they come down here, they'd send for their wife or children, the family like. They were all good. They were all nice people. They come here, you know, and didn't know how to talk English, but they learn quick, you know. They kind of talk broken at the beginning, you know. They come from the old country, you know, and it was all Italian there. They were all nice people. Nice like anybody. They had to work for a living too. But they'd come here, they didn't know and you'd talk to them, but they learned the English pretty quickly. That's one thing around here, there hardly wasn't any trouble. Nobody had much money but there was never hardly no trouble, there was. Once in a while a little argument, but nothing out of the way.

Q: How big was Coal City at that time? Was it larger in population or smaller that it is today?

A: Oh, today is three times bigger that what it was then. Three times bigger. It's like all the other places at increase quite a bit, the population. Coal City today is three times bigger that what it when I started working even. It was, I can tell you that. Much bigger. Today it's pretty good size, Coal City is, yeah. Oh, it's much bigger, three times bigger. That is back in them years, 1900, yeah. But people come from the old country, they went along, they got on, like I say, the work inside digging, any of these mines, you had to have the experience. You could be big as, no matter how old you was or how strong you was, you went in there, they took you in there, take a load early to get onto it, you weren't onto it. You had to use your pick and you had to know how to move that pick, how to work that coal, how to cut that coal and you was on your knees shoveling the coal back. That was the only place you could stand up, was the track with your car in there. You had about 15 to

18 feet one side of the road and the same on the other. You had people on both sides, there were two, they didn't want you to work by yourself, you had to work double, you know. If something happened, you know, that way you wasn't by yourself. And if you got hurt there, them days, they hauled you home in a wagon, a lot of people got hurt in these mines, crippled, once in a while one got killed. But if you got hurt there, the company had a team of horses or team of mules and a wagon at the mine when you come up in a cage, they heist you up there. They put you on a stretcher, you know, and they put that stretcher on the wagon. It was a coal wagon, the company hauled coal to the digger, you know. They'd put that cart on there and one fellow would stay and watch you on the cart, you know, and the other fellow driving the horses or mules or whatever it was, take you home that way. The road in them days had holes all over them, the rain you know, before they got you home that mile. That's all it was, as I understand, they took you home on a stretcher in a wagon. There was nothing else. That's [unintelligible] stuff. By the time you got home the rest of your bones was broke. That's the only way you could get home, there wasn't no other way. They took you home with a team of horse or a team of mules there. See if you needed coal, all the miners, naturally in them days in wintertime, you got the coal from where you work. And by working at that company, you got it for the miner's price. You know what I mean, from the company. If you didn't work there, you'd pay more than the fellow working in the mine. You'd pay wholesale price. If you was working at the mine they'd give it to you at that price, company price. When you needed a load of coal, which I always had plenty of coal to haul, you tell them in the office that morning, "I need a load of coal." They'd ask you, "Where do you live at?" and this and that. They had two teams of mules and wagons hauling coal every day to deliver, you know. They'd haul a ton and a half at a time in a wagon and take the money off your pay for that coal. Naturally that was all right, that was. At the mine, at the office, the coal that they hauled, you'd have it took off your pay. See when they haul the coal there wasn't no way, the office had nothing to do with it, gets unloaded, but at the mine the guy would tell where they hauled that coal and the office would mark it down, to take the money off for the coal. That was all right, I tell you, yeah.

Q: After you came back from working in Auburn and Hillsboro for quite a few years, where did you work after that?

A: At the coal face again.

Q: Which mine?

A: Let me see. When I came back from Auburn, I went to one of the Campbell's mines. It was all Coal City mine but it was a Campbell mine when I came back.

Q: What number mine was it?

A: In Auburn I couldn't tell you the number, but I can tell you right where the mine was located. The mine in Auburn I couldn't tell you. It was right in town and right along the C&A track. The streetcar used to run by it on the north side. It was right against the track and the number I don't know. It was south of Springfield. I used to come to Springfield when the mine wouldn't work sometimes, hang around there, you know. But the number I couldn't tell you. It was 20 miles south of Springfield. Right against the C&A track, the mine was, used to call it the "Peanut Mine." But I boarded with the French people. And then when I come from Hillsboro I went to one these mines here. The Big Four Star Coal Company. But I was only three years up

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there. But that was the only outside work I did outside of all these other mines. But when I started in these undergrounds, I started at the face. Of course, I had the experience, I did, I could go right on inside. But afterward I got onto the work, you know, and I knew what it was all about. But it took me until about 15 years old or 16 before I could hold my end up, naturally, because when the kids are on in them days, they never started until they were 14, maybe 15. Some started when they was 13 like I was. But them days the father would take them down. My father wasn't working in the mines, I had to depend upon somebody else. You know what I mean? These kids are just nice. They took their sons down and they'd look after their sons more than anybody else. My uncle looked after me good. But by taking their sons down, they took their sons down for a buddy like, they took more care. But they were 14, they could tell you, some 15, some 13. They all quit school around the fifth grade. But they weren't all like me, going to night school. I went over to night school, \$1 a month on Monday night and Thursday night. But it wasn't all kids. It was grown-ups, a lot of grown-ups that knew much, never had much schooling, that took advantage of that too, you know. Well it was an advantage, paid \$1 month, they went to night school. And the principal of that school, he was teaching us at night. We'd go there at seven o'clock. He put quite a few of us in that room. But it's nice nowadays, they get schooling but like anybody else will tell you, what are you going to do? When all they thought about was putting you to work, you know, and you never knew about what was ahead we didn't know and another thing you were all grown up and didn't know much about anyway, but still went to it. It's nice they go to school, I'll admit. The fathers, they took their sons, they knew they were taking them down young, they telling you, "You're not going to school no more, we're taking you down in the mine." That was it. They could tell you the same thing as I'm telling you. I remember back when I started. I started in 1901 and I was only 13, I was. My father died 1903. Of course it was a good thing I had an uncle. He was my mother's sister's husband. That would have been my uncle. And he come to my house, he informed my mother that he would take me in and she said yes, that's all right. He took me in. Of course he was good to me, he was.

Q: When did you meet your wife? Mrs. Bertot?

A: You mean my mother?

Q: No. Your wife.

A: Oh, my first wife died.

Q: You were married before?

A: Perena!

Q: Mrs. Bertot, where was your husband married to his first wife? Who was she?

A: [Perena Bertot] Here in Coal City at the Catholic Assumption Church [Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church].

Q: And what year was it?

A: [Perena Bertot] 1916.

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Q: And what was her name?

A: [Perena Bertot] Elizabeth Genardi.

Q: Elizabeth Genardi and she was your sister?

A: [Perena Bertot] Yes, she was my sister.

Q: I understand she died?

A: [Perena Bertot] She died from an operation. She didn't recover from it.

Q: When was it?

A: [Perena Bertot] In 1948.

Q: And then you and Mr. Bertot got married?

A: [Perena Bertot] Well, a few years later we married, in 1951.

Q: There were no children from either marriage?

A: [Perena Bertot] No, from either marriage, there were no children.

Q: Okay, that you very much.

A: [Perena Bertot] You bet.

Q: How long did you work in the coal mine after you came back to Coal City from Auburn and Hillsboro?

A: Well I came back here. When I left Auburn and Hillsboro, the only place, I come back here. There wasn't no place no more.

