Tape #1083
Joe (Cotton) Fletcher

This is Donna Carbone, September 21, 1987, interviewing Joe (Cotton) Fletcher on the mines. Okay, Cotton, I think we'll start off. Now, your first job in the mines, 1919? Well, yeah, there wasn't too much of that in 1918, so I call it 1919. I got a 50 year pin. I guess you got one of those too. (Andy DeBorski - No, mine's coming, I signed up for it here a couple of months ago.)

Okay, and what did you do on your first --? On my first trip? Loaded coal with an uncle of mine. I done the shovelin' of the coal and he helped me drill the holes and that's when we used squibs. Did you go back far enough for squibs? Okay, and what is a squib? A squib is one of them things like a little rocket, a little bitty rocket. It's not quite as big around as your pencil. About that long and it's curled here on this end and it burns slow up here and when it gets up to here, it kicks the powder off and the powder runs into your hole where you've got the powder tamped in there and blows your coal down. And then you load it up. And what were your hours, Cotton? Eight hours. Eight hours a day? Yeah. But it was eight hours at the face. It took you an hour to walk in and an hour to walk out but you still had to call it eight hours. Is that right? You got paid for eight hours. Well, we got paid by the ton. Do you remember the price per ton at that time? The what? How much you got paid per ton? Yeah, 42¢. (Andy Deborski - When I started in 1930, it was 52¢ so you guys probably got less than that.) Yeah, I can't remember exactly. We got more because we had to furnish our own powder and squibs. Had to buy our own tools. And I got an auger, one of those old hand augers out there in the shed yet. I guess it's still out there, it's with junk on it. I've had the kids living with me and you know how they'll pile up stuff and then walk away and leave it. Right. And what mine was that, Cotton; what mine did you first start in? When I first started? It was in Broadhead right out of Aguilar. They called it Broadhead. Oh, the Southern. Yeah. I had been working on the farm before that, when I was 15 and my dad got sick and I got sick and when we got well, we owed the doctors. So I had a brother-in-law that was bossin' down there so he called up and said, "Send him down here and I'll put him to work so he can pay them debts". It took me about three months, I guess, to pay $44.00. That's the way it was then, wasn't it? (Andy Deborski - I know, that's right, I remember that, I remember a lot of that.)

When did you start in the mines in this area? Up here? The fall after that, that would be in '20. And what mine was that, Cotton? It was the Puritan Mine. And were you loading coal? Yeah, the same old job. Well, everything was that way then; that was before machinery got started. I was working out there when the first undercutter came into this country. Boy, all them guys was wanting to get on that undercutter because they'd been using punching machines. Do you remember them? (Deborski - I got two of them). There's one of them down that old Washington Mine yet.

(Deborski - I looked for that for quite a while and I couldn't find it). It was on that side there and down in a hole. (Deborski- Pasco told me about it but I could never come up with it. All that top coal and rip sucked in on top of it there, you know, and you had to walk over the top of it.) Yeah, that was it, it was buried too deep. And what is an undercutter? An undercutter is something that will cut the coal for you. A machine. Yeah, it's a machine. You've seen these saws that they cut trees with now? It's like a chain saw? Only them, they weigh about what, four or five ton? They're a big electric outfit and they've got a blade and they've got bits on it, just like these saws, and when you turn it on, it goes like that there and it'll cut about like that, way in as far as it'll go. Then you drill holes and shoot the coal down, see. And before that you had to use that auger? Yeah, and drill the holes. Before that there, you got a pick and you laid on your side and you mined in under there, about 18 inches or two feet and then you drilled your holes and shot it down.

