M318. Mans, Catherine DeRorre. (1920-2010)
Interview and memoir


Interview by Barbara Herndon and Nick Cherniavsky, 1975
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This is an oral history interview with Mrs. Catherine DeRorre-Mans. The date is February 17, 1975 and we are sitting on the sunporch of the Mans’ home here at 419 Wadsworth in Collinsville, Illinois.

Q: Mrs. Mans, I wonder if we could start by you telling me when you were born and where you were born.

A: I was born in DuQuoin, Illinois on June 13, 1920.

Q: Did you have other brothers and sisters in your family?

A: Yes, I have an older brother, Felix. He’s four years older than I am. And I had an older sister that was three years older. Antoinette was her name. She died in 1931.

Q: Was your father [Joseph DeRorre] a coal miner?

A: All of his life.

Q: Was his father before him?

A: Well, I really don’t know because he came from Italy and I don’t think so.

Q: What part of Italy, do you know?

A: From the northern, from Belluno.

Q: Did he immigrate to this country?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you know when?

A: About 1907 or 1908 it was.

Q: And did he go directly to the DuQuoin area?

A: Well, I don’t remember exactly. I know he worked up around Staunton in the coal mines and then I guess he ended up in the DuQuoin area.

Q: How about your mother [Catherine Bianco DeRorre], was she Italian also?

A: Yes, she was born in Italy. She was brought over here when she was about five years old by her grandmother. Her folks had come over previously and her father was a coal miner. She went to school through the eighth grade. That’s as far as her schooling went. When she just worked at home, her folks had boarders.

Q: Did you ever hear any stories of how your father met your mother?

A: Well I think it was, there was the DuQuoin Lodge, the fraternal and social lodge there in DuQuoin and it was about the only place the fellows congregated and I think that’s where they met.

Q: Was this an Italian lodge?
A: Yes. I could get the name for you. We had a nickname for it. The initials for it were SMBFT, and we, the kids, said the initials meant “somebody's big fat toe” and that's how we remembered the initials. And it was a family lodge. After we were born it was the regular congregation for the families, entertained families there and we kids had a play area. We built our own golf course and tennis courts. The family, it was a recreation area for the complete family. The men's played Bocce, played cards, we had dances.

Q: But you kids would use it as a sort of gathering place, even during the week?

A: Yes. Not in the wintertime because all they had was potbellied stoves in the building, but in the summertime, like I said, we had our own golf courses, we built miniature golf courses, tennis courts, and all.

Q: It sounds grand.

A: Well, I guess it kept us out of mischief.

Q: Can you recall your father’s working day life? What time he’d leave in the morning or what the family had to do to get your father off to work?

A: Well, I think in those days everybody had their own set of chores to do and the day started about four thirty in the morning and he would go off to work and we had a cow and a few chickens. We never had anything else and we had our garden. Each one of us knew what our chores were and mom always did the milking in the morning and when she’d bring the milk in I had to strain it. And I never could drink that milk. The smell of that hot milk. I was so thin when I went to school and the teachers used to get after mom to have me drink milk and I said now that's the one think I just couldn't stomach.

Q: You prefer the pasteurized cold milk of today?

A: Well, I can't very well drink either one.

Q: What chores, specifically, would you have in the household?

A: Well in the morning, like I say, by the time papa and mom had boarders, they went off to work, well then we either had to help mom get food ready for the evening meal and we’d get our own breakfast which usually consisted of a bowl of coffee and milk and we’d dump crackers or bread in it and eat a piece of homemade cheese or salami with it, and that was our breakfast. Then we’d have to get our water in. We’d have to pump our water and get the coal in, take the ashes out. We had the kitchen stove, the old fashioned cook stove and one other room that was heated with a potbellied stove and the rest of the house was closed off. There was no heat and when we went to bed, we had the old feather bed mattress and we snuggled in there. Then we’d come home for lunch and if there was anything to do, we’d have to do, and do the dishes, we’d take turns between the three of us. In the evening, there was a cow to take care of. In the summertime, we’d take her clear across town to a feedlot in a field and in the morning we’d take her and at night we’d go get her and that was better than a mile, we’d walk her across town. Then we had the yard to take care of, the garden.
Q: Did the cow have lots of company in this feedlot? Did lots of families do this?

A: Well almost, like I told you before, DuQuoin is divided by a railroad track, divides east and west side of town. We lived on the west side and we were considered the trash, the scum of the earth, because mostly miners lived on the west side of town. The east side had your businessmen and your upper class. When we got into, now what was it you asked me?

Q: How many cows?

A: Everybody on the west side had animals and most of them that were out a little farther, we just had a lot so we didn’t have much space, but some of them that were a little bit farther out on the edge of town had chickens and pigs but almost everybody on the west side had a cow. They gave us our milk and our cheese.

Q: I have a mental picture of all these little kids leading cows through the town. You see, I was trying to find out how many of you did that.

A: Well, not everybody took their cattle. You know, we didn’t specifically have a big acreage to take the cows, but we did and there might have been 10 or 15 cows in that.

Q: Who owns the land where you graze the cows?

A: Oh gosh, I don’t even remember anymore.

Q: I wondered if you had to pay rent for pasture. Any idea?

A: I believe, if I’m not mistaken, it belonged to one of our neighbors and of course mom always gave stuff away so it might have been that they got milk in return for it. I don’t know. I don’t remember.

Q: Do you remember how big DuQuoin was in those days? What was the population?

A: In those days, I’d say, maybe 4,000 or 5,000 at that particular time. And then as time went on I think probably the greatest amount of population was maybe 7,000 or 8,000. But there was this division between the east and the west side of town that even in the schools you could see this. The east siders wouldn’t fraternize with the west siders, but we had some pretty smart kids on the west side. I happened to be one of them. We had what we called a Rotary Club that gave a dinner for the honor students, for the top three students in the classes. Seemed like the west siders kind of outdid them all the time. As we got into high school it was still a carryover, between the east and the west siders. Three of the west siders came out on top in the class, in our graduating class in high school. We were all pretty proud of it.

Q: This is public school?

A: Yes.

Q: Were there parochial schools in DuQuoin too?

A: No, I don’t think so. I don’t remember at that particular time there being any. There may be now. But I don’t believe, if I remember right.
Q: So the whole town went to one grade school and one high school?

A: Yes.

Q: What are some of your early recollections of the Progressive Mine Workers movement?

A: Well, since my father was a miner, and like I say, this one particular border, Charles Rovaletti, that lived with us since this 1923. He was an immigrant but very well read and a self-taught scholar more or less like Jack Battuello and he was very interested in the labor movement and took an active part in it. And after my sister died in 1931, my mother took it so hard that when the miners’ trouble started and Charlie being at home and we always had a houseful of people for some reason or other and the discussions always started. I remember vaguely hearing about miners having their problems and the locals not having the local jurisdiction with the right to vote and all. And then I remember about this new union going to be organized and my mother got interested in it in order, that was one of her escapes from her sorrow, and that’s how she got so involved. I can remember the local union, the Majestic Local, took a vote, a strike vote, and they voted to strike and then there were threats made on the officers of the local by the United Mine Workers officials. I can remember meetings being held until they finally decided to go with the Progressive Miners and from then on why that’s when the real battle started. The Women’s Auxiliary was formed to help the miners, to give them moral support and they were right out on the picket lines with the men. In fact, I think sometimes there were more women than men but they were right there on the picket line with the men. As the organization was developed and people would come, our house was the central meeting place for that area. People would come at all hours of the night mostly to get away from the thugs and I think so much and I lose...

Q: Since you were living in the DuQuoin area, do you remember any of the survivors coming in from the March to Mulkeytown?

A: Yes, we had quite of few of them come in that evening, about, like I say, all hours of the night and I don’t remember their names but they came in. They had their heads bleeding and their clothes all muddy from walking, because their cars were shot up. They walked that distance through muddy fields and all and that’s maybe six or seven miles and a lot of them not knowing the area, God knows where they had been to get back and they had to side skirt the patrolmen and what have you, the thugs that were on the streets, because they were on the streets with their guns.

Q: When you say “come in” you mean into your home?

A: Yes.