Q: When did you retire?

A: When did I retired? Let me see now. Elizabeth, she died in '48. Must have been about '51 or '52. Yeah, before I married you. Yeah, about '52. That's when I retired. That's when the miner's pension come up and I took it, '52. And I took my miner's pension. It was \$75 in them days. '52 I retired.

Q: Go ahead, Mrs. Bertot.

A: [Perena Bertot] Well listen, I think he's a little confused there. You retired before you married me. Don't you remember?

A: Yeah. I retired before I married you. When Elizabeth was living I was working.

A: [Perena Bertot] You retired before you married me. Don't you remember? At that time, you weren't working. You know, that's when you took the job of janitor at church.

A: Oh, yeah, I took the job at the church, yeah.

Q: So he retired 1950?

A: [Perena Bertot] 1950.

A: Yeah, about that neighborhood, yeah. And that's when the pension come out, well then, I had the 20 years and more than that. I took my pension at \$75 a month, whatever I drew, up in that neighborhood. But I took my pension then, took it right away, I did. And there was a while it didn't come. It stopped and never had money I guess and I never got a check for a while, then they started paying it again. I was on it ever since. A lot of it is covered. I took it then.

Q: Do you remember shortly after you started working in the mine about a big fire in the Cherry mine, west of here, in Cherry, Illinois?

A: That was before I started to work here. I think it was and I started in 1901. That Cherry mine, that disaster, everybody was left in there...

Q: I think that was in 1909.

A: Oh no. I knew the cause of the Cherry mine. That was out near Grandville. I know where it was at., near Grandville and Mark and them places. They was a hay barn burning around them mules down there. Yeah, I think it was about the time ...

Q: 1909, eight years after you started working in the mines.

A: Yeah. I was working then already. I was working then. That's when that happened. I was young. It started in a hay barn.

Q: More than 250 people died in that fire.

A: Yeah. See they used to keep the mules down in there and something happened there. That hay caught fire in the mule barn and they couldn't them get out. You know, some of the works up around that neighborhood, them roads get awful dusty, powder and that. You had them in Hillsboro that way too. You used to have to sprinkle them roads because the dust will catch on fire, cause an explosion, you know, a fire in the mine and I think that's what happened over there.

Q: No it was, they had a load of hay being taken down for the mules and it caught fire.

A: Yeah, that's what I'm staying. That's where it started, with that hay. In these mines you can work in Auburn, but not around here. In Auburn, them mines was pretty deep, you see, they're awful deep you know, like in Hillsboro, and that dust in the roadway, it's awful dry, powdery-like, and you know some places had explosions. You know where I worked they used to have a man on the midnight shift till seven o'clock before the day shift come on, and after midnight, he had a water cart and a mule hooked on to it. He had to go around and sprinkle the all roads, keep that dust down. Once in a while if you neglected it that thing would cause an explosion, start a fire. In Cherry, you're right, it started with a bale of hay, cause they kept the mules down there.

Q: Were there any big accidents that happened while you were working in the mines?

A: A lot of them.

Q: Can you tell me about some of them?

A: Every couple of months some of them would get hurt bad and some wouldn't. But there was quite a few that got killed in these mines. See these bad roofs you know. Sometimes a miner would take a chance down there, take a chance under that bad top and getting by, but that wasn't it, naturally they got hurt because when the roof is bad, you had to put a prop up. You see, you had props and with a sledge you had to hammer that prop up tight to protect that stone from coming down. And by putting that prop up it was in your way, working in the coal cutting with a pick. And a fellow would take a chance to get by there before he'd put the prop up. That was no good. I took chances all the time before I put the prop up. You up against the coal and it was in your way and you need the prop on the side. But sometimes before you got done working, you got buried in rock or got a leg a broke. That's why it paid to put that prop up. But it's in your way, it was. And if you're working with the pick and it's in your way, they take that prop and put a top piece on it to make and with a sledge hammer it tight against the roof. But sometimes, I know, it's like everything else, you wait, that prop to put it up, maybe 10-15 minutes before you got by there. You could tell the roof was bad with the pick, falling out, the pick you get ahold of the handle then sound the rock with the pick, if that rock sounded a little hollow, they could tell, it was bad. But when you tapped with the pick on the roof and, you could tell it was solid, then you knew solid it was safe. But when you [unintelligible] with the pick and that rock was bad, that's one you had to keep in the clear of and put up a prop. I took chances down in there and got by, but a lot of people I saw got hurt. They'd say yeah wouldn't take time to put up a prop. But you have to take that time to put that prop up. It's like any other work, sometimes you have to take a chance on certain works to get by with it, first thing you know get crippled. Well quite a few got killed. A lot of them got legs broken and so on like that. But they'd go back to work. But then we had all of them get hurt that never worked once. When we had a member in the local that got hurt and was out quite a while, other mines too I guess, but in our local always did that. Well, I want to tell you about that company store. When you got hurt, we'd get a committeeman, he'd take a book and go around all through the mine to everyone, the miners, and ask to give a donation for that man that got hurt. They need the money you know, they didn't have much. He'd take a donation up for him, he'd go around with a book, and it took over a day to get around 150-200 men, he'd start the next day and he'd get done before dinner. He asked what they wanted to give. He didn't ask if we wanted to give, he asked how much we were going to give. He'd go from place to place, he'd say, "What are you going to give?" One would give 50 cents, maybe a dollar, whatever you feel like, but they'd all give something. He'd mark it down in that book. He'd put down your name and what you'd give. And then he'd go on to the next man. He'd be crawling around on his knees with 150 men. He would tell me he wouldn't get done that day and start in again on the next day. The local would pay them for that, see. The local would pay that committeeman for keeping away from the face. And then when he got through with everybody, he turned the book into the office. And the office looked that book over carefully, took all them names down and what he give, that certain amount, and then they took the money off your pay, and from the office they called the committeeman, and he got all that money collected and gave it to who got hurt. Because if they got hurt, they was off for

months and months and they had a family. It was tough. But he collected quite a bit. But he had an awful job, see he was digging coal, but the local they wanted a man to make a collection for him, they'd pick a committeeman, there was two committeemen in the local. They'd pick one of them. And he was took away from where he was digging, he was losing, it was \$2.50 at that point. They took a miner to replace and they got done collecting, that's what he got. But he was about a day and a half going around, because he was going on his knees all the time. Some places he was going on the main road he couldn't get through. I never got hurt once.

Q: In fifty years that you spent in the mine, would you compare for me safety conditions from beginning to the time that you retired? How much improvement was there in safety in the mines?