What were the conditions like, was it very hazardous? Were there a lot of cave-ins? Oh, well, there was no more at last than there was at first. Or visa-versa. Because you get so you know it, you know. You don't have hardly any cave-ins only if you're working in bad filler work and stuff like that. Yeah, old Bill Winger down here, remember him? That's where we used to buy all the squibs and stuff. (Deborski - what you called the mining equipment). Yeah. (Deborski - you could buy anything from soup to nuts in those stores in those days.) Oh, gosh yes. And on credit, right? It had to be credit. We didn't have cash. All them guys would come down and they'd work in the winter-time and they'd buy their tools from him and then sell them back to him in the spring. That fall, they'd have to buy the tools again. So you'd just sell them and then you'd rebuy them. I used to have a tamping bar, but I don't know, the kids used it out on the fences and that so now I ain't got none. (Have you got any of the needles? - Deborski) No, I ain't even got a needle; I'd like to have had one of them needles. Yeah, they were about five feet long and they tapered to a point. And what did you use those for? (Deborski - In them days, the powder you used had a hole through the center of it, black powder, and you put it on that needle and shove it back in the hole and then you would tamp around all that and when it was nice and tight, you'd pull the needle out and this is where the squib had that pass to go to the powder then, see.) So it was just like one of these bottle rockets. Yeah, exactly right. It had a fuse on the end of it. And it shot down that? (Deborski - it would shoot into the powder).

Now, Cotton, on the Columbine Mine. Yeah. When I talked to you on the phone, we discussed it a little bit and I told you we have a program coming that we'll --. Yeah, I can't imagine,

you know they buried that massacre for this long, haven't they? And I always wondered about that, they brag up Ludlow. But this one up here, though, they bury it. That's true, you don't hear that much about it. You never hear nothing about it. (Deborski - I think it was because of the organization wasn't it? Down there it was the United Mine Workers and up here it was the IWW - I think that's the reason.) That could have been it. I always wondered when they shoot so many people down and cripple up so many that it don't make any difference what it was, because it was all coal miners that they shot. I went back in the - we have the old Lafayette newspapers on film and I went back to that month to see what was in the newspaper and I expected a great big article. I don't know about the Boulder Camera, but in the Lafayette paper, all it said was, "Mine strike gets serious" and it had a little tiny article and I wondered, was the newspaper a Company owned newspaper? It might be like that. It might be. Because of the Wobblies. (Deborski - I think it was controlled). I wondered because you'd think something that serious would have some type of --. Did it say in there how many got shot and how many ---. I believe it said six were killed and 30 were wounded. Yeah, that's what we always had in mind. The dead, they took them right over to - what the heck was his name that had that mortuary in Lafayette, Henning. And the wounded ones, they took to the doctors all over. The dead ones too. I held the door open down here at the doctor's office while they carried in the dead. All there was from the back of that old pickup to the door going in there was just a streak of blood. Cotton, you weren't there, but I imagine you've heard stories on it. Oh, yeah, I got in close enough that I beat it up there. Is that right? But I come right back with the gang but it was after the shooting. Afterwards. And the gunmen all left. In the newspaper article I read, the miners were to meet in the union hall and they said a couple days before that happened there was a big union meeting with miners and they were very, very unhappy about what was going on. And at the time they didn't feel it would happen. Oh, no, nobody ever expected that, you know. All the reports you read, they just didn't feel it would happen. What's your idea as far as what really brought it on? Was it --? I couldn't tell you that. (Deborski - they told them not to cross the fence and they did). And they crossed it. You see, even the sheriff was there; the sheriff knew what was going to happen. Is that the sheriff of --? Of Weld County. Of Weld County. And he had his pockets full of silver and when they got serious and was gonna march through, he started throwing that out there, thinking it would bring them back to their senses but it didn't. To heck with the money, they went through. And the guns that they used, were they stationed in a certain place in the Columbine? There was a machine gun stationed up in the tipple and one in the watertank and the rest of it was the gun men that was buried around. I never will forget old George

Mazzini - about a week before this happened, he got hurt down in the mine - he got his shoulder broke - and he was runnin' around with this arm and one of them guys shot him in this side and there he was - he had both shoulders banged up, he couldn't do nothin'. He was lucky that's all that happened to him, wasn't he? Oh, yeah. Because he was pretty radical too, you know.