Q: Where you up? Did you help feed them or what was your part?

A: Yes, we just pitched right in and we fixed coffee and gave them what we had and gave them as much medication as, you know, we could, washed their wounds off and bandaged them with sheets and got them on their way again, back home.
Q: There were a great number of miners, thousands of them, that night and the following day. Do you have any direct recollection of this additional mass of humanity in town at that time?

A: Oh we lived, the March came through a block from our house. This was our house and the alleyway, and the next street over was where the March came in at, was the main thoroughfare on North Hickory Street. Of course, mom was one of the leaders in the March because the March, as it progressed from the north, it picked up, the caravan grew as it came down and they were headed for Dowell, Illinois. I was over on the next block watching the parade and gosh it just seemed like there was no end to it. There was big truckloads just open trucks and truckload after truckload of people, of miners and wives. Well we just never saw the end of it and then it was getting dark and when you get to the southern edge of town, there is a road that goes to the left to Mulkeytown and Dowell goes straight ahead. Well the police diverted the marchers to the left down into the Mulkeytown area in the bottoms there and that’s where the shooting occurred, in that particular area. I couldn’t begin to say how long we watched these trucks just loaded with the miners.

Q: What were your reactions just to seeing this tremendous march go by?

A: Well, being involved in it and we knew it was a Progressive march and we were Progressives, well we were just thrilled to death, we were just waiving our hands, yelling, and like you would cheer any big event that you were really enthused about that was going on. We were just happy to see everybody coming in because we felt like “well now this was going to help our cause.” We could see the strength of the marchers coming down in this area.

Q: How did other people in town respond to the March?

A: All the streets were lined, waiving, I mean this route that I’m telling you about where we were, this was on the west side where all the miners were. Well then the March had to go up about three blocks and then turn left on Main Street. Well now how it was on the other side of town I don’t know, but like I say, this was on the west side and the streets were lined and we were just all waiving them on and cheering for them.

Q: Were the people in the caravan waiving back?

A: Yes.

Q: So as far as you could tell they were completely unaware of what was in store for them?

A: Oh you better believe it. You better believe it or else they’d have never gone down there. Any of the miners there in town never had any inkling of what was going. They’d have never got trapped down there in that area. You couldn’t imagine. I went down several days later with mom through that area. There were clothes strewn all over, hanging on the tree limbs, on the posts, in the ditches, cars, trucks there with the food, there were cooking utensils and everything just strewn along the highway.

Q: You mentioned that your mother was in the march. Did she actually take part in the march itself?
A: Yes, she, I don’t know just how far up in front she was, but like I say, as the caravan came through town then the miners joined in. And that’s what happened here because down a ways about five or six miles south of DuQuoin, and that’s where they were headed for.

Q: Did she go with your father or with other women? Do you remember?

A: No. My dad was a quiet man. He believed in the labor movement and, I mean, he had no reservations about my mother being so active. He knew that this was an escape from her grief and he was glad that she was active but he stayed at home with us kids. Occasionally he would go but mom was always gone, so somebody had to be home. But no, he was the quiet one in the family.

Q: When did your mother get home after the ambush?

A: Oh, I don’t remember. It was late and she had others with her, like I say, I don’t remember who they were or anything because most of these people were total strangers to me. Now if they’d have been like Jack and Joe Burrell, and some of the other people I would have known them. But since it was just a march of everybody why I didn’t. I don’t remember anybody in particular that I knew.

Q: Did you have any idea how many you housed that first night after the ambush?

A: Oh no. No. I don’t remember. It was just mass confusion.

Q: 25 in your house?

A: Well, I wouldn’t say that they all stayed there. I mean we didn’t have room, what we did was cleaned them, tried to bandage their wounds and if they got back in their cars, some of them managed to get back with their cars, we got them so they could get back and get on the road and get out of town again before daylight. But how many actually stayed I don’t know, but I know the house was full. People were just sitting in chairs, on the floor and where have you. But it’s something that I don’t want to see again.

Q: What is the first that you recall of hostility or threats against your family because of your mother’s participation in the March and the help that she gave to other marchers on that night?

A: On that night?

Q: Yes. When is the first time that there were any hostility or threats?

A: See, mom was active in, before my sister died mom was well known in town. She was very respected. Her father was a respected person and she had a brother that was a druggist and he was well liked. And mom was very active in politics. So I think that’s probably the reason that she got by with maybe a little bit more than ordinary. But after the, I don’t remember it, it was probably after this March when things really got hostile here. We weren’t safe in the house. The, we called them thugs, they were deputized people, would come up and down the street in the daytime and at nighttime they’d shine flashlights in the windows. I guess to see if anybody was there. I don’t know, but I know every time we’d hit the floor and crawl under the bed.
for fear of our lives. If mom had to go anyplace, she would usually leave real early in the morning before daylight so that she would be out on the road when it was dark and Agnes Wieck would come and this Thyra Edwards came and all just innumerable people would come but they would always have to travel by night. They were going to a meeting in Buckner one night, or for one evening, and Mrs. Wieck was there and they were going to try to get Pat Ansboury back in. So they dressed him up as a woman and Mrs. Wieck dressed as a man and mom drove the car and that’s how they would get by, dressing up differently. Even going to school, there was fear in my mind, especially after Laverne Miller, the girl that was shot and killed, she was my best girlfriend. That has left a mark on me and it did at that particular time because I wasn’t even allowed to go to the funeral home for fear that something would happen to me. It’s a sad situation when children can’t even be friends.

Q: And the fact that you were Progressive and her father remained United create any problems in your friendship with Laverne?

A: No. As far as the school kids were concerned, we had no hatred against one another. It made no difference to us because we felt like, well, everybody to their own beliefs and that’s the way we felt and the rest of the kids seem to feel the same way. We had Negro kids at that time, we called them Negros, now you call them Black, I guess. We always just called them Negro kids and we were just raised a block from them and most of them, well, all of them that I remember, were Progressive Miners and even between them and the whites there was no conflict at all. Of course I guess, maybe, age factor might have had something to do with it. Like I say, we were only 12 or 13 years old and at that age, I guess in those days you didn’t worry too much about what your folks did. I don’t know. But there was no hatred between the kids I went to school with, just like nothing was going on.

Q: Well what about the grownups? Did this division between United and Progressive create a great deal of hostility between maybe former friends, once-time friends?

A: Yes. In fact, family wise, I had an uncle that lived in Christopher that stayed and scabbed. For years afterwards we wouldn’t visit. Of course, after years I guess you forgive and not that you forget but forgive. But yes it did. It made a division. People really, what they believed in, they stood for.

Q: This was your mother’s brother or your father’s brother? The uncle you spoke of.

A: My mother’s sister’s husband.

Q: What was his name?

A: Louis Cadelli.

Q: Did you remain in the DuQuoin area during most of the so called mine war period?

A: Yes, we stayed in DuQuoin until 1938 and we moved here to Collinsville. We moved here the day after I graduated from high school. After the strike in the mines, we had nothing down there. Everybody was on the relief. We finally, with all the people that came to the house after this, we raised stuff in the garden, our vegetables, and in the springtime we’d go out and pick dandelions and everybody used to get the biggest kick. We’d fix a dishpan full, like that, of dandelions with hard
boiled eggs and bread and that was a meal. Now if our cheese, why that’s how we fed most of them that came to the house until we left there. After the strike broke, and the miners didn’t go back, my dad went to work as the watchman, the night, oh, he worked at the boilers at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale in the boiler room. He stayed down there. He didn’t get very much of a salary, but at least it was something. When my brother got out of high school, I had an aunt in Detroit. Her folks were working in the automobile, no not at that time yet, they were doing a lot of construction. So my brother went to Detroit and he worked up there in construction until they started forming the small cooperating mine along the bluffs here. There was a Glen Carbon mine, there was a Sunset Hill, and there was a Sugar Loaf mine. These were all small cooperating mines that were developed by the striking miners from Southern Illinois. And then there was the Truck Trade mine that was closer to Edwardsville. In 1936 I believe it was, there were about four fellows, four personal friends of ours from DuQuoin, that sunk money into this Truck Trade mine and then my brother and this Charlie that lived with us, they came up. My brother came back from Michigan and they took shares in the mine and they worked in the Truck Trade coal mine until 1951 when it went under. But in the meantime, it was the last cooperating mine in existence along the bluff. The rest of them had folded over in between. But that’s where the miners came, a lot of the miners came from Southern Illinois.