A: As for the safety, them days, I'll give you about them [improvers?]. When I started, naturally, it was 87 cents a ton and a good miner averaged three ton, but you couldn't do that. But the company man was paid \$2.50. But there's a lot of dead work. Inside, your roadway, inside, you had to keep it up. It was up to the miner to keep it up. There was four feet of stone and you had a hole in that stone and three sticks of dynamite you put in the hole. It was on the roadway to get that road dug. See your coal was only that high, three feet. And seven feet was your roadway. And you had four feet of stone there on your roadway. You dug a five foot hole and put three sticks of dynamite in there and you shoot it down. You had a pile of rock. It took two men an hour and a half to clean it. That you never got a cent for it. And that was once a week you had to do that. See, your coal was only that high. You had to have a roadway high enough for the car and the mule to come in. Your road was eight feet wide and your ceiling height you had to take down. After you got the coal a ways, you couldn't get to tracking because that four feet of rock was up there and you had to get that down. That rock would come down and you had a pile of rock that much. You lost a lot of time. It took two men, you and your buddy, over an hour, and you took that rock, you got it loaded and there was room and you called it the gob. It was in a vacant spot behind away from the coal. You put it in that vacant spot there. It took an hour and a half to put that rock away and you never got paid for none of it all the time it was here. That was up to the digger and there's were you lost an hour and a half to put that away. And you lost time for that day. And that went on. And every week you had to take that stuff. And then you got the tracklayer in there. He laid the track. That wasn't up to the digger. They had a tracklayer the company. You tell them you need track, you tell them that night, "tomorrow I got to have track." He come in with a pair of rails and ties, you know, after you had that all cleaned up, that rock gone, you was up to the face of the coal then. He laid that track right up to the coal then. But otherwise, as you was digging that coal, it was leaving the road four feet back and you couldn't get the car in until you took that down. You had to take that roof down. But the digger, as far as digging coal, you had to have the experience, like when I couldn't begin to use a pick, my buddy, my uncle, he said, "No, you're going to load the car." He told me, "the empty car come in, you load it." And he got the coal in about 15 feet along the wall and I'd be on my knees with a shovel. You shoveled along the wall until you got to the road head. See you couldn't throw 15 feet to the road but you had to get that coal to the road where the car was, see. And you kept on throwing it and piling it on your knees until you got to the road head. And it would be throw'd two times before it got to the road...

End of Tape 1, Side 2

Q: Go on about safety.

A: About the safety, I'll tell you about the safety. The state had an inspector, the state paid him, and he went all around all through the mine like and he had one of them gas lamps, safety lamps, you know what I mean?

Q: Yes.

A: He had a lamp and it had a handle on it and he'd go up because that gas, in these mines here, sometimes there was only a little bit of gas, and the gas as a rule, it didn't hit the bird, the gas as a rule, it hit the roof for some reason. It gathered in the roof. He'd go around with his lamp and he'd point it at it. When he'd see there was gas at that certain place where men worked, he'd be in there from midnight to morning before the men got to worked, and when he'd see that gas in that place, well, as the switch you know, the men would come to the switch to go to their place to work, at the switch he'd put two blocks up at the switch and he chalked them. He marked on the stone at the switch where they'd start to go in, "gas." And besides that he was afraid to put the gas mark, afraid they'd miss it, he had two props and he'd put them crossways like this and when the men seen them props he knew there was gas because he put those props there, see. There was a lot of gas. A lot of them got burned. They'd walk in on it. Sometimes they neglected, I don't know, they never even got it right. You'd set that gas off with the light you know. They generally make the rounds and they generally get it right for you. Because they had to do it. He was paid for safety, he was and he had to do it. There was a lot of gas, a lot of them got burnt. That gas in the mines, when it burnt you it was hot. It burned your hands and they used to tell us, everybody, whenever you see when the gas, you walk in with your light and you walk sideways because your roof is low, and that gas, you set it off with your light, when you move it, and they tell you whenever you set that gas off, get down, your head down, it'll burn your back. That gas comes down from the roof. You could tell when the gas was gone 'cause you didn't burn no more. You could feel when the gas was out. I remember a lot of time, you'd hit the track 'cause the track had lay on and your back, but there was times, you had to burn out, John [unintelligible] in Carbon Hill, he got burned, he got burned bad. A lot of them got burned bad 'cause that gas was awful hot it was. Now down at the strip mine, he'd go down, that was at all the mines, all the time, they wouldn't do without, they was strict on that, the gas, that was one thing. 'Cause some mines didn't have very much and others had quite a bit. But as I say, when we was digging like, like I say when I started, to dig coal it was tough. You had to cut it that vein three foot, you had to cut it under, foot and a half, you had to have a sharp pick to do that and you was on your side like this and leaning forwards and you cut it down about that high off the ground like, with a pick, you cut it with a pick about a foot and a half, that was the only way you could get the coal down. And after you got it cut there, you kept on going and then they slide you down wedges. But some of the mines used to shoot it too with black powder. Company didn't like that, but they would do it. But anyways you had some digging too and it was all right shooting it too it was. But there wasn't much of that went on. But you had to cut it down anyway you could get coal was to get down on your hands and about a foot and a half, maybe a little less, and you had to have a sharp pick, it was all slack like when you got through cutting around in there and then you get with wedges and with the sledge, it would come down right at the back where you had it cut. Now it wouldn't all come down. It would be where your wedges was it would come down maybe five feet ahead of the miner where you was pulling with the sledge and then you'd clean that coal up.

You'd get quite a bit out of it, you would. And then you'd go in again and put the wedges in a different place, as long as that coal mine cut, you'd keep sledging it down, put a wedge in and when you put in that wedge you could hear that coal all the time, you could hear it breaking, you had hammer the wedge slow. It'd take it down to about a foot and a half, those wedges, see. But that's one way, cut that coal about a foot and a half, start digging around with the pick, you got no place. Of course, anybody could tell you that. As I say, you had to cut it, that's an awful job. 'Cause you was on your side and you had to lean forward and you was cutting right into the bottom under the vein. But you had to cut it five feet high so you could get under there with the pick. [Unintelligible] The conditions afterward are like, I say later on, like when I was growing up going from mine to mine, it was tough and even the company was taking advantage of that when they got a chance. Of course the union wasn't quite, not to strong you know. [Unintelligible] But even after, like I say, went from mine to mine, no matter what, a lot of mines here, I could tell you, 67 of them, there's dumps all around here, some of them which closed and no matter which one you went to, there's only one thing, you had to cut that coal in there a foot and a half, they could tell you. That's what you had to do to get it, of course you could shoot with black powder but they didn't like it, the company, because it knocked all the slack. You had to do some digging out after that, you did. But I can remember things when I was young, I was only 13 but my father started at 14, yeah, I did start at 13. I was young. It took me a while. It's a good thing see I was young [unintelligible] cause a lot of them was starting, my father was taking them in, some was thirteen even then they were older than me, some was fourteen, but my father took them in see, and my father died in 1903 and I started in 1901 I was only fourteen. When I was fourteen, my father died when I was fourteen. I was kind of worried before that I couldn't get anyone to take me in. And by God my uncle knew that them kids was all starting with their dads which was a nice thing you know 'cause the dad take more care than if you went in with a stranger. But still you had to work with somebody you had to go in with somebody and my uncle finally came to my house and he told my folks that he'd take me in. My poor mother I remember says "Yes" and he's says I'll get him a dollar till he gets all lined up and stronger. Well he come and I got some clothes and shovel and pick started slowly that way. He was good to me. I can always remember he always told me when I get tired "sit down now, you sit down." The first thing I did was get the shovel and the empty car. The driver brought it he pulls your car your load. Your cars held a ton of coal some of them put in a little more, with three inches over the top of the car you got about 2500 for it and they put over the box you know, they were boxed in. And my buddy he showed me how, now you get the shovel now, you've got an empty car there's the coal there. All right [laughs] I looked at that pile of coal and at the shovel. I knew all right how to shovel all right, I seen the coal there he said you people keep shoveling until that car is full. I kept on shoveling and shoveling the whole big pile there, I stopped and looked was that high you know I looked in that car and seen how much I had in there, I'll never get up top to see the coal I got you know [unintelligible] A miner knew that the box, the leather box, [unintelligible] a lot of them didn't have it, that was handy there [unintelligible] you know and you had to build it up with coal. But this was boxed in it was you know, it's a good thing and that made it much better. [Unintelligible] Number seven shovel. My uncle told me to get about medium you know I was shoveling and shoveling and some places there was chunks I put the shovel down against the wall and picked up the chunks and threw the chunk up and my uncle says if the thing is too big you know then keep shoveling you know. Well, I shoveled and shoveled and shoveled away and threw it in the car and I was wondering if I was hitting anything in the car with the shovel. I don't know anything, at thirteen what are you going to do. [Unintelligible] But I got

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on about loading the car all right didn't take me long once I had a shovel. All I knew I had a strong back and shovel that coal: "get that car loaded!" "every box 20-hundred!"