Then did things kinda quiet down then after that? Oh, yeah, they quieted down. (Deborski - It wasn't long after that they settled). I know some of the guys said that some of the other guys didn't do right - now you know - do you remember old Red - what the heck was that red-headed guy's name? Red faced and a big hooked nose. Do you remember him? He was one of them that was sent down here from Washington. (Deborski - There was a fella by the name of Emery, would that be it?) No, Emery came up here from the south. (Deborski - The only one I can recall is Emery). I can't think of it - sometimes I can think of those names. I'm the same way, believe me. I wish I could think of that name. Now was he a union organizer, Cotton? He was a Wobblie organizer. Oh, he was a Wobblie. He was one of them that came down here from Washington, Oregon and up in there out of that timber country and started the strike down here. Was it Haywood? No. I know there was a man named Big Red Haywood or something like that. There was a song about two guys in Denver that was strictly non-union and Adams, do you remember that old song, Adams and O'Near? (Deborski - I remember but I can't recall it, that's been quite a while for me.) It's a long time for me too. (Deborski - In 1927, I was about 12 years old.) I think Adams was governor of the state then and O'Near was the head guy in - what was that they said up there - they had three guys on there that could tell you when you worked and when you didn't work and all that - I forget what the devil they even called them. I can't think of it. (Deborski - See I wasn't old enough to be a coal miner yet then). The first time I ever came out on a strike was the strike in 1922. Well, I came out two days down south because it was a rathole too, you know. And there were a lot of black people down there working in them mines. They shipped them in there from Kansas. The second day I was supposed to go to work - it sloped and you had to walk in - had to walk in there - oh I had to walk over a half a mile. Now, Cotton, what's the difference between a slope and another type of mine? One drifts in, one is about like this. And you walked that. And you walked down. It's a tunnel. Yeah, just a prospectin' tunnel is all it is. And the shaft goes straight up and down. (Emily Lastoka - And on a cage). Like an elevator? Oh, you've been on them, I suppose. (Emily Lastoka - One time, and that's enough.) (Deborski - The slope had a railroad track all the way down and you pulled it up with a hoist and a rope). (Lostoka - And you'd get in a car sometimes on the slope, too).

These two black guys - you'd go to the - oh they had a little shed there, you know - and the firebox - when he'd come out, he'd go in that shed and then you'd go over and get your dogtag - your little brass tag to show that --. (Deborski - Your identification). Yeah. And the old company got smart and when these guys would go to get their tags, they had a gunman there that chased them down the hole. But he picked on the wrong two, he picked on two radical black guys and there was a battle. And then we were out on strike for two days over that. I was just a kid, you know, going on 16 - I thought, my God, what kind of a life am I going to lead? What was on those tags, Cotton, your name? Your number. They used your number for everything - like the army is, you know. They put them tags on them guys. (Lastoka - And every time you loaded a car you'd put one of these numbers on it). Yeah, they'd give you a brass one for your identification and then they'd give you so many of the others for each car you loaded. (Deborski - Then they could tell how your coal came out). (Lastoka - And if it was dirty and had rock in it, they fined you for it). Yeah. They would go through it, they would pick through it? Oh, yeah. It had to be a car of clean coal or you'd get fined. If your rock got to piling up on you in there where you'd been throwing it back in the clear, you'd ask the boss if you could load it up and send it out - "No sir, he'd say, you dig a hole and bury it". You remember that? Old Jake Weiler was heck for that. Maybe you know Jake Weiler. Yes, I remember him. You would have to bury it. No, that was just a gag, you know. Oh. (Deborski - You'd have to put it to the side so it wouldn't be in the road of anything else. They left it in the mine, anyway.)

When I think of areas, you weren't in a room as big as your kitchen, were you - it was just a small --. Oh, it's possible. It could have been? Oh, yeah, it was possible. You take, the reason they ain't aworkin' now - they took out all that easy coal, didn't they? (Deborski - The area wouldn't be as high as this - it would be four to five foot high - six foot). It was in there, cause you could leave a coal top and that was the safest top you could leave it. The coal itself.

When you worked down there now, did you have crews that timbered and crews that dug? The mine had the timber crews they called them. (Deborski - That was later). That was when machinery came in because they had to timber behind the machinery. Otherwise, you done your own for nothin'. (Deborski - You made your place safe all on your own when you were hand loading). The bosses, they come around, and they was mean then but after the union came in and they found out what the devil it was to work right, it was a whole lot nicer. Even on both sides of the fence. (Deborski - It was better for the bosses).