Q: How many men? All the owners worked in the mine?
A: Yes, you bought a share and then...

Q: Was that a necessity to work in the mine, you had to own a piece of it?
A: Yes they did. Because of the profits that you made, the salary, like they made so much, well they had to have so much operating expense. Well then, like if you were supposed to get $100 pay, well if it wasn’t there, then maybe you’d just get 80% of your pay, or 50% of your pay. But at least you had a job and a little bit of an income, but when the mine closed down, I mean there’s just nothing there for you to get. The sad part about it is the smaller mines that closed, the miners weren’t eligible for any pension. Like my dad, he died at 86, he never received after working in the coal mines almost 50 years, he never received a pension of any kind from the coal mines. After the mine closed down in 1951 at that time each local had set aside, they were assessing royalties for the coal, and each local kept so much of that money for pension for that particular local. Well, the miners that didn’t go out and get a job when the mine closed, they drew out what was in that local. But my dad went to work as the night watchman at the Brooks Catsup Factory and he continued paying his miners dues to the local as a working member. And he had to quit in 1961 because of his health, all the funds at that local had been used so there was nothing to get. So he never did receive any miner’s pension at all.

Q: In spite of the fact that he put money into the Progressive Miners for all these years?
A: That's right. And when he died, he didn’t even receive as much as a flower from the local.

End of Tape 1, Side 1
Q: I wonder if you could tell me as much as you can recall about the soup kitchens that your mother I understand started.

A: Well, the Auxiliary, when the miners got to the point where there was just nothing coming in anymore, the women of the Auxiliary decided that they had to do something, especially for the children. So they, I don’t remember who owned this place, but it used to be an old millhouse, about halfway off Main Street across from the Depot, and the women set up a soup kitchen there. And every day, which the main meal that I can remember was stew, stew and bread or stew and crackers, and occasionally if the two local bakeries had any extra doughnuts, well that was a big treat. They had set up committees to go around to the merchants to receive their donations. Then they got a little bit of help, I believe through the Progressive Miners relief fund. I believe at that time they got a little bit of their food that way, but most of it was donations from there in town locally. It was supervised by the Women’s Auxiliary of the striking miners and all of the children regardless of whether they were United Mine Workers or Progressive Miners, if they came there they were fed. It made no difference, black or white. This went on, oh I don’t know how long, but it went on for quite some time.

Q: About how old were you when it started? Do you have any idea?

A: The soup kitchen? Well, it would have been in, I’d have been about 13 years old, I guess. And the miners, the Auxiliary had formed a group called the Junior Auxiliary too. Of course, we had a local of the juniors and it was up to us to help too in this project. The Junior Auxiliary had their role in helping with the dishes, cleaning up the place, we had this board for tables and sometimes if there was enough room, we had some wooden benches for us to sit on otherwise the kids just stood up and ate their stew.

Q: Do you have any idea how many people were fed by those soup kitchens? Approximately?

A: Oh, I’d say, maybe, 300 to 400. Those articles will tell you more about that. But there were an awful lot as you can see by that picture.

Q: Did this operate seven days a week?

A: I really don’t remember. I think it was five days a week if I remember right. It was so that the kids would at least have something in their stomachs when they were in school. I’m sure that’s what it was.

Q: Because they would come from school?

A: At noon, yes, to eat their noon meal so that they would have a hot lunch.

Q: Well your mother, Sister Katie DeRorre, is a very famous woman really, particularly as far as the labor movement goes. Was this her idea originally do you think, or was she the one who pulled it all together to get it going?

A: Well, I wouldn’t say that it was, that she was the sole instigator of the idea, because I think when you’re in a situation like that, it’s a culmination of everybody’s idea. But I guess really she spearheaded it you’d say, the main leader. Seemed like
every place, every project that was undertaken why she was more or less the front runner. But I wouldn’t say that is was just mainly her idea.

Q: But she was quite an organizer?

A: Well, yes, I guess so.

Q: Well I’m intrigued that the merchants of DuQuoin did pitch in and help you.

A: Well, there were quite a few merchants, grocery stores, on the west side of town. The east side of town carried more of the clothing merchandise where the west side of town had more of your grocery stores and I suppose that is one of the main reasons for them to be able to get the food that was donated. And then, like, some of the committee would go as far away as Dowell or to any community that was sympathetic. They would go get food from them. But it wasn't just that they gathered food locally it was wherever they could pick up anything and then it was kept and used.

Q: Were the volunteers who were soliciting ever subject to harassment bringing food supplies in or even soliciting food?

A: No, not that I know of. Not that I can recall because I think if they would have been harassed especially since this was a child project, the feeding of children, it would have, you know, created a lot of problems.

Q: Was it only children who were fed at the soup kitchen?

A: Yes, the majority, occasionally there would be some of the grownups come in but this was more or less specifically so that the children would have something warm in their stomachs when they went to school. And the PTA on the west side of the school, see my mother was in the PTA organization too, and they donated merchandise and so everybody, they just begged wherever they could and brought in what they could. It was just a big community deal I guess you would call it, amongst the miners.

Q: Did she ever try to set these up in other towns also?

A: Well, no I don’t think so. If she did, I don’t remember. Because, like I say, she was involved very in town there and every day that was her job was to get down there to the kitchen and get things going.

Q: You mentioned Agnes Burns Wieck a little while ago. I wondered if you could tell me some of your recollections of her.

A: Well there’s a personality that I don’t think could be duplicated anywhere. She was short of build. She was dynamite. She was cute. Like I say, she was small of build and what impressed me most was her speech. She spoke real, real fast. I guess after a while, if you hadn’t been around her very long you would have difficulty understanding her but after a while it didn’t bother you. And she always wore a tam on one side of her head. And she wasn’t afraid of anybody. But she was a wonderful person. And like I say, I don’t think they could duplicate another Agnes. She was sympathetic, she would listen, she would discuss problems regardless of whether she
agreed with you or not and walked away as friends. There was never any bitterness. And she really had the labor movement at heart. She was conscientious.

Q: When she was not reelected a president of the Women’s Auxiliary, was that because of some political schism within the Auxiliary? Did they not understand?

A: Well, not within the Auxiliary. It all happened, actually the Women’s Auxiliary was the backbone of the Progressive Miners. After a year or so, I don’t remember the details exactly, but Claude Pearcy that was elected president was very conservative. The miners could see that they needed to go forward and expand and push ahead. Well I’m not saying that Pearcy was paid off or received anything, but he was meek and he couldn’t stand competition or, how would you say, well he was friends with everyone, he wanted to be on everybody’s side. Between the operators and the Progressive Miners had hired an attorney and this attorney started eating away at the funds and got to Pearcy somehow or other, and anyway, things started clamping down on the forward end of the Progressive Miners and so that was the beginning of the friction within the men’s section. And that’s when Gerry got fired from the Progressive Miners, from being editor of the Progressive Miners. So this backlashed into the Women’s Auxiliary. And it was through all of this combination that Agnes was defeated as president in the miners Auxiliary. There was no friction itself, I mean nothing on her personality, because of her personality or her doing, it was just the culmination of men’s bit that reflected back into the Auxiliary because the women from the north, I guess, that hadn’t been down in the struggle didn’t realize what was ahead, that they should go ahead, instead of just standing still as they were and making concessions back with the operators.

Q: When you say “going ahead” does that also include trying to go over, back and organize West Virginia and Pennsylvania?

A: Yes, get out and expand and eventually they did set up an international organization and they did try, but I don’t, I mean, I never was involved in any of that. I don’t know, I know they organized a few locals out of state, but how much or how far I don’t know.

Q: So Mrs. Wieck was defeated by the women voting but really by the men’s influence?

A: Yes.

Q: Did she remain active in the Auxiliary after the defeat, do you remember?

A: Yes she did until, well see her husband Ed was with the, oh what foundation was it in New York, offhand I can’t think of it, I may later. Anyway, he went to work in New York and so then she finally followed him up there and they have a son, who last I heard he was a professor up in that area.