Q: Did you have to take examination for miner's papers?

A: Yes.

Q: When was that?

A: I tell you what happened then, might as well. You're right about that. They kind of got strict about that died out though after, after I worked a while. After I worked a while we had our meeting, the local had our meeting, they'd notify the local when it was going to come, oh maybe a year. Before they come they'd notify that local a few days before that they would be at that certain place certain local at a certain time and for the men to be there like that now. And be there to ask you all the questions and then ask you about the mine. And they wouldn't give the paper if you wasn't experienced or really know about everything. Some of them you know how to work in the mine quite while, it's like everything else, it wasn't quite often there were children what they didn't know 'cause they'd ask you some of the damnedest questions. They didn't have a meeting they didn't bother me for quite a while 'cause they knew I was just starting in but I remember they turned some down and wouldn't give them their papers. Yeah them papers other places you go they want to see those papers, if you have the experience. They give if you have the experience they ok'd the paper. But certain things they ask you never knew they wouldn't put it there and you stood there. They come pretty regularly. They'd let the local know they was coming.

Q: How did you do on your exam?

A: They come [unintelligible], huh?

Q: How did you do on your exam? Did you pass?

A: Well at the beginning they never bothered me. Till after I got older. You had to be so old. And so long in the mine. They never bothered me for quite a while. But the men who were experienced kind of up in age well they knew it, well they found out they asked. Then at the table there they'd question them: and asked them how it was, how was the coal, how was the [digging?], how was the brushing, and how was everything. And they could tell if you made a mistake 'cause they knew all about that work you was...

A [Perena Bertot]: You were all right, when they examined you.

A: Yeah, they thought I was all right I'll say that much. Like I said they didn't examine me for quite. My Uncle would tell me, he had to get examined. He told me, "they won't get you for a while." 'Cause they'd ask you know, how's your buddy how's that kid? Well yeah, the answer is forgotten. As I said, if you went to a different mine, even around here, and you went to a different mine, if I quit here and for example go to Campbell Brothers, they wanted to see those papers.

Q: Right.

A: [Perena Bertot]: Sure. Well what about yours?

A: Well I never had none to begin with until I got the experience.

A: [Perena Bertot]: But didn't you have them later on?

A: Yeah, later on. My papers were all pretty good because you had to know before you go there because you had to sit there with them. There was two of them. There was two of them. They were strict on that, they want to see the paper, they didn't like everything, they knew all the words on there. I knew how good I did. Later on a little bit though they told me [unintelligible] that was a little different, that was a little different you know. There is something out of the way and you are not renewed because you was in danger all the time at the face, was getting after that you know so there weren't so many men, so many diggers getting hurt. That's what that was for. If you went to a different mine you had to show that paper it shows experience. You wanted to show that you knew what it was all about down there, see. That's what it was for, you had to have the experience. And a lot of them, they use to say, they worked quite a while in the mine and by God they worked there because there was whole lot you had to know about down there, not only how to use a pick or shovel but you got to know you had to know when you was in danger about your roof, like I got through telling you, you had to watch it with your pick. They wanted to know that. They even asked you do you know how your roof was you were working under. You had to tell them yeah, I used to ... with the pick, they knew that, because the pick [unintelligible], they could tell you the same. That rock was lose ready to come down any time, but if it that sounded like a bell up there that rock was solid and that pick you knew you was safe. But if you left for another mine they were strict on that. But that died out after. The state had them go around, they'd notify the locals couple days before they were going to be there, two of them would come. Course that was a good thing, they wanted to know if you didn't have the experience they'd tell you. They'd let you know and get corrected and want to be corrected on that if you said something you never knew about. 'Cause they knew that place they knew that much to the T, that what they were there for you know. When they examined you they knew as much as the experienced man down there but they were paid to go and find out about other people what they knew, about it, about the face I mean. See that's where the danger was, there's where your danger was inside, inside it was dark, biggest part of the day, you were on your knees. The only place you could stand up the road, it was seven feet high. With the coal come down some rock maybe three-four inches come down it was a little higher naturally, you had to clean it from the coal but all the day that's how it was you were on your knees. On each side, each side fifteen feet, maybe seventeen feet, from your own side and that side and that side and on side two men, it's a long wall, two men along and two men on the other side, all lined up together. All three together. You had to strike and so far into the other place and so on. Like I say, you average about fifteen, sixteen, seventeen feet on one side and you had to strike in there. The next two men had the same thing, they had a row they had about fifteen feet of coal on each side of the row and so on. It was all lined up. There were about 150-200 men.

Q: Mr. Bertot some of the mines in this area were strip mines right? Did you work at strip mines at all?

A: Very little, very little. The strip mines started in the year 1927, they started in 1927. I never did get to the big strip mines. I got to a little one up here [unintelligible] just a very little while but otherwise they went on here all the time