Now, the IWW, from what I've read, was more radical than the UMW. Yeah, it was the same, pretty near, as the Bolsheviks, you know, it degraded down from them, from the Bolsheviks. (Deborski - Where'd they get the name Rednecks?) They got that in 1910. You was either a Blackleg or a Redneck. Now what is that, Cotton, what is a Blackleg? A Blackleg? That was the guy that worked. The guys on strike wore a red handkerchief around their necks. And they called them Rednecks, I'll be darned. That was in 1910. My dad was out for five years. Your dad went out too because you was here then. (Deborski - I was born in '14, but I can remember my dad talking about it. They used to rough them up then). They took care of their own then. Yeah. (Deborski - Catch them guys going to work then, buddy, they really stomped down on us).

Now, like the Simpson Mine, at one time, I read--. That was a great Blackleg Mine. And they had a fence around there, didn't they? And was that to keep the Blacklegs in or the Rednecks out? That was it - to keep the Rednecks out. The Puritan had the same thing out here; do you remember it? They had a gate and you had to go to a young man to get permission to go out, if you wanted to go out of the camp and you had to show him your little tag if you wanted back in. And this was before the Columbine? Oh yeah, that was 1910 to 1915.

So things got better,then, after the Columbine did you still have the scabs? No, it started straightening up. It changed the atmosphere of the people after a few years because there was nothing but union then in the mines. But then them's the ones that shot up too because, I tell you, there was people so damn bad that they'd have joined anything, wouldn't they? They'd have joined anything for a little more security. Well, they say, you know, in the books that I've read, Cotton, they say that the IWW was radical but it did help the strike because it did bring it to a head. The UMW, then more people, it grew stronger from that. You know they wanted the UMW to come in. What was that guy in Lafayette's name - he was quite a union man - wasn't it Jack Green and (Deborski - Joe Symanski). I remember, I was sitting down here, there was two - three dozen of us - sittin' on the curb down here in town and that Jack Green and some other guy, I don't know who it was, drove around there in the car and wanted to know if we'd hold his attention, you know, he wanted to tell us something, and he said, "Every one of you men, you're all miners, if you'll start a Local here under the UMW of A, we'll call you charter members and it won't cost you a cent to join". And I'm still there; I've still got my union card. Well, I had it in my pocket before then because I had to join the union down south when I was a kid. (Deborski - Roosevelt helped that too, when he gave everybody the right to organize). You're darned right, 1933, that's when they organized. (Deborski - John L. Lewis was president of the UMW at the time and he jumped right on the bandwagon.)

(Lastoka - Now at the Columbine, that was a large camp.) You bet it was, so was the old Puritan. That's out here between here and Dacono. I've got a question maybe one of you two guys can answer - Serene - the camp was called "Serene, Colorado". They called it "Columbine". There was the Columbine - they changed it when they got the postoffice up here to Serene. Okay, 'cause I had never heard it called Serene and I was looking through some books and it said "Serene" and I wondered where that name came from. Yeah, when the postoffice came in.

Now, describe the camp for me; did it have quite a few buildings in it, the Columbine, and homes? Yeah, three or four streets there. (Lastoka - and a dance hall. Remember, we used to go the Columbine Dance Hall.) Yeah, a dance hall, a pool hall there, right down below the office. (Deborski - Tony, what the hell was Tony's last name? He ran that for years - a big fat guy that smoked a cigar all the time. Tony's his first name.) So it was a community. Were all the mines like that? Yeah, only some of them never got near as big. (Deborski - the Puritan had a store.) I didn't realize that. (Lastoka - And the Morrison Mine had a camp.) Oh, yeah, the Morrison had a camp. Well, so did the old Clayton have a camp. You lived at the old Clayton. (Deborski - We lived at the Clayton, yeah.) Now, did the Company own all that? Yeah, and you paid rent to the Company. So they paid you and you paid them right back. (Lastoka - And you paid into the Company Store and you never did get a paycheck.) That's right, there wasn't nothin' left. (Deborski - You got scrip for money. The only place you could spend scrip was in the Company Store.)