Q: I would like to backtrack a bit. A couple of people that we interviewed told us that about a week or so following the Mulkeytown ambush a number of them, about 100 or so, came back armed, which was in contrast to the Mulkeytown March participation, and camped for about a week in Coulterville. Do you remember anything about that? Any discussion or talks about people coming back to this area?

A: You mean the Progressive Miners?
Q: Yes.
A: No. I don’t...

Q: Coulterville.
A: Yes, I know where that’s at but I don’t remember that there was a second march.

Q: It wasn’t a march, it was a much smaller group of people. Not more than 100 people. But they camped for about a week.
A: No, I don’t remember. We did, the local did picket after the March, oh I don’t remember how long afterwards, but the local did picket the Westside strip mine and the women were out there with the men along the highway, along the strip mine edge and the thugs, as we called these armed men, came and they shot into them and dispersed them. And that was about five or six miles out of town.

Q: This is quite soon after Mulkeytown?
A: I don’t remember just how long afterward. But it had nothing to do with the Mulkeytown March because this was a local situation.

Q: In DuQuoin about how many Progressives were there versus how many Uniteds? From your own childhood recollections?
A: Well there were more Progressive Miners as far as that goes because all the scabs were imported that worked at the mine. Like I say, most of the miners lived on the west side and I don’t recall any of them on the west side going back to work. The only way the mine worked was the few that lived on the east side, there were a few of them that went back to work, but most of them were imported.

Q: Now where did they live when they came into town?
A: Well, they drove back and forth to work or were brought in in truckloads.

Q: By the day?
A: Yes.

Q: From what areas?
A: Well I don’t know because we never did talk with them or anything. They were mostly people that came from Franklin County. See that was another bad area and they imported quite a few from in there.

Q: We talked about your mother some and then I skipped to Agnes Burns Wieck. I wonder if you go back, and as a daughter, unless it’s too painful for you, describe your mother for me, who I have such feeling for.
A: Well, it’s a hard question.

Q: I know for a daughter.
A: Yes it is. All I can say is she gave everything she had to everybody else but herself [weeping].

Q: Well, I’ve heard such wonderful things about her. So very many people that you know. I don’t know, I think to the miners there’s Mother Jones and Sister Katie and I think it’s marvelous. We can skip on to something else if you want to come back.

Q: Now I thought I would ask, I image that your mother participated in the Auxiliary march that happened here in Springfield. Do you have any recollections of that?

A: Well, like I say, we were the Junior Auxiliary, we went along on these marches, along with the women. We used to march right with them and we’d go anyway that we could because in those days, very few people had cars. So we’d get trucks and the fellows would build like a cattle truck and we’d ride on benches to wherever we’d go and we’d sing our solidarity song and other songs that we had made up and that’s how we made our trip. If it rained, well we just got wet, that’s all. If it was hot well that was alright too. But they were good days to remember and some things weren’t so pleasant but all in all, that’s life.

Q: Did you go to Springfield on that march?

A: Yes and as far as I can remember everything was peaceful. Some of the women went in and talked to the governor and the rest of us stayed outside. I don’t never remember of any of the marches being interrupted. I don’t know if there are any of Mary Voizey’s relatives left in Springfield but she was very active in the very beginning.

Q: You said that you made up songs. Were these union type, you mentioned solidarity and making up songs. Were they union type songs you kids made up?

A: Yes. I don’t remember them anymore. Of course, you know how kids are. They can make up anything, give them a few hints and they’re gone. But I don’t remember anymore. But that’s what we would do, sing.

Q: Did you wear uniforms like your mother?

A: Yes. We had white uniforms and at our meetings we wore our uniforms and we had, originally when the organization started out they wore, not a ribbon, a scarf, a red scarf and our caps. We had caps with three points, it had PMW of A, we embroidered that on there and then we had our local number, our local embroidered on and it was embroidered on in red. And then in case of a death, or like if we’d go to a memorial, then we had a cap with black and we wore a black tie for mourning. But the Women and the Juniors both had the same white dresses.

Q: Do you remember when the Auxiliary switched from red to black as the official color? Or why?

A: Well, I think that was at the time when Agnes was put out. I’m almost certain that’s when they said the red standed for communism and radicals and they didn’t want to be radicals, so that’s the time red was given up for communism and they went strictly to black.
Q: You have mentioned your good friend Laverne Miller being shot and killed and the years that followed there were a number of shootings and bombings in what is known as the mine war and this must have provided for a great deal of tension among the people who were involved. What recollections do you have of that period?

A: Well, there in DuQuoin after Laverne was shot there was Henry Arnold and Jim Attes who were very good workers in the Progressive Miners in that area and Henry Arnold lived on the highway going south towards Dowell about a mile out of town, just before you get to the fairgrounds, and one evening his home was shot into and he and Jimmie Attes were both killed instantly in his house. Right there in town those were actually the only fatal injuries or deaths. Of course there were scraps on the streets and like I say, most of the Progressive Miners stayed in at night because we were afraid. We had no guns. We wanted to be peaceful. But at Christopher, at Benton, Zeigler, Buckner, in those areas the law enforcement agencies in West Frankfort were real bad. They were as bad as DuQuoin and there at Zeigler, no, West Frankfort, there were some killings. I don’t remember the names, but they’re in those books. Laurenti was the first one that was killed down in that area. The Auxiliary defied the law enforcement agency to attend the funeral and there was some fear but they went and they attended the funeral.

Q: I guess they did the same thing for Joe Colbert after he was killed.

A: Yes and all of them the Auxiliary would just follow right back up and just dare them. Of course sometimes, I think one or two, they got into, had a little bit of trouble, but for the majority why they managed to attend the funeral without any problems.

Q: Did Junior Auxiliary members ever picket?

A: No. They never would let us go on the picket lines. I guess they felt like it was no place for us under the situation. I mean if the law enforcement agencies were a little bit different, under different circumstances, we would have been allowed to, but that was one thing we weren’t allowed to do.

Q: I’d like you to tell me a little bit more about Junior Auxiliary. Most of the people I’ve talked to weren’t in it because they were older than that.

A: Well, they were just the teenagers of the miners, you know, and well, the fathers were busy in the miners’ local, and the women were busy in the Auxiliary, so the girls decided they’d have a Junior Auxiliary. We usually met the same time the Women’s Auxiliary met so that we wouldn’t be afraid to go back and forth and sometimes we held joint meetings.

Q: What would you do in your meetings?

A: Well, we’d hold regular meetings just like women and if there were any projects going on we’d help. If we’d have any bake sales we’d participate in those. Just would help any way that we could.

Q: Did you elect your own officers?

A: Just like a regular meeting.
Q: Did you have a constitution and bylaws?

A: Yes we did but I don’t know, I think we just followed the women’s. But we did write up our own set of bylaws.

Q: Would you get together with other Junior Auxiliary of other towns?

A: Yes. And like I say, when we’d go like on the marches or like on Labor Day or anytime that there was any big gathering, well the Juniors would get together there too. Maybe I mean you know it wouldn’t be advertised as a group but at least the Juniors would congregate and meet. They’d talk about one Auxiliary had been doing and what their projects were.

Q: Would you have regular meetings?

A: Regular meetings.

Q: How often?

A: Oh I don’t remember anymore but like I say we’d meet when the women met.

Q: But this is in a sense Girl Scouts?

A: Well yes, I guess you could compare it to the Girl Scouts because actually we were just assisting in any way that we could. Sometimes a kid could get across, a kid might go in and ask for something and get it from somebody where a grownup couldn’t.

Q: During the sit down strike in Wilsonville …

Q: Excuse me. Were there any boys in this organization?

A: No. The boys didn’t participate. I don’t know why but they didn’t participate. They did help down at the soup kitchen. They’d help with moving the tables and the boards and that. But for some reason or other, I don’t ever remember the boys participating.

Q: You broke from school at this time, the time in the soup kitchen. Would you get out of school and run down to help with the kitchen or were you one of those being fed?

A: Well we were being fed along with the others. And we’d go there and we’d eat and if there weren’t enough workers that particular day that would help with the dishes, I remember we had those big soup, in Italian we called them scodella, but there those big coffee bowls like.