until they pulled away. But otherwise, like I say it's all these undergrounds. Now I worked one of the Campbell Brothers that's two miles from here. They had two mines going, that's where she was born. I worked at one of the mines, it was called number three mine, by God I don't remember. And then down there was three of them and the Campbell Brothers owned all the ground back there, all the ground them days. They were two brothers they were pretty well-to-do they had they had three mines there. I got in to two of them, one of them was down the road down there. One of them was pretty good it wasn't what I thought, but they had lines they had croppers out of the roof when you was under there you got your back all wet. So I quit and went down to Carbon Hill down there, they had two mines going down here. But no matter which one you went to, it was the same old thing, you had to be a good miner to average three ton. You couldn't hardly do that, you had to have good luck and all that. Eighty-seven cents a ton when I started, exactly that. Company men two-and-a-half. One thing about it they had the advantage over others. When the company men went down naturally they knew they were going to have two-and-a-half out there, you know. Whereas [diggers?] you went down there you had rock to clean up and everything, we worked about three hours on the rock, and winded up with \$1.75 some days. Course that was regular company men they worked through the drivers, timbermen and tracklayers, but that was their scale \$2.50 a day. We was like on piece work. When I started I can remember it was eighty-seven cents a ton and you had to be damn good digger there to get to three ton. It was tough. But there was a lot of dead-work that was the heck of a time your road was a 125 yards from the switch, come in some mornings and walk along there had to get the driver to give you an empty car to load. Two men before you got to the coal. You lost about an hour, hour-and-a-half, before you got to the coal, nothing before that. It's up to you to keep your own lined up. Sometimes the road they used to settle down, and by God they did settle down you couldn't get in there. You had to back with your buddy with a pick and take about six inches off. There's where you lost time too. See that road would settle down and it would get so the mule couldn't get in there you had to go back there and take a slab down maybe six inches maybe a foot. Just where the mule was catching putting you all the way through. Some places settle pretty good and any way you do that to take that slab down well then you get through there all right. All that never got paid for that, as I say. But as I say [unintelligible] there was working around here only the mines. You know what I mean. There is another thing, there was a [unintelligible] factory later on, there wasn't too many... But them days all the people wanted to work, you all had families, [unintelligible] you wanted to eat, you went to the coal mine. Some of them people worked until they were really old, you could hardly walk up to the mine you know. And still you never had much. In the summertime come my contract run out the first of April all the time. First of April run out. All right. When the first of April come there was no demand for coal. That I know, that right, no demand for coal. Well they'd leave us out on strike for three months sometimes. Then when we would go back towards the fall, as I say, then you had to walk all over on your own. [unintelligible] They'd need no coal in the summertime, here's what I want to say, they'd only work about three days a week or three-and-a-half and they'd tell the days you were going to work and you was home about two days, two-and-a-half days every week. Course then when the fall come and winter then you worked everyday, six days and work on Sundays if you wanted to go. But the summertime only three days or three-and-a-half. There was no demand for coal them days. We did have some strikes. 1927 we was out four months. 1927 I was working for [Northern?], that is the Peabody Mine. In 1927 we had four months off, I worked on the hard road. Len Small from Kankakee, he was the government, he was, we went to him in the fall and we got a dollar an hour we did, as I say, but we'd be off all summer. Then you go back to

work. You lose the summertime you couldn't get ahead on only one dollar or whatever, you would rightfully go down to fishing when the money wasn't worth it. But it was tough and all the times but I'll admit as we went on conditions got better. I will say that much, I remember then, they got better, the union got stronger, conditions got better. But still underground you're still here. But conditions were better. When I started like I say, your bosses, your superintendent where I worked, they do what they wanted with you. They tell the pit boss, pit bosses don't go all the time, he's the one line up down below. And as I say, it was tough it was but conditions got better as you went on. But when I started they do as they wanted. If you didn't do, if you had some trouble in the place, you didn't do what the pit boss told you they told you to take your tools out. Course you could take tomorrow out there was always places to go, they told you places to go. But you was doing pretty good the way it was, you hate to take your tools out 'cause you were losing time. And another thing we knew going to another place 'cause they were all alike, you couldn't better yourself. Oh I quit mines, I quit there, I quit Carbon Hill, that's what I say, I knew them all. [Unintelligible] You think you were having a hard time with one place, a lot of the time you tell the boss, "you got something else?" "No, all right," take the tools out of your machine, your tools out, you go to another one. No matter where you went at night the boss went up at quitting hour, he knew you always quit about half-past-three, "You gonna [pray?] for me? Bring your tools out in the morning!" You always had a place down below. No matter which place you went to you couldn't better yourself, you couldn't get three tons. I think some places the wages the same but then there was nothing going on. But still the men that's what they did sometimes, they tried to better themselves they go to another place, they knew they got work in another mine, you always had work, but that was it, you didn't know how much you were going to make. But they got along, they made a living, but they didn't have no extra money, at the beginning I mean, afterwards they did better.

Q: Mr. Bertot you worked both in deep mines and in strip mines, how would you compare, strip mines to [deep mines]? They're

A: Yeah. Well the one down here in Verona is a Peabody Coal Company I went to work at this eight foot collier only twenty miles away, that was in Verona a small town. Peabody sunk it there in '25. And Santa Fe Coal Co. took all their coal, the railroads in them days had coal shoots you know all along different places. And that Verona coal, Peabody found out they tested this coal and Verona coal, that was seven foot coal here, that one is twenty miles, this coal burned easier and softer for home in stoves. Verona coal was hard, a hard coal, and the Santa Fe Coal Co. they took all the good load there, they took to the coal shoots for them trains. And they sunk it in '25, I, quite a few of us from Coal City got a job there in '25, it shut down in '32 it did. In '25 I decided and we went there and worked and they used to have a bus to haul us over there, it is 18 or 20 miles. You could make good money, you could make \$8 a day, they had a machine that could cut the coal there. So Peabody, they shut it down in '21[?] that's when the depression started. They had a wash house there, all these coal mines, nothing, they weren't going to have a wash house for you, never had one, you had to wash at home or as well as you could. But Peabody starting in '25 they put a nice one wash house there. Then '21 come along these strip mines all started, see, and that was all Peabody, and they were getting their coal better, easier, and for less money then deep mines. So they started a strip mine here. In '31 depression times started in and the first thing you know we come up at night they had a big sign up on the wash house: "This line take your tools out and in a couple of weeks it's going to shut down." In the later part of March in '31

that's when depression time come on. All right I took my tools out and they did shut it down in '31, it did shut down in March I can always remember. Peabody, besides these strip mines that he did afterward, that was good work there. They had a machine cutter there, had a machine cutter, six foot, and that's how you made good money, you made \$8 a day there while you were averaging only \$3 here. But it didn't last very long. They had a machine cutter, well there was all cutting bars, they was all six foot, and a twenty-eight feet wide. By the time they cut six feet deep and twenty-eight feet deep, two men could load coal for two days. And then it was all shoveling you didn't need any experience there. It's just like Hillboro, well all the mines down south, Hillboro, you could slide in if you never seen a mine. The cutting machine cut, like I said the cutting bar was six feet. All you do drill three holes, what they call a buster, you drill one in the center of them at twenty-eight feet and two on the ribs and three sticks of dynamite in each hole. You had to put one stick of dynamite less in that center hole so it didn't bust down so the rib [unintelligible] would take the rest down. It took two men two days, they get you down and tell you what. And everybody take a look at that sign on the wash house. You know I can always remember everybody was buying new cars and there were a lot of people from Streator working there. They looked at that sign they couldn't believe it you know the way they was going, it was \$8 a day, and there's nice work there, [unintelligible]. By God everybody bought new cars you know, you made a lot of money there. It started exactly '25, month of March the sign went up on the tool house everybody come up, I came up myself, we come out of the mine, we used the cage, and started and looked at that sign, "Everybody have their tools out of here by the middle of March." Holy Christ the mine was going to shut down, it gonna shut down, and boy it did shut down by Christmas time. Then I had to go back to deep mines, these here mines here.

Q: Did you yourself like working in a strip mine better than in a deep mine or other way around?

A: Well the strip mine was easier than down below.

Q: Easier.