Now, did you work all year? Did you work winter and summer? No, hell no. (Lastoka - No summer work.) (You got so damn deep in the hole during the summer months without workin', it took you all winter to get out - Deborski) Yeah, along about spring you were just about even with the board. And that fall when they told you to come back to work, you were in debt. (Lastoka - I can remember, it was about $50. you'd be in debt for the summer.) Yeah. (Deborski - And if they caught you buying outside of that place, you was down the road.) Yeah, they'd fire you, you're darned right.) I heard stories from this one gentleman who worked at the Columbine and one of the bosses had a car dealership and he said if you didn't buy that particular brand of car, you didn't work. That doesn't seem too fair. It was well controlled. If they found out you were a union man working in there and you've been talkin' a little too much about union, down the canyon you went, too. (Deborski - there was a stool pigeon). Somebody that would tell. The Company kept gunmen right there on the job all the time. With guns? Yeah. (Lastoka - This younger generation wouldn't know how to put up with stuff like that.) No, they wouldn't, would they? I go down here to get

a beer once in a while and you hear them guys talkin', "Oh, I coulda worked today, but to hell with it, give me another beer". (Lastoka - that's right, and we worked day and night.) (Deborski - By, god, you'd best work up there or somebody else had your job.) You're darned right. (Deborksi - if you didn't want to work, they'd get somebody else.) You had to work so you'd be squared up for the next summer. Walk in a long ways - I'd come home and gee my legs would ache. (Debroski - Eat dust all the way in and all the way out.) Yeah, you'd come out with the mules and them mules would kick up more darn dirt.

And you worked in water some times? Oh, yeah, if it got too deep for you, they'd put a little pump in there and pump it out. (Deborski - We used to have to bail it out and we'd load a car of coal and dump it in the car and hope it would get out of the place before it all ran out again.) No fun in that mine.

Were the miners a close knit group, Cotton, because having to work together like that in those kinds of conditions? It was awful close. That's the reason there was so many of them on strike. They all had the same darned idea in mind; they'd like to see something happen so they could get better conditions.

How about when you came out of the mine - were the communities like Lafayette, Louisville, Erie - were they close knit communities as far as---? Oh, I don't know - not too darned close. I think Erie and Louisville were more than Lafayette, don't you? (Deborski - Take Longmont - Longmont hated to see a coal miner come into their town back in them days.) (Lastoka - Being a farming community.) (Deborski - They'd see you walking down the street with your lunchbucket - they'd look down on you.) Yes, they would - Boulder was the same thing. (Lastoka - I can remember when we were kids, they used to say that we were the miners' rats.) Yeah, that's all we were - lowdown miners.

There's a lot of history from the mines. You know, when we were on strike that time - the Wobblies were on strike - and Longmont was helping every way they could to get guys from Longmont to work in the damn mines and everybody around here that was on strike hated Longmont for it. And when the strike was all over and it was all straightened out and we were all workin' good, nobody was going to Longmont to buy groceries, and brother, I'm a tellin' you, that hurt Longmont too. They even had a big miners' party over there once to show the miners how nice they was. Is that right - they just about gave in. I remember the night we came out of that meeting over there and the National Guard was there and we walked through, I think, there were 12 soldiers on each side and all the bayonets crossed like that and we walked through them. What meeting was that, Cotton? A meeting we had along — that was the Wobblies. And we had a guy there, he was a union man, but he was a Wobblie too because he was one of the rest of us, you know, Old Simpson,

do you remember him? He gave them a big speech and that's what they wanted; they were after him. They checked everybody solid, coming out, all but the women. So the women got to seeing that and one would take off a little piece of dress or something, you know, and the other one, and by god, they put old Simpson in a dress there and he walked through there just as brilliant as you can--. They never got him,either. That was a good idea. Old Adams and O'Near. There was a song, you say? Yeah, the miners made up a song on that.

When we take these tapes, we don't have anybody around who can explain what it means and they'll use different names and none of us know what they're talking about and so this way, with both of you here, you're saying what squibs are and that, because it's hard when you don't know on mining.

