

Interviewer: DONNA CARBONE 1983

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The union would get out of order the same as anybody else. Sometimes, they called strikes when they shouldn't. Now, the 1910 strike was called because the company wouldn't give them the raise. Of course, when you're in the union, you have to go on strike. They make it so you can't get out of it. But a union can cause a lot of friction. After they were on strike, I think about a year, year and a half, the company called them in one time, the committee, and they offered them a raise, but they wanted a bigger raise than the company wanted to give them. So they just went ahead and put carpenters to work and built all them shacks and houses like over at Louisville and down here. And these people that go in and work, they're not union men, anyhow, to start with and you've got to make a union. And these last years that we had at the Columbine, we had guys there that didn't believe in the union. But you can't do nothin' about it. You can't fire them. The company won't fire them because the company don't believe in the union. That's where your trouble is. But we finally got straightened out on that union business and we never had no more trouble.

The miners was wrong in that, see. We had an agreement with the company that we had to work the six days to get your full day's pay. Sometimes, you didn't get to work only five days. Well, that didn't give you forty hours, see. Then when Saturday come, you had less than forty hours and they wanted you to work but they didn't want to pay you time and a half. So the men was wrong on that. They made that agreement. But they wouldn't stay by it. And when you've got a contract with anybody, you can't change a contract in the middle of a contract. You've got to go to the end. That's the way it should be. Like when we was on the night shift - see we used to work a month night shift and we'd change and that way, everybody got the same thing. You'd go over there Saturday morning to work and you didn't have your six days in, they wouldn't pay you time and a half, see. They'd pay straight pay, but they wouldn't pay you time and a half. And they had a contract to that but they didn't go by it at all. They wanted - because it was Saturday, they wanted time and a half, but they wouldn't. I got up in the union one night and I told them, "I don't see where you've got a leg to stand on. If it went to a court, you'd lose it. You made an agreement with them on that deal and when you make an agreement, you've got to go through with it. You can change it when you come to a new contract." But they wouldn't do it. They'd stand out there and tell them they wouldn't go to work unless they got time and a half. And they'd come out there and tell them that there was no time and a half. Some guy would take his water and he'd throw it up in the air and say, "Now, if that comes down, we'll go home". Well, naturally, it come down.

But we got along pretty good at the Columbine. It wasn't too bad. After old lady Roach took the Columbine over, it was all right. Old lady Roach, she had stock in the company and she wanted the company to go union, see. She was a good old lady as far as that's concerned; she was all right. But one person can't do it all by themselves. But she went ahead and sold out her stock and she bought some kind of control that she had control over and from there on, we had the war, you know, and it changed everything. If they wanted the coal bad, you'd work and they'd pay you for it. Many a times, I worked three shifts in a row. I'd go in in the morning and have to stay on the four o'clock shift; they didn't have a motorman. The motorman would lay off. See, they had four motormen. One of them would lay off, somebody would have to run that motor, because they didn't have another trained man. But they'd pay you your time and a half. I used to draw \$200., \$220., \$240. every two weeks. Of course, the wages then wasn't too big. So, with that much overtime, if I was gettin' like they're payin' now, it would amount to something. But she was good, the old lady was, she was a good old lady.

Then there were a lot of things that used to come up over there. They had a bad deal, the miners over there. Of course the company didn't have anything to do with that - the people would come here from back east and come up there and take up a collection. Every time, the guys all went for it and I told them one time, "You guys are crazy; maybe these guys here don't want to give money all the time".

Were there a lot of accidents in the mines? Well, you see, it's a good thing in some ways to give collections. Some people, you know, coal miners most of them, were always up against it. They were always broke before paydays. Sometimes they'd have some trouble in the family or something, we'd take up a little collection, maybe 50, 60 or \$100. But they caught them finally because they were going and getting drunk on that money. And that don't work. One fellow got drunk and he didn't show up to work one day. I don't know how much money they give him. Pretty near everybody paid two, three dollars - sometimes if it was a big case or something, we'd give them a whole day's work. That was \$10. a day. Is that what you worked for, \$10.00 a day? Yeah, that was our wages - we was up to 10 hours; \$10.00 a day. When I first started workin' in a coal mine, I was drivin' a mule and I was gettin' 39¢ an hour. You know, I had more money to spend then. For 50¢, you could go get a dinner.

We had electric drills. We had a fifty pound drill to drill holes with. We could drill nine foot holes in no time. Before we had to drill them by hand. You had a crank on your auger and, believe me, it was tough. Your arm used to get tired. You had to hold them pretty tight because sometimes they stick. They'll throw you too. But when you work in a coal mine, you get used to that kind of stuff. You watch everything. You had to watch everything. You know, one of those West Virginian guys told me, he says, "How come all these people that work in these mines here can take care of themselves so good?" I said, "Well, if they didn't do it, they'd all be dead because we don't have a solid roof. We gotta put timbers up. We gotta keep it timbered right to the face because if you don't you get killed. Because that soapstone top - there were big slabs of soapstone sometimes as big as a car and they just slide out of there". He says, "These are the best miners I ever seen". I says, "They gotta be miners if they want to live. You can't fool around here".