A: Yeah, actually it were. But as I said I didn't get on, I never could get on. They knew I was working under but they never put me on. I had a card with them. But then I kept working here. Underground. I worked for Campbell in '27 the time he started here. As I said, the other shut down and everybody went back to these undergrounds around here. Now there's eight foot coal exactly twenty miles from here, you wonder about it being three feet here, but that coal over there I took a ton one time and wanted to try it, it didn't burn in the heating stove, you had to open the draft from the bottom. I didn't take no more. [Unintelligible] This coal was softer and that coal you had to leave the draft open it was a hard coal. And the railroads that's what they wanted for their engines for steam and they took all they could load for the coal shoot. But this coal here you could go with the heater and shut it off, keep the bottom shut off, you could ventilate and go nicely until morning. As I said it was nice work up there but people thought "Jesus, we're all right," for working, it didn't go very far from the bottom you had a lot of coal, but... [side one cuts off]

[Tape 2, Side 2]

A: [Perena Bertot] Did he satisfy you on that?

Domenic Bertot Memoir

Q: Fine. Mr. Bertot, in 1932 there was a split in the union, the progressive miners were organized and there were two unions.

A: Oh I was in the union. Oh yes.

A: [Perena Bertot] Yeah, but he don't understand what you're saying. I don't think.

A: No I didn't.

A: [Perena Bertot] You always belonged to the one there...

A: What did he ask me, I know all about that.

Q: Ok, tell me what happened in 1932 when the Progressive Miners were organized? Go ahead, tell me.

A: I was working here, they were in the neighborhood of Springfield up through the south there. They even come here, after these miners here, the Progressives, but I didn't work under them, they come here, they had a union of their own I think it was, the union of the Progressives, down south there I think around Springfield all those places, they even send some of their men here to investigate around here, but they didn't listen to them. They [unintelligible] union men here, because [having trouble?] then they finally put them away from here. No I wasn't in there, but there were some from here that was working down there that belonged to the Progressives. When we got our pension, they wouldn't give them nothing there, the Progressives, they never had no money. That's when, I took it, I got it here I did. I retired and I got it I had twenty years and I never had no trouble at all. They give you a blank to fill up before you take your retirement, they want to know [unintelligible]. I got it right away I got it after I filled the blank. I got it and the money started \$75 a month. I think there was a couple of months we never got, they never had enough money to get it all. [Unintelligible] But it started in again, it wasn't quite a while, \$75. After I retired I took my pension right away, I didn't have no trouble at all, I took my check right away I did. But the Progressives, no, around here, oh Jesus they were..., but they were pretty strong around Springfield and them places.

Q: Yes they were.

A: Listen, I'm gonna tell you, boy around here you hated them. They come here, you had to get the sheriff out of Morris there, to come here, and his deputies. They went around looking for trouble and tried to get us to join the Progressives. And boy there was a scramble. They got the sheriff and went to the strip mine, and they were all hanging around there and stood here for a couple of nights. We knew it. Around here, all around this neighborhood all they knew about were the United Mine Workers from even the time I started and I fought it. But I don't know. And then you come to the pensions. We had a couple here who used to belong to them [down in? unintelligible] they didn't have a pension here, and they never had nothing, they never got a pension. I don't think they ever got a pension.

Q: No they didn't.

A: I don't think they ever got a pension. I think they were around here after or something, I don't know. [Unintelligible] I joined that time when I started here and

there was a little while when I was off work and I kept up my dues. Course dues was only a quarter a month. Like I say, when you joined a union, like I told you, I can remember that good, I didn't know that neither. All the fathers took their sons out, it was a nice thing, they took them down at thirteen or fourteen. And I went to work, the committeeman, my uncle took me, and before you go down, you couldn't go down until 7 o'clock, we sat on top in the summertime, the committeeman come up and he seen me, he said "are you gonna start to work here?"

I said, "yes I'm gonna start with my uncle, my uncle's right beside me."

He said, "you starting with your father?"

"No, that's my uncle there, my father quit the mine, he was sick all the time, he couldn't work in the mine when I started."

He says, "Well it's gonna cost you two dollars and a half."

"Well," I said, "I didn't know." I told him I didn't know. I says, "I'll get you the money tomorrow."

He says, "Well you'll have to bring two-and-a-half." "Well," he says "if you want to you give me your name," he was the committeeman, he was all right, "If you want to tell me your name and I'll tell them in the office your name, to check off your union card for you, to check off two-and-a-half for you," for my union card. They were keeping the dues off at the office, twenty-five cents a month, they were keeping the dues off at the office, then they turn it in at the local, you know what I mean. But not two-and-a-half.

I told him, "I'll bring it to you tomorrow morning." I had to get it from my mother.

He says, "No," he says, "that's all right, just tell me your name, and you'll do without it." He says, "that two-and-a-half will be kept off your pay. I'll tell them in the office.

And we're keeping union dues off [unintelligible]." Course that was all right. They kept it off, that two-and-a-half, so I didn't need to keep it off..

Q: Did anyone join Progressives from this area?

A: No, no, I can tell you that much. I'll tell you one thing, I remember that time good. We were in Coal City or in that neighborhood, I can tell you about here, right here... well we had a couple of them worked up there now I take that back. A few of them worked I think up there but they had come back here. But at that time there was up there was, see, working in big mines, some of them were working in Gillespie and Kincaid and them places, and the bit coal, they were going on in there. But around it was no Progressives at all. Like I said, I remember the sheriff coming from Morris, he took his three deputies with him. And we all, everybody around knew what the trouble was, everybody knew there was trouble around here and boy they got them out of here. That's what I'm trying to tell you [unintelligible]. Unh uh I didn't believe in your Progressives. But again, as I say, when I got pension, none of them got pensions, we got it around here... As far as strikes, we had three of them in my time. Nineteen-hundred-and-thirteen, we had two months off in the end, 1913 I remember that good. And then nineteen-hundred... oh yeah, nineteen-hundred-and-forty-seven. Len Small was governor, well it didn't look different from here. Nineteen-forty ... 1944, we went three months off, we did. Yeah, I got it right now, 1947, you'll find that out if you look up the records in Springfield. We had three months off in 1944. Because, I remember we was all off, and they were starting... That's when Len Small was governor from Kankakee, and he was looking for men. That's when he started all the hard roads. Starting all the hard roads. There was a contractor from Joliet, we was out of work, we was off of it the first of April, we was off until the fall, he was looking for miners, well not only miners, anybody who wanted to work in construction. We all signed up and we tell him, [unintelligible] building a road to Joliet, he would put up a bunkhouse.

Domenic Bertot Memoir

Q: When the Progressives were around...

A: Well listen, I'm not done with this yet.

Q: Okay. Go ahead.

A: And '13 I remember that good.

A: [Perena Bertot] Well in '13 yeah. But...