Q. With a handle?

A: No. I’ll show you one. It’s just a big cup.

Q: Heavy? Crockery?
A: Yes. Like that. And we would eat a bowl of stew in that. And a glass of milk. And then we had bread or crackers.

Q: You know, just the logistics of your mother putting this together to feed 500 children boggles my mind. And to get enough scodella and enough, would you use spoons?

A: Well we had to have spoons, yeah.

Q: Where did she get all of those?

A: Well I don’t remember anymore.

Q: You know, she’s feeding an army. It really is.

A: But I think everybody just donated and pitched in and gave what they had and we made it work.

Q: Another sort of housewifely question. How would they heat water for doing the dishes and things like that? What kind of utilities did you have in that building?

A: Oh as far as utilities there was nothing because it was an old mill. The outside of it was tin and part of it was gone but it was the only place where we could get to feed the kids. So the inside was just bare floor.

Q: Dirt?

A: No, you went up two or three steps and it was an old wooden floor. We brought in a kerosene stove, coal oil stove. You cooked on that and we heated our water on that. Like I say, with everybody donating a few odd ends of dishes and stuff that they had, why we managed. One kid get done eating we’d hurry up and wash it so it would be clean for the next one. And a glass of milk. And like I say, once in a while, we got an extra doughnut or something like a cookie.

Q: You mentioned in the old mill that you are using as a soup kitchen, you had a kerosene stove. Wasn’t that heresy for coal miners?

A: Well at that time it was a hurry up affair and we knew that it would just be a temporary or we hoped it would be a temporary thing. So we brought in these coal oil iron, and we called them coal oil stoves and they just looked like a piece of tin with a burner and you used coal oil. There was a little gallon empty glass gallon on the side that you filled with coal oil and you inverted it and then it run into the line and it went up into the burners and usually they were just two burner deals and they were nothing but a piece of tin. But that’s what we used and there were no flues or anything to burn coal so we had to use the, we called them coal oil, just like you used in the coal oil lamp.

Q: And then what, you’d have a big pot on each burner?

A: Well we had great big canning pots, like you’d cold pack foods in, those great big blue kettles.

Q: What you’re demonstrating is about 36 inches in diameter.
A: Well, we had about two of them, maybe 24 inch diameter or else a great big aluminum dish pan that we used because after all, we just got what we could and to fix that amount why you had to use whatever you could get your hands on.

Q: Did your mother have lots of help all during this project?

A: Well at the beginning it's like any other project, everybody wanted to pitch in and help. But as time wore on, help got short and it just fell on the hands of just a few and it did get to be a chore and that's where the Junior Auxiliary really fell in was when the bigger help went out. For the most part, for the biggest part of the time, there were a good dozen of them that were very faithful and stuck to the end.

Q: Can you remember any of their names?

A: Oh yes. Not a whole lot of them because a lot of them have died and after all that’s been 40 some odd years ago, but...

Q: Even the ones who’ve died.

A: There was Maggie Roscio and Mark Roscio and Fred Alabastro and his wife and there was Domenica Janini.

Q: Now these are all seniors?

A: Yes, these are all the seniors. There was a Richardson family from over on the east side, Bill Hackleman. Gosh, so many I can remember their faces but I don’t remember their names. Charles Rovaletti and...

Q: How about some of the people who were in the Auxiliary with you. Can you remember any of those girls’ names?

A: Oh...

Q: If you can’t, that’s alright.

Q: Well, there was, like I say, a Richardson girl that lived over on the east side, Marie Roscio, Elsie Brezina

End of Tape 1, Side 2

Q: In Agnes Burns Wieck’s first annual report of the Women’s Auxiliary, she mentions that early summer 1932, Pat and Hazel Ansboury and I also know Irene and Gerry Allard went to Indiana and found out that they had an auxiliary and brought the idea back and that’s how the auxiliary was established. Where were they at that time? West Frankfort. Did you have an auxiliary when you were still members of the United Mine Workers in DuQuoin?

A: No. No such thing.

Q: So the first auxiliary that was established as far as you can remember is after...

A: After the Progressive Miners started.
Q: You mentioned last time that the kids had no hate towards each other, the Progressives or the Uniteds. Did that change at all as that first year went on?

A: No, there wasn’t any hate, but there was fear after the killing of Laverne. There was fear of the Progressive Miner kids, but as far as hate is concerned, between the children, there was no hate that I can remember.

Q: Would you still be as friendly with a Progressive Miner child five years later as you were before the trouble? Or did you kind of go into your own groups?

A: You mean the United Mine Workers kids?

Q: Yes.

A: No, we just, as far as the kids were concerned, there was no hard feelings or anything even later on. Where the hard feelings was, was the older folks. As far as the kids were concerned there just never was. I have a personal friend today that I went to school with and we had never had any qualms about our parents being in different organizations. Of course, I don’t know if it was just me, there are none that I can ever remember. I mean, all the kids that we went to school with even after we got into high school it just didn’t seem to bother.

Q: Did the Uniteds have an auxiliary?

A: No. They didn't have to. They had the police and what have you behind them. They didn’t have to have a reinforcing organization.

Q: So you Progressives in the Junior Auxiliary, but United, did they have any organizations for their kids similar to what you had at all?

A: No. There was no purpose for it, actually, because the men that had control of the organization and they didn’t have to worry about food and what have you so I guess that’s one of the reasons why their children wasn’t involved.

Q: You said the men had control of the organization. You mean in the United?

A: Yes.

Q: At that time, didn’t the men have control of the Progressive organization too?

A: Well, the men were considered officers but the women were the backbone and I think several times probably, if it hadn’t been for the women, the men would have gone back to work. But the women felt it was a challenge that they had started and it was a necessity, so they were the backbone and they stood behind their men.

Q: Evidently they also stood up to the men a few times.

A: Yes. They had their arguments. They expressed their feelings and I think the men valued the women’s opinions.

Q: I read that there was one and only one joint meeting of the men’s executive board and the Women’s Auxiliary.
A: Well, I don’t remember about that but that’s probably true.

Q: Well at that time, evidently there were three points under discussion, one was the dismissal of Gerry Allard, and one was the expansion of the union, and the third point was the legal fees were much too high for a struggling union. Speaking of legal fees, she mentions particularly a lawyer in DuQuoin who she felt was charging excessively and getting nothing done, this was Mrs. Wieck. Do you remember who that would have been?

A: I believe that was Dowell and I don’t remember, like I said, the inner workings then I don’t remember too much except what maybe I might remember hearing at home. But he was the lawyer and I know that there were discussions that he was just trying to rake off as much as he could without producing and getting any place at all. Now whether he was being paid by both sides at the same time, I don’t know. I think at one time they were questioning whether that might have been a possibility because of his not getting as much done as they thought he should.

Q: Jumping back again to the Junior Auxiliary, were there boys in the Junior Auxiliary?

A: No. Just girls, strictly girls.

Q: Where were all the boys?

A: Well, the boys helped out at home and they had formed an organization, a group called YPSLs we called them, Young People’s Socialist League and they held regular meetings. I think it was just more or less to brief them on the economic conditions and the welfare. I don’t remember what any bylaws or anything, if they had anything like that, but I imagine they did. That’s where they spent their time.

Q: Did they help participate in the marches?

A: No, or like if we go to Springfield, no the Women’s Auxiliary marched at Springfield, they didn’t participate there. That was strictly the Auxiliary and the Juniors. I don’t remember the boys actually participating in any way like the Junior Auxiliary.

Q: We were talking about the March last time. Can you first recall when you heard there was to be a march?

A: Well, date wise I wouldn’t know. And how far in advance I don’t remember either. I guess a lot of this is heard there at home, the discussions in the house. I couldn’t tell you how much in advance I knew about the March.

Q: What kind of preparations did your mother make to go on the march?

A: Well, as far as individual preparation there was just none because it was just supposed to be one big meeting and then she would come home.

Q: That was the March to Mulkeytown. I guess I should have put that in.
A: So I mean there were no special preparation outside of we knew there would be maybe some of the leaders would stop at the house and we tried to have a little more food in the house. So that was about all the extra preparation that we did.