That Super stayed here quite a while after most of those West Virginians they brought in here. They had to bring them guys in here because nobody knew how to run them joy machines. They brought four in here; they had four machines.

If you didn't watch the roof; that's where you'd get killed. These mines don't have a solid roof. Where my brother worked up here in Routt County, you could forget the timbers because you're under the mountains. You drive right in the mountain up there. Them was real coal mines up there.

These mines that were here had rock in them too along with the coal? Yeah, some of them. We were eatin' dinner. They used to shoot your coal down at dinnertime. They didn't shoot only at certain times. That's to keep the fumes away. We were all settin' there eatin' dinner and this guy heard the shots and he says, "They're shootin' our place". I said, "Eat your dinner; you've got a lot of time to go down there". Well there was a streak of rock there about that thick and they'd shoot that down there and that evening, they'd drill the holes on the top parts, cause the coal was 10 feet high. That way, they had two feet underneath the rock. They'd make wages loadin' that two feet of coal and they got 50¢ a car for rock. And this old man he went down there after he heard the shots and some of that rock and coal didn't fall down from up above and he put his head under there and that thing came down and boy, it just squashed his head. Oh boy. I told him not to go down there. You can't see too good because of that smoke. But it sure killed that fella. So there's a lot of hazards in a mine. You see guys drivin' mules, gettin' rolled in between the car and the rib. They don't drive their places wide enough - the entries.

We had a fella here at the Simpson Mine one time. We got called out - I was on the First Aid work. They called us up there on a Sunday morning. This guy wasn't dead but he was really skinned. He got between the rib and the car and the car kept goin', just kept rollin' like that. Boy, he was skinned all over - the back and front. Morgan would hold his hands there and I poured the iodine in - boy that guy would jump.

These cars that they drove with mules - they took the coal out of the mines on the cars, is that it? You see, you got a mule stable in the mine. They kept the mules right down in the mine? Yeah, they stayed there all the time. And in the morning, at the Columbine, especially, cause it was a big mine - there was about 16 drivers over there - they had a man to take care of the mules - stable boss, they called him. He'd have the mules harnessed - you'd just go into the stall and unhook the mule and you'd go in. That's what used to make me sick, goin' through that old entry - they never did clean that dust, those mules trampin' in that, churnin' that dust, boy it just burned me. Then when they brought them machines in here we didn't need no more mules. With the mules you could only take a couple of cars, three cars at the most. This other way, with the motor, you could take 25-30 cars.

Is that how you got paid with how much you put in a car? Well, yeah. They used to take a mine, like this was coal here, they'd leave a stump - like there was solid coal all the way through for maybe a mile. Well, they would make rooms, they called them rooms. They'd leave 50 feet of coal between one and another. Then they'd get inside to run the rooms 300 feet in and then they'd have to come back and bring the pillars back, they called it, see. They'd take this coal off the sides, two sides.

How did you breathe? What kind of air did you have? Well, we had air shafts; all mines have air shafts.

A lot of these little bitty mines they used to have a lot of trouble with them. They'd drive two entries. Every sixty feet you put a cross cut in. That would be solid, all solid coal. The room would be 20 feet wide. Then when you'd come back, you'd start on the pillars, see. You drove the room up and you'd come back in the same room. Every time you took a lift out, you had to drill the timber and put dynamite in them, half a stick of dynamite and shoot them all at one time. If you didn't do that, you'd have a squeeze. When you get a squeeze in a coal mine, it pushes the bottom right straight up. You had to watch that.

Of course there's a lot of different ways of workin' in a coal mine too. You gotta figure out a way to make it easier for yourself. If you're workin' in a bad place and you got timber close to the face, what you've gotta do is you gotta get a couple of timbers, you drill your holes and you get these two timbers and you put one here this one way, like that - you dig a little hole here in the coal and put that timber in there and wedge it on the bottom. Because if you don't do that, when you shoot this shot, you shoot all your timber out. This is what they call "sprags" (sp?) That way, it just sets that coal down. In some mines, you don't have to do that because they have a different top, see. It makes a lot of difference in different mines. All mines are not the same.

The Columbine Mine was dusty all over. That's why we worked so much overtime. I worked every Sunday. The motorman worked every Sunday and all he did was clean the roads; keep the roads clean. Well if you don't, you have explosions. See the dust accumulates and gets up on top of the timbers and on the timbers and you don't pay much attention to it. And when you're runnin' with your electric motor, you've got a trolley pole, see, and if that trolley pole sparks, sometimes it lights that stuff. And that's where you get your explosions. Most of these mines here weren't considered gasey. They had a big explosion down here at the Standard Mine but that was before I ever went to work at the Standard Mine. George _____, that's how he got that job - he done a lot of work there saving people. It didn't hurt too many people, that explosion, but it burned him too. And they made him the superintendent. He said to me, "Maybe you don't want to work so much Sundays, but I want the roads kept clean so the men can walk on them. If you walk in that loose slack, you go backward more than you go ahead." He was right; he kept that mine just as clean as a house. That was the best little coal mine I ever worked in for a small mine.

The Columbine was a big mine. They had a lot of 18 feet of coal in a lot of places.