A: But more than '13 there was, there was others, besides the '44 yet. In '13 we was off for the summer because in them days [they gave you off the operators had?] no demand for coal. In '13 was off for two months. Let me see in '44, anyway we sat there in '44, it was in our neighborhood, we had three months off that time, it was a strike, because you always come off first of April. And then in '47 I was working for Verona mine, that's when I told you I started in '45 in the Peabody. '47 that I remember good, we was over there four months in '47, we went back, yeah it was four months, we went back towards the fall. That was a good strike. [unintelligible] We'd work on top, sometimes we wouldn't get a job at all even, 'cause work was [scarce then?]. If you worked you got 35 cents an hour. Course that was good because it was hard to get work. Well in '44 like I got through saying this fellow come looking from Joliet, I forgot his name, a contractor, he was looking for men to start building a road up from Joliet up to Wilmington over here on construction. I can't think... anyway I went to work for 40 cents an hour, \$3.20 a day it was, pouring concrete there was. I know I got a job there, they even put me back at the mixer in them days, they had the mixer all slow work, you know, they had [tankers?] hauling the concrete to the mixer. Two of us were working back there. When I started he told me "you are going to get boots," they had boots up in where they mix, he said "you put a pair of boot on because you are going to work by the mixer here puddling." He called it "puddling" you know, geez I thought, "I wonder what it's all about." So I had the boots on when I started in the morning and geez they gave me boots that were way too big for me. The mixer when they are throwing a bunch of concrete down between the forms naturally you know it was going on and sometime before it dry you had to spread you know. I was getting 10 cents an hour more. I earned it, me and my buddies, we earned it, that was hard work. You had to get it even with them forms, and a little bit ahead, because behind that concrete they had what's called a tamper come along on top, you know. You had to spread it so you get that form, and sometimes when you threw wet concrete down from the mixer it was all right. You think you can just push it around [laughs] sometimes it was a dry one, then again it was ten cents more an hour for working back at that mixer. I quit after I did... my feet was all swelled up and my knees. Them boots, you know I was putting rags in... I worked quite a while, I was getting a dime more. My buddy told me "we gonna do this hard work we are better working for 40 cents an hour," we were getting 50. [laughing] I thought, boy sometimes dry batches, he couldn't help it, the fellow [unintelligible]. That's when they started putting the roads in, that contractor from Joliet was lucky, he got that lined up.

Q: Back to the Progressives. At that time when the Progressives were here down south in Springfield and Gillespie area there was a lot of violence: shootings, killings, bombings. Was anything of this nature happening here?

A: No. I'll tell you just how it happened. Everybody we're talking about, even your people at home, they were kind of leery of strangers going around here. See, which it was. They come down, not only one, but Jesus, dozens of them, you know. What happened, it was after the union, I think, or something, they were starting the Progressives, but they knew we were all union, United Mine Workers, that they knew I guess, but they still come here, and they stood there for a couple of days. Finally they called, [John J.] Perucca, he was sheriff, he was born here. And they called him up and told him to get his deputies to come here and, "get these people out of here!" They finally walked them off, he talked to them in a nice way, he did the sheriff and his deputies. But they hung around trying to turn us over to them. But no they didn't, we were all United Mine Workers back when I started and before I started. Well anyway, I remember [unintelligible], what I'm telling you is everything the truth I remember good. I went through it, not only me, these ones you're going to see they were all fourteen, maybe some fifteen I don't know, but when I started, there was a couple that started at thirteen, but fourteen is quite a few quit school to come out of the fifth grade. My folks, all of them, all of the people never have much money around here. Only on the coal mines we depended on. We had, like they'll tell you, cows, pigs, chickens, gardens, [unintelligible]. When my father died my mother had a hard time. My sister and brother they were young. My uncle told my folks if they wanted me to come with him, I'll give them a dollar a day until I was signed up. My father and mother said yeah. Course they knew that dad was already working at my age and they figured too, you know. Course at thirteen I was young but I got along. Like I said, happy my uncle took me. They were kind of worried because my father quit before I got started. They used to talk about these kids, and I used to hear them too, like damn fools us kids was antsy to get out of school, we never knew what it was all about. To me, for one, when I started in the mine I got out of school geez I though all right. It was nice to get schooling you know, us kids we didn't know what was ahead you know, that you should go to school to learn something for your time ahead of you, you see. But, as I say, my father and mother they realized these kids was working and when my uncle came that night, I was there that night, he says he was wanting to take me to work. My mother and father said yeah. Well he says, "I'll give him a dollar a day to start out," and get him pretty well lined up which wouldn't take long. Well they thought it was nice, yeah. He said, "Well, don't come out tomorrow." I had to get some clothes, they used to call them pit pants, and everything, tools, little tools. Finally he come stopped at the house one morning, I was working one of these two mines, they were the same company, Star Coal Company, Wilmington Star Coal Company, had the same name two mines. They had a company store right where I started. But that check I can tell you all about that, that and the two mines, that I can tell you about I was there. The boss, I'll tell, the superintendent was here, his name was Bill Harkis. Well she remembers you used to go to work at the tailor shop. Harkis, he was the superintendent at the mine, he'd tell them pit bosses, the boss down below, he'd tell them all who was checking, who was wasn't checking, about 150 or 200, he was telling them all who was checking. [laughing] You didn't hardly know, they knew, they knew, in the office who was checking! The superintendent! Once in a while he would pull you up in the office who wasn't checking. All right, I'll tell you how it started out. You went down there, they even asked me, my folks, they want if you worked in that mine they had a store there, they had a grocery store and a butcher shop besides. And when you went to the store, you went in there, they had a little office in the store. I went in there myself, I took a few checks. I thought I better take one too, course I wasn't making hardly that much money but I took my buddy... My uncle said maybe you better... But the ones inside making money they wanted them to take a check every two weeks. And two or one, that went on for a while, that was big store, that butcher

shop... it was over here, she knows, the store was over here, [unintelligible] north two miles. When you went in, you had to ask for a check, there was a woman in that office, and you asked her "I want a \$5 check." She'd give you this, you didn't pay no money, you had to go by check, your coal miners.

That woman asks you, "all right here's your check, \$5 check, what's your name?"  
"Domenic Bertot"

"What's the number of the mine you work in?"

"Number one."

She had number one, number two. All right. Oh they had us, they did. Well I took this check. My mother use to go, I went there everyday [unintelligible] my mother went there, my mother come back, I came back at night, [unintelligible], "oh" she says, [unintelligible]. They were awfully high! That's why the miners didn't want to cash it but you could hardly get away from it. Then in the office they marked it down and they took \$5 off your pay. Course they knew that you took that check. But again then if it didn't come through a check, or they seen you didn't no checks in the office, they'd tell the pit boss or the super, they'd find out in the office who took them. Well then they'd tell the pit boss, "he never took them, he never took no more checks." They knew just which one never took it and which one was taking them because that check from the store went to the office. They had you there, they knew your name in the office, they took your check money there. If you didn't take none, they'd tell you. The super would tell the bit boss you tell that certain one he better take a check. Oh boy oh boy! [Unintelligible] I can remember taking two. They take \$5 out of your pay, course that was all right. The trouble was they were high as hell, they was company, they wanted to make money on you there too, on the store. Well that [unintelligible] that was the hard way you know you sell, course they got away with it you know. But how in the hell could... you do what you want with your money, everybody knew that! But there, I'll tell you the truth, you worked there, you worked there, they keep on telling you got a check. They didn't want your money because you had to take that check over to the mine, and the mine they knew your name. They knew that check was there. They took your \$5 out every two weeks, thirteen days. And then sometimes in the office they kept track of that, whose checks didn't come. They knew, you know. They'd let it go for a while, they'd let it go for a little while. First thing you know somebody would come up, and he said, "Jesus Christ, the pit boss told me that he got a letter from the office that I better go to that company store and take a check." He hadn't been taking one, you know, he'd been worried about himself, he was a pretty good worker in that mine. There you are, that is out of the way. [unintelligible] he got the right to go and spend the money where he wanted would they?

Q: Right.