Q: She didn’t plan to camp out with them at Dowell then? As far as you knew.

A: No. Not as far as I knew anyway. Because it was supposed to be a peaceful thing and like anything else, you go to your meeting and then if you’re within driving distance, why then you would go home. We had no telephone. By chance, we had a friend just a block away but they weren’t coal miners, they operated a small filling station and repair shop and one of the boys ran a taxicab business, so for that reason, they had a phone in the house. So if we had to get on the phone it was always relayed by going a block from home to get to the phone.

Q: Did you see the first contingent in the March? Were you out there early enough to see them come down the street into town?

A: Oh yeah. Because they were expected earlier in the day and as the day wore on there was a little fear and tension that problems maybe might be arising. Since it hadn’t it seemed like from what could be gathered their procession was slowed down all along the way so that they got into that area...

Q: Into DuQuoin?

A: Into DuQuoin as it was getting dusk. So that when they would get down into the bottom it would be dark and them being unfamiliar with the surroundings that’s when they let them have it. But they should have been in that area earlier in the day. But they didn’t get down there, I would say 6:30 or 7:00, it was, like I say, getting dark already. Consensus was it was purposely done so they wouldn’t know which direction they were going.

Q: I noticed the Springfield paper had quoted Sheriff Robinson saying, “That if they come down here, we’re going to shoot them up.” So many people have said that they had no idea what they were getting into, yet these newspapers were quoting this man saying this.

A: Well, Dowell wasn’t in Franklin County and Robinson was the Sheriff of Franklin County and that’s why they, the Progressive Miners, had picked Dowell because that was expected to be a quiet area and a sympathetic area where no problems would arise. But instead, now, Franklin County was different and that’s why they routed them out in that direction where Robinson could take care of them.

Q: Where did your mother join? In what part of the column did your mother join in the March? Do you remember? Did you see her join it?

A: No, I don’t remember if she met them outside of town or if she came, I don’t recall at all.

Q: Was there a contingent to join in DuQuoin?

A: Yes there was. I don’t remember if they just joined in as they were coming in to town or like maybe at the car load or a group lived in a certain section of town if they joined in at that particular area. I don’t know. I don’t know how it was done.
Q: How long did you have survivors staying at your house? More than just that first night?

A: Well, I think the biggest part of the next day or two. Possibly for a couple of days.

Q: Evidently one contingent also went to Pinckneyville to spend the night as well as those who came to DuQuoin.

A: Well, there could have been because Pinckneyville wasn’t, there weren’t any problems up in that. There were sort of home free from the thugs by the time they got that far away from DuQuoin.

Q: I’m going to jump back to the soup kitchen now. Were there any male volunteers in the soup kitchen?

A: Oh yes. The men helped just as much as the women. Like I say, they, most of the men, usually it was a combination of both when we went mooching because they’d carry the merchandise, you know, like potatoes, carrots, or whatever we got, why they’d carry it back. They’d help with the building too. So it was a combination of both of them working together.

Q: I read somewhere that said the Quakers had sent food supplies in to feed the children. Do you remember anything of that? I think this is before maybe your mother’s soup kitchen.

A: I don’t remember it. As far as I know, there never was another soup kitchen in that area. As far as help, like I said, we got, begged from every store possible, so it could have been some help came in from the Quakers.

Q: There was no date given and it could have been just supplies sent in to your mother also.

A: Well it could have been. I don’t know. Because we wrote everybody we could even for financial aid or goods and so it could be that they sent aid.

Q: Well lots of the merchants helped you in DuQuoin. Were there others who were antagonistic to the strike?

A: Well, yes there were some that expressed their opinion and they were just left alone, didn’t bother about going back and asking. So no use to create any more friction than what was there. So usually those that we hadn’t contacted that wanted, were sympathetic and wanted to help, they would get in touch with somebody and so if we didn’t get them by direct contact why they would call. And the rest that didn’t show signs that they wanted to help, they just weren’t bothered.

Q: How about the churches? Did they take sides or did they give you any help?

A: No, not that I can remember, I don’t believe. Not that I can remember. I don’t believe the churches helped.

Q: Did any of them work actively against you?
Catherine (DeRorre) Mans Memoir

A: No, not that I remember. As individuals, yes. You couldn’t say it was the church because the person belonged to the church. But the church itself, I don’t remember any of them taking an active part.

Q: You didn’t have ministers giving sermons against the Progressives?

A: No.

Q: Was Agnes Burns Wieck’s husband a coal miner? Is that right? What did he do when he was here?

A: Well, evidently he had been a coal miner. I think he was a teacher at one time. I really don’t know too much about Ed because Agnes always came to the house and Ed very seldom came with her. But I believe Ed was a teacher at one time. He possibly worked in the coal mine, probably no doubt that he did maybe not for too many years, I suspect, but I couldn’t say.

Q: Well, I was wondering why she personally got so wrapped up in the struggle if her husband wasn’t an active miner.

A: Well I really don’t know unless it was just her philosophy. I don’t ever remember that being discussed.

Q: They were lucky to have her. She mentions in her first annual report that one time she was threatened with jail by authorities in counties sympathetic to the Progressive Miners. How many counties were sympathetic?

A: Well that wasn’t down in the south. That was up north. I believe that was up in Macoupin County where Gillespie is and probably up in Sangamon County in the Springfield area. But I would say that Macoupin County would be the worst offender.

Q: This was all within that first year and Frank Fries was sheriff of Macoupin County at that time. I don’t understand what he’s doing mixing up in internal union politics.

A: Well I don’t know. Here again that’s a little bit out of our territory and I don’t remember too much about that outside of knowing there were problems. But I would sort of suspect this problem, it was a result of the split in the men’s group. When Claude Pearcy and his group and the more liberal group had their problems and Gerry was fired from the Progressive Miner, I think at the time of her problems came up.

Q: I don’t have the record. Was she reelected as president of the Women’s Auxiliary?

A: No, I don’t think so. I don’t remember offhand either. Well, she had to be reelected the first time because she was at the second Auxiliary convention. She was in that picture at the second convention so she had to be reelected for the second convention. And after that, oh I think that was the last time. Then I think she left when the big break came and she was no longer safe in her home there.

Q: Were there, I know the Post-Dispatch is often mentioned and the St. Louis Star, were there any Illinois papers that you can remember that reported this whole thing without too much bias?
A: No. I don’t think so because the only papers that came down into Southern Illinois was the St. Louis papers and of course all the papers in that area were biased. So how the news was reported around Springfield and the upper area I don’t know. But St. Louis covered that area in Illinois that I [unintelligible].

Q: It’s a problem for researchers. The papers are sometimes difficult to use. You mentioned the other day that you’d gone on the march to Springfield and then I think you started to mention other marches you went on with your mother. Can you remember any of those or any other marches, gatherings, meetings?

A: Well yes. Like on the Labor Day celebration, Mother Jones anniversary at Mt. Olive.

Q: Did you go on the first one after the Progressives were formed?

A: To Mt. Olive? Yes.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

A: No. I don’t, there’s just too many, you know, there’s been a lot. Unless there was some particular incident.

Q: I guess this one was packed with incidents. That they refused the platform to different speakers, they booed.

A: Well, yeah. I don’t remember too clearly, you know, on the marches, but I used to go. Mom and Agnes, when they would go to organize, they would take us in the car, a little bit for protection I guess they figured if they saw us in the car, why, maybe no harm would be done. But I did go with mom an awful lot when she went to the meetings, to the locals, in the formation of a local.

Q: What would she do first?

A: Well you go, you make contact with a sympathetic person and you’d meet in different houses. One time you’d meet in one house and maybe you’d have two. Then you’d set up a meeting for maybe the next week or in a few days where those two would contact, make their contacts, and you’d meet at another house so there would be no suspicion and that’s how your locals got formed. And then when they got big enough to where they had strength or then they would rent a hall or rent some public meeting place. And sometimes the public places where threatened and then they would go back into the homes. First meet one place and then the next one.

Q: Once a man became a member of the Progressive union, his wife didn’t automatically join the Auxiliary?