And the Simpson Mine? Where that shaft was sunk, there was about 18 feet of coal there.

When you got men that get trained to what they're doin', you didn't have no troubles. There's a lot of things in a coal mine you gotta learn yourself. Now when I used to work in a coal mine, I never did throw my water away. If you threw your water away and you get down to the bottom and something goes wrong with the cages, you're down there and you ain't got no water. Of course, the Simpson had water because they had an artesian well that was right where the cages was. They had a cross-cut there and you could go in there and get a bucket of water or a drink but it didn't taste like our water.

That water's got soda in it and stuff like that. There's a lot of things in a coal mine that you've gotta do for yourself.

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We had a blacksmith shop right here in town or was that in the Columbine? In the Columbine.

When you had a lot of rock in a mine, you didn't make no money. You had to separate the rock and the coal? Yeah, you had to throw the rock out.

Coal mining was hard work, wasn't it? The Columbine was the best mine in this field. And that's the place they had the shooting. Were you there when they had the shooting? Yeah, I was workin' there. We went out there that morning to go to work and when we got up there, there was shootin'. We never got into camp; they didn't let us in.

How many mines were there? Do you know how many mines there were at that time around here? They had some good mines here. The Morrison Mine was a good mine but they ruined it to get cheap coal, you know. They done that all the time with every mine, don't matter where it was. When they'd get the coal out, that's when they're makin' money.

I went out to the Columbine a couple of days after the shooting and they wouldn't let me in. I don't remember how much work we lost during that strike. That's when old lady Roach took over. They killed four or five guys up there. They had the machine gun on top of the tippie. And they were comin' in from the northeast there, there was a road there that came by the State Mine. That's where they got it when they stepped into the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company's grounds - that's when they killed them. A couple of them didn't die. That's been quite a long time ago. I didn't have much of a pull up there for a long time, up there at the Columbine, cause I wouldn't move up there; they wanted you to move there. They wouldn't fix the road; you couldn't travel it with a car. I froze my feet one time and froze my hands one time. Well, you'd have to get out and push them Model Ts. They'd get in the mud holes and you had to push them out; that's the only way you could get them out.

Now the State Mine, they had a good set-up. They had a good road goin' in there. But Columbine wouldn't fix that road; they said if you wanta work here, you move here. They wanted you to live right in the camp? Yeah. Them guys that lived in the camp had the advantage. They made more money than we did because when they needed an extra man to go down and do something, they were right there. They wouldn't bother with us until after we got the union and then we was all even.

We took a collection up and hauled ashes to that road and it was all right then. I had to come home and wash at home because there was no more lockers up there at the wash-house. They had 700 men workin' at that mine.

Did you live in the Simpson Mine camp? Yeah, I did when I first came down here in 1915. I stayed at the boarding house. You had to stay at a boarding house; there was nowhere else to stay. There was a lot of restaurants in town at that time and poolhalls and that type of stuff. Now they don't even have a poolhall or many restaurants either.

How long have you lived in Lafayette? Since 1915. I stayed here and I got married here. These mines were workin' every day, here, see. I worked in Louisville in the mine for a little while. There was a guy I used to work with in Louisville and then he moved down here. He says, "Why don't you come down there? You can get loadin' coal or whatever you want to do, you can drive a mule or anything." So I went down there and I never worked so hard in my life when I worked in that mine. You never seen the tail end of the end. If you pulled 90 cars with a mule in a day, you'd get an extra hour. You'd get an extra hour; that was 39¢. Well, it wasn't a lot of money, but you had money all the time.

We used to go to Denver, three or four of us would go to Denver and stay in a rooming house. We'd always get a room with a double bed for a dollar. The three of us would sleep in the bed.

And that's when they had that trolley car or whatever it was, the Interurban.

The Mitchell Mine was over here north of here. There were quite a few places they had a mine. You see when the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company bought the northern coal company out, they bought all them little old mines up. There was a mine between the Mitchell Mine and the Simpson Mine. And the coal down here wasn't much good. It was soft coal and they couldn't sell it. Louisville wasn't gettin' nowhere in their work. So they put a motor up there on the outside and they'd go up and get them cars up there and bring them down here and dump them and mix the coal here and that way so they could sell it. We had better coal up there than we had down here. See, the Simpson coal wasn't very good. Just soft coal. But when they found out that coal made good steam and it was cheap, why the Burlington put all their engines on that coal. They told me down here at the Simpson Mine to come to work every day, Sundays and all unless we tell you different. They never did tell me different. When I didn't want to work on Sunday, I'd just take off. Boy, that was hard mine to work. The air

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wasn't good either. It ^{was}clammy. You would sweat down there without working.

Then they had the Strathmore Mine. It was right there where the flower house is. I was drivin' a mule up in there. I found out that those guys that was drillin' the Strathmore Mine had to quit because they couldn't handle the water. Then Dave Allen said, "I'm goin' in there and get that coal". I says, "Why do you want to go in there, monkey around in there for, there's enough water we're gettin' seepin' in here now in the Simpson Mine". The old Super said to Dave to leave that coal stay. And you couldn't get in any of them places because of that water.