A: But that went on for a while. They did that, you could ask these five. You know maybe they won't remember, remember the store [unintelligible]. They had a butcher shop with it. They didn't want your money they wanted you to take that \$5 check. [laughing] They cut that out after a while. A fellow was working company work, if you didn't check you was working company work [unintelligible]. Because they knew their two-and-a-half when they went to work in the mine, but like us there were days when we only made a \$1.50, \$1.75 weighing rock and everything. But them company men they wanted them a check every two weeks because they knew they had that job. They used to check every two weeks, because if you wanted to hold a company job, that was better than digging you know, they knew when they went down to work, at quitting time, they had that two-and-a-half. Where a fellow digging they didn't know that. The company man took the check, they were kind of

leery about it because the pit boss down below he was told the company man if he wasn't checking, he better check, if the company man didn't check they'll put another man there. So that's why working company work the picker had to check and the digger...

Q: Mr. Bertot, what do you think about the coal strike that we have today?

A: Huh?

Q: What do you think about the coal strike, this strike that is happening right now?

A: Oh, yeah, well I don't know, to be true there buddy, you wonder what it's all about. I belong to the union, always as far as that, course you gotta stick up for your rights. We know that you know. But, you know it's kind of getting going along, you know. Another thing it's hurting a lot of people you know. Like I said them strikes we had the operators didn't need the coal. But now there's a difference, nowadays they're laying people off and all kinds of people are needing coal, you know what I mean. I've been listening to it right along, it's kind of tough, both ways we know that. The miners want what they want like always you know. They're fighting that operator, the operator he's holding back too, you know. For the operators it's both ways you can see that. And the miners, our President Miller there actually they gotta set, course it's going on two months now, they want just that signed up and the operators don't agree to what they want. But I think Tuesday they are going to be called in again. It's a long strike, it's just too bad, you know what I mean. The union, we got to have what's coming to us, we can't let the operators put it over on us, anybody knows that, even operators know that, because what would it be? You would be working for nothing. [There was a bridge?] there between operators and the union but now it's gotten to be pretty rough there. I know what you mean. But they're going to meet Tuesday, I think they'll settle. I think Tuesday. They've been off two months, that's quite a long time to be off. Still they gotta stick up for their rights, like I say. Now I guess they're gonna force them to go back I guess. This morning news is saying the President is going to stop in, step in now. I think by Tuesday ... gee that's a lot of miners that's been off.

Q: Has the strike affected your pension?

A: Yes [laughing], good thing you mentioned that. Yeah, they've been off two months. The month of March, what am I talking about, I get all mixed up. Last month there, last month, January, that's when it was barely starting in. Well we got a check ... Perena! [calls for his wife] We got a check I noticed that time from the union that we were getting cut off, getting short of money, that was in January, that we'll get one more check in January, but we weren't sure in February. Well, January, we got it, and this one, we never got that one, course [unintelligible] there's nothing you can do about it, even as pensioners. But there's a lot of pensioners that are getting worried about it you know. They always say they ain't got much money or anything. But this one we haven't we never got nothing yet and even when they do start it will take a while.

A: [Perena Bertot interjects, unintelligible]

A: Yeah, it was January it wasn't before we got a check, they wrote us a letter, didn't they? They wrote all the pensioners a letter, they'd get the letter in January, but they said they'd do them all by February. Well that was all right, but we never got ...

A: [Perena Bertot] We didn't get one after that either yet...

A: Well listen, I'm not done yet.

A: [Perena Bertot, laughing] He's wound up.

A: You want me talk.

Q: Go ahead, go ahead.

A: But this month here, February, naturally wasn't even looking for it, they don't have any money, we know that. But then when you do get lined up, they expect, I think Tuesday they're going to sign up with the operators. But then before they get lined up again and get money, I don't think we'll get this month yet. You see, every time the call goes out, it's the operators paying for this pension, when you look at it that way. The operators are paying for it, but get it through the mining union. Every time the call goes out the operators gotta pay, it used to be 40 cents a ton, it used to be, from the operators from that coal into the miner's union. But now I think its 60 or 65 cents a ton [unintelligible], I think it's 65 [unintelligible], you get that 65 cents every ton goes into the union fund. Now when they start, before that coal gets rolling around you know, it's going to take a while to get them trains before they get rolling. Course not that I care ... well, I care, I like to get it ... but the other poor devils really need it. You can see [unintelligible] depend on their thing. We won't get [unintelligible] for a couple of months, because by the time they got that pension money, and the union getting that treasury up, you know, all that pension money you know. You know you got your pension check, like I say, if you got your pension check, he can tell you, all the time, it started out \$75, it was only a one or two months. I told them. A lot of people ask me about the mines you know and different things. Yes many things. They told me you got your check at 75. There was a month or two my neighbor he brought me my mail one morning, he used to bring me my mail, he went to the post office, he says, "you ain't got no check this morning from the miners." I looked at him we haven't gotten a letter in two months. I said, "no, I only got the letter but no pension check though." I didn't know what happened. He said, "well we'll have to wait and see." And so we waited two-three times, here the check come, \$75. My neighbor said, "by God we're all right." He had the letter the check 'cause he bring my mail. [Unintelligible] He said, "we got our pension check." [Laughing, unintelligible] But now with that [unintelligible], that's what keeps the union... We got it coming the miners, from the operators, you know what I mean. Course they didn't like that idea. But the miners, after you work in a mine so many years, you get old you can't work no more you know. Operators, ain't gonna keep you, like overtime you quit the mine here, if had anything all right, if you didn't, nothing from the company. Some argues you know, you got \$5 a week. But as I said the operators, it's a nice thing, they're the ones that keep the thing going, they'll tell you, we pay for the pension. Well, its nice the union goes along with it because when you work in the mine, you've got twenty years, you figure up there about sixty years old, you are getting close to retirement. Well the mine, they know they've got that fund there, they give you a blank to fill up, you've got to have twenty years. [Unintelligible] Sometimes the mine it closes down and you only have about eighteen years or so and they go away from here and you couldn't get it. You have to have a full twenty years. Well then you start in with your pension. If you didn't have a pension, what would you do? You would keep on working in the mine. Keep on working [unintelligible]. It's a good thing they called you here. Well all right. Look at

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the carpenters. All unions. You've got protection. Which is nice. You know a man can get so old, you know, some can go quite a while, and some maybe 65 or 70 no matter [unintelligible]. Even at 70 if you didn't work in a mine you was dead. No at 78 something happens with them, well it's nice to get that pension. Them operators worked with the unions, you wouldn't get it from them back in the olden times. When you got hurt, quit, that was it, you should have something, you got nothing, even when you got hurt you got nothing. That what I told you, even if you got hurt you got nothing no matter how many months you were off. I told him, that's true what I told you, the committeeman [unintelligible] he'd take a book and go around to everyone in the mine and ask everyone, "what do you want." He'd mark it on the book, some would give 50 some would give a dollar, "give them what you want, the two of you." [Unintelligible] He got a lot of money up and then he'd turn it into the office that book. From the office he took all their names down from that book and then they give the committeeman their money, whatever it was, and from the committeeman it went over to [unintelligible], that was a nice thing. And if he was off a long time, he'd take another roll again. That committeeman, like I says, [unintelligible] well they took it out to the local to pay him, we paid him, it took him about a day and half to get around, it would...

End, Tape 2, 1:00:26