A: No. It was all on a voluntary basis. There were a lot of them that had small children that couldn’t go and there were some that they just didn’t want to be bothered. It’s just like everything else. Some people want to get involved and some don’t.

Q: But still, even though the husband would be a Progressive member, it was still dangerous to organize the women?
Catherine (DeRorre) Mans Memoir

A: Oh yeah. Sure, because the politicians and the United Mine Workers knew that the women were backing the men and pushing them. They figured if they could squelch the women’s organization, well then they had it made, which they would have. The men would have gone back if it hadn’t been for the women.

Q: Did your mother and her organizing attempts ever find antagonism from the men when she was trying to organize their wives?

A: Oh, I imagine there might have been a few instances. Some of the men maybe felt like they just didn’t want their wives involved because they feared law enforcement agencies and they just didn’t want to put any pressure on the home. But the cases were far and few between. But that was the only, I would say it would be the major setback, for the women not doing it, against the men, that was their reason.

Q: You think it was more fear rather than the fact that they prefer to have their wives stay at the home doing cleaning and cooking.

A: Yes.

Q: They were really quite a liberated bunch, weren’t they?

A: Well, I guess so. They were something. It was a concentrated affair. I guess they felt like they were doing the right thing. That’s why they kept at it.

Q: What you’re really saying is that when the Progressives organized they had double fear. First they had trouble for themselves and then there was second trouble when the wives joined the union auxiliary.

A: Yes. If the Auxiliary was raided or if they came in and beat the Auxiliary members up, then there would be problems at home. So like I say, some of them just didn’t want to take that risk.

Q: Your mother never went to jail?

A: Yes, I think she went a couple of times. I don’t remember where. But it wasn’t for long. I don’t even remember where or anything anymore but I think they did put her in jail a couple of times. She was never around.

Q: I knew that Agnes had been jailed.

A: Yes.

Q: Are there any other mass meetings or marches that stand out in your mind?

A: Well, I don’t remember, at Southern Illinois there were no more attempts at large mass meetings. You come back in later years in the organization at the time that Jack and Dave were attempting to bring the two organizations together under a compromise, there was quite a few meetings that were hot and furious. And they held some here in Collinsville that were very, well, the miners finally took an active part and were interested again because all this trouble then and dissention within the Progressive Miners after that first break and then the interest sort went down. Well then when Jack and Dave got involved they could see where there was a chance for
the miners to get back together and then there was a renewed interest and there was more activity and public meetings held. But outside of the conventions, there were really no specific march or anything that stands out.

Q: Do you think your mother was in favor of the two unions going back together?

A: Oh definitely. I mean, after everything that was going on in the Progressive Miners, there was just no reason, no logical reason for there to be a Progressive Miners anymore. There was nothing for them. Where at least if they went back to United Mine Workers than had pension protection, they had their welfare and medical expenses and everything, where now they have nothing. Miners that worked under the Progressive Miners, the majority of them, have nothing at all.

Q: You think most Progressives felt that way?

A: Well by the time this all came to light, most of the Progressives had gone out and got different jobs and what few remained, they more or less had the “well I don’t care anymore” attitude. And it had to be that the majority of them didn’t care or else Jack and Dave wouldn’t have been taken out of office. So it was just a handful left in the district that pushed this fight against them. And the members did not care anymore about it. They just didn’t have any backing. But the ones that kept involved or kept abreast of everything they backed the proposal.

Q: Did you by chance attend the mass meeting at Buckner?

A: No, I don’t recall going to Buckner.

Q: I think that’s where Agnes got jailed.

A: Yes. I think that’s one of the times.

Q: Was your mother there? Do you remember?

A: Oh yes. Because it seemed like everybody came to our house and that was the distributing point for leaving and then they left from there and either switched cars or congregated there and went in groups from there. So mom was always involved.

Q: But Buckner stands out in your mind?

A: Yes. That was a hot spot.

Q: I was interested to know that your mother was one of the founders of the League of Women Voters here in Collinsville.

A: She was one of the founders, yes.

Q: About what year did she take this job?

A: Well, I don’t think it was too much before she died maybe a year or two before she died. And that would have been around 1958 I think. Because they hadn’t been in existence you know too long.

Q: Is the Collinsville League of Women Voters still going?
A: Yes. I have never participated. All this has sort of left an impact on me. I just don’t care to be involved. I have taken over mom’s, she was secretary/treasurer of the Moose league, the miner’s auxiliary, the Alpina Dogali...

Q: Alpina Dogali?

A: Alpina Dogali is the Italian men’s organization.

Q: And your mother was secretary?

A: Of the Auxiliary. And I accepted the miner’s auxiliary.

End of Tape 2, Side 1

A: Now I kept the office of secretary/treasurer in the miners’ auxiliary and the Alpina Degali office.

Q: It’s interesting to me that your mom, Sister Katie, and Agnes Burns Wieck both favored the reuniting of the two labor unions under the United Mine Workers. Well, I don’t know quite how to say this.

A: Well in the first place they got behind the Progressive Miners, they built the Progressive Miners because they thought they, or they knew they needed an independent organization that was run by the miners themselves and the United Mine Workers wasn’t. So they fought to bring the Progressive Miners about. And then afterwards, after they saw the corruption starting to sink into the Progressive Miners, they decided or felt that if there was a possibility of the miners to get back into the United Mine Workers with their local autonomy as an agreement then they were for it. And that’s why they pushed for it. Because they felt that the Progressive Miners were no longer an organization that was going to fight for the miners and it was getting to be just like the United Mine Workers. So that I think is the main reason that they were fighting for because they felt like the Progressive Miners was getting to be ruled by a handful of men without regard to the membership. And the United Mine Workers had showed signs of being willing to give the men their autonomy and to go along with them and accept them back which was step the miners didn’t accept.

Q: And yet, this so called liberal or radical element of the Progressive Miners who now are favoring the reunification.

A: Yes it was the radicals or so they called them, radicals, people who could see a little bit farther ahead, that formed the organization and here they could see what was happening and now they were asking for unity again.

Q: Why do you think some of the men remained Progressives even after they obviously had, the union was you know becoming rather insignificant?

A: Well, there was that fear of the United Mine Workers not keeping up to their agreement, saying they had gone through before, their autonomy was taken away from them and all even though they were supposed to have it and it was just the fear that they couldn’t trust them. That was the major drawback.
Q: All your teenage years as a young girl really were spent with this mine war, so
called mine war, going on. Do you think that children like you and the other children
who grew up under this situation became different from children who did not have to
live through something like this?

A: Well, I don’t know. To me, it has made an impact on my life. I would never want
to go through another thing like that. We made friends that we probably would never
met before which would have been a big loss. But to go through something like that
again, I would never want and it has left scars, yes. Now maybe it was because I
was so involved on account of mom, maybe that’s one of the reasons, I don’t know.
Since we’ve moved here there aren’t too many that have been associated with it
since we left and came to Collinsville. I really don’t know how they feel about it
anymore. But like I say, there are a couple of them that I used to go to school with
that are living in this area that were in United Mine Workers and we meet and we
talk, just like we always did. For me, there has been a scar, yes. And I want no part
of any more of it.

Q: You’ve done your activist life.

A: Yes.

Q: Age 13 to age 18.

A: Yes, I think so.

Q: Even though your mother and Mrs. Wieck favored the reunification of the two
unions, they never considered dropping out of the Progressives’ Auxiliary?

A: No, my mother never did. I don’t know about Agnes. They moved to New York
and whether she still kept her membership up in Belleville, because she belonged to
the Belleville local, whether she kept her membership up I don’t know. But like I say,
mom was secretary until she died, or held office some way or other and never once
entered her mind to drop out. Of course the local has dwindled down now to only 20
members left and most of them are, I guess I am the youngest one in the
organization. But we’ve gotten to the point where we hold meetings once every three
months and we meet in our homes because most of them are up in age and they just
can’t get out and so it’s just a matter of just dwindling down to nothing. We send our
dues into the district. The district has a $50 death benefit fund. The local of course,
they have nothing, no death benefit, none. It’s just actually a social gathering and
you have your meeting and what’s on your mind to talk about.

Q: I was interested to learn that the Progressive Miners had funeral parlors and at
one time a cooperative store. Was your mother in on the formation of any of those?

A: No the cooperating store was just around Benld and Gillespie and mom didn’t
have anything to do with that. As far as the funeral parlor, I don’t know about that.
Now I do recall that there was the hospital in Staunton, a hospital set up for the
miners local. But whether it’s still in operation or not, I don’t know and about the
funeral home, I don’t know if there’s one in Benld or not. There might have been.
But I wouldn’t know for sure. But the cooperating store yes there was one in the
Benld and Gillespie area.

Q: Were those the only cooperative ventures that you know of?
A: Yes that’s all.

Q: And the hospital was set up under the Progressives in Staunton?

A: I believe it was set up during the Progressive movement. It used to be a schoolhouse, but I don’t know the details of it. I don’t know if it’s still in operation or anything. But it was set up in an old schoolhouse. Then too I think the miners there in Staunton operated a theater. I’m sure that Ed Morgan has sold it. But they had the theater there.

Q: As well as the theater here?

A: No. The theater here, the miners only owned the building and they leased the theater part out. I imagine years ago they tried to run it and operated it but as far as from when we moved here as far as I know it’s always been leased out.

Q: Did the theater remain a member of the United Mine Workers?

A: No. Here in town? No, when the Progressive Miners was formed the United Mine Workers gave up all claim to the building and so the Progressive Miners local took it over. They took care of it and it was just recently sold to some theater outfit. So what’s happened to the local funds, I don’t know. The sale of the building was put in trust in the bank and the judge divided the amount of the sale between the members that were still in the organization in the local. I believe that they were still a member in 1965. I believe that was the cutoff date. They were given a portion of the sale. I think the paper recorded it at something like $240 or $245.

Q: That each local member received?

A: Yes, you know, that were still in Local #3. But what had happened to the local funds of Local #3, I don’t know. I know when my dad died we didn’t get a death benefit. We didn’t even get a flower. So I don’t know what happened, we ask and we don’t get any answers.

Q: And he never received his black lung benefits either?

A: No.

Q: When did he apply for black lung, do you remember?

A: I believe it was about in January or February of 1971 and his first denial stated that he had black lung, tests showed that he had pneumoconiosis or however you pronounce it, but he was still able to work. Well at 82 years old I don’t know where you’re going to find work in the coal mines. So anyway, his case was appealed and appealed and finally a year ago now he filed an appeal and the case was supposed to have been heard by a trial examiner who they claim comes in every so often to St. Louis, a travelling judge of some kind, that rules on this case. And it’s been a year now and when dad died in August I notified the Social Security office that he had passed away and I sent them a copy of the autopsy and his death certificate that stated that he did have black lung and I haven’t heard anything today.

Q: So it’s been approximately 4 years.
A: 4 years.

Q: Is this prevalent?

A: I don’t know. We had a friend that was here a couple of weeks ago and he said that he had just been to the trial examiner in January or December, I don’t remember either December or January, and so I asked him how long before he had filed his appeal for the trial, to go before the trial examiner, and he said it had only been about two or three months. So I don’t know what the procedure will be now or anything. But when I reported it to the Social Security office and said we should get, my brother and I should get what my dad had coming if the trial examiner would approve it. So I don’t know what more proof could have been wanted when it was on the autopsy and on the death certificate.

Q: What can you tell me of your mother’s early life?

A: Well mom was brought over from Italy when she was possibly two, three, four years old, at an early age, with her oldest sister by her grandmother. Her folks were already living in St. Johns, you’d call it a suburb of DuQuoin, just a couple of miles north of DuQuoin. In those days most of the coal miners that had come across boarded or roomed in homes where they slept and got their meals. So my aunt, who was older than my mother, has often told me that the girls had to work very hard in the family. The boys were considered as ones that carried the family name so they got all the privileges and so the girls consequently had to do the milking, and all the heavy work, the washing, and the baking, what have you. And when it came mealtime, all of the men including the boys in the family got to sit at the table and eat. And what was left, then if there was anything, the girls would get their meal out of that and if there was nothing left, why, they’d maybe get a piece of bread or something and my aunt tells me there were many a time that my great grandmother would get out and get some crackers, a piece of bread, or some cheese and bring it in to my mother because she was crying. My mother would be crying because she was hungry so my great grandmother would bring this food in. If she got caught doing it why my grandmother would get after her. And my mother went as far as the eighth grade but she never had a pair of decent shoes. She always wore regular men’s work shoes. And she said she was ashamed to try and go any farther in school because of the way she dressed. She often said when I asked about it, she said on the day she married she had to make sure she milked the cows before she went to the church. And I can remember when I was just a small child in order to help make our ends meet, because in those days the mines just worked in the wintertime and then in the summertime there was no income, and there were the three of us, three children of us, and so we started hanging wallpaper. Mom would go and she would measure the rooms and we would cut all the, in those days the wallpaper had to be trimmed, so we would trim the paper, cut it, and trim the border, we’d get our wallpaper paste ready, and we’d leave home maybe five o’clock in the morning and we’d go as far as Christopher, eight or nine miles, to paper. We’d paper as high as five rooms a day and I don’t remember anymore but I know maybe if we got four or five dollars a room we were doing good. But they always teased me, it was my job to paste the wallpaper and we had blue horses with our regular board to put our paper on, and they had a little stool that I had to stand on to be able to reach to paste the wallpaper. It’s been a rough life. I guess it’s all worth it.

Q: About how old were you when you were a wallpaper hanger?
A: From about four on. My brother would get on the ladder, we called it the scaffold, to help mom put the ceiling on and my sister and I, she helped too, we’d paste and then we’d carry the paper to her. Some of the ceilings in those old houses, I remember one time once there was a house that had 12 foot ceilings and we just didn’t know how we were going to get that ceiling on. But we had to get, not the step ladder you know, the other type of a ladder and lean it against the opposite wall and put a board in between on it, what my mother and brother walked across on to get the ceiling on. Of course in those days they didn’t have all these long handled brushes like they have now. It was an experience.

Q: Who were most of your customers?

A: Just anybody that needed wallpapering done. It didn’t make any difference. Just anybody.

Q: Would your mom go out and solicit the jobs or would it be word of mouth?

A: Word of mouth. And then when my brother was in high school why as a means of trying to keep him involved too with his spare time, they got a pair of chinchilla rabbits and we started raising rabbits. Some of them we’d send back to the, what do you call it, the rabbit farms, for their fur, and then we had white rabbits, great big brown ones, we just to kill those and can them, pickle them, used them for food.

Q: Did your mother go to school in DuQuoin?

A: No. Yes. Well, she might have gone to St. Johns school, that little suburb and then finished up in DuQuoin. I think by that time they had moved to DuQuoin.

Q: How many brothers did she have?

A: Two brothers and two sisters.

Q: What was her maiden name?

A: Bianco. And her father died when he was, well 1920, he was 50. He died at an early age. Her mother died in 1931. I can’t say too much about my grandmother. That was the only house that we never went into. That we never went to, that we couldn’t ask for anything. And all she ever had to do was [unintelligible].

Q: Well the fact that your mother knew hunger as a child perhaps influenced her later project of the soup kitchen.

A: Probably. That’s probably a big factor. Manys the time, even after we moved here and she did get out on her feet a little bit, a lot of times she’d say, “Well, even if my sister owns the Dairy Queen, I’d sure like to have an ice cream. Well, I can do without.” It was always thinking we could use that money for something else.

Q: Was the custom of the boys eating and the girls waiting traditional in Italian families?

A: Yes because the Italian custom is girls actually aren’t wanted in the family. They want boys because the boys carry their name. The name is sacred.
Q: So there were lots of hungry Italian little girls at this time.

A: Well if they were all like my family, then yes.

Q: About what year would that have been? When your mother first came.

A: Well, she died when she was 64 and that was in 1960. That would be 80 now. And she came over here when she was around two, three, or four years old. So that would have been around 1900.

Q: It sounds like your grandmother and your great grandmother had a little difference of opinion about which girls should eat, or what girls should eat.

A: That’s right. My aunt tells me that my great grandmother didn’t agree with my grandmother because she didn’t let the girls eat long with the boys.

End of Tape 2, Side 2