(Lastoka - When the next strike was - the Columbine - Joe was working at the Columbine - when was that next strike? We were married, so it was in 1930 what? Wasn't there a miners' strike then too?) Oh, there were several short ones, I can't recall them all. (Lastoka - It must have been about '36, yeah.) Most of them was what were called "Little local strikes". You know, this mine might be having trouble while this mine over here might be doing good. Well, these guys would put up a protest on it. (Deborski - I think the biggest after we got organized was during the war, wasn't it?) Yeah, that's when the army was going to stop the war and come over here and straighten the coal miners out and then go over and start the war again. (Deborski - That was the Taft-Hartley Law - remember when the Taft-Hartley Law came in?) Yeah, that's the old Taft-Hartley Law that forced you to go to work. They forced you to go to work? Well, that was the law. (Lastoka - That was under Roosevelt.) He got rid of that. So it was against the law to organize until Roosevelt? Not to organize. This is way in the '40s we're talking about. When Roosevelt brought that - you had the right to organize - it was against the law before that? No, no, but they wouldn't recognize you. This is where they recognized you.

Did either one of you - Mother Jones - I've read a little bit on Mother Jones. Oh that was back East. That wasn't in this area. (Lastoka - What was the one here - Rhoads - what was the woman that was so good?) Josephine Roach. Josephine Roach, she was the one that straightened the Columbine out. And the union's still getting money out of that, ain't they? Are you one of the officers yet of the Local? (Deborski - No, I'm no officer.) You know, when I had to quit going because they went to Lafayette, because I'm scared to drive at night, you know and I won't go to the meeting - And what old John L. Lewis done, after Roach died - that mine belonged to her, and old John L. Lewis gave her $50,000 to straighten that mine up and make a union mine out of it. She did and when I quit

coming up here when we'd have audits, by god the union's still getting a little money. Is that right? That's right, and I was wondering --. (Deborski - I don't know, I'll have to ask Charlie if they're getting any money on that yet. He never brings it up.) Ask him about that because, you know, that Columbine, the company, Rocky Mountain Fuel Company, it owns all that top ground too and everything that's made off of there, the union gets that little bit of a cut, or it did. Cause old L.C. was always up in that and he used to show us that every darned time. So John L. Lewis gave Josephine Roach money to make it a union mine. Yeah. A lot of guys got sore over that but I think it was one of the nicest things he coulda done. She was about kapoot, she was going broke, and he bailed her out. In fact, at the same time, even some of the miners gave some of their money back to halp her. You see, this is something we've never heard before. I think a whole bunch of the miners were giving her money back out of their paychecks to help and then she got back on her feet.

You see when the war started, that changed every damned thing. You coulda worked seven days a week straight through if you wanted. I never got started to working straight through until '39, when they started sinking the Washington. I got in on sinking the Washington. Boy, we was in debt too. When we got down into the coal and got to going down there, it was the first time since we'd been married, I think in about 10 years, that I brought a check home and throwed it on the table and nobody could touch it. It was all our own. After that, we done all right. Had a few dollars in the bank and got a decent car. Got the house paid for. Yeah, we was sittin' on the kitty.

When there were explosions in the mine, Cotton, was that from a gas deposit or something? I've read where the lights - your miner's lamp or something that would tell you when there was gas? Well it was a flame safety lamp in them days that would tell you whether there was gas. (Lastoka - Carbide lamps.) Well, the open carbide light would set the gas off. There was no way of knowing other than--. Yeah, there was a safety lamp and that's your fire boss - he goes through that mine completely with one of these safety lamps and he comes out and tells you if it's safe to go down or not. And what did the lamp do if there was gas? It was fixed just right so if you seen gas,he carried it in his hand all the time - if you seen gas, your flame would start raising, or if it was black damp and there wasn't no gas in it, your light would start deteriorating. (Deborski - If there was black damp, there was no air. See your safety lamp will burn in 60% air - less than that, it won't burn, oxygen, in other words.) So that's what you

depended on, whether you went in or whether you stayed out. See, they wouldn't allow you to go into a place with a carbide lamp on if it hadn't been inspected by the fire boss and he okayed that there was no gas in there. (Lastoka - The Morrison Mine was bad for gas, wasn't it?) (Deborski - Well, if you didn't take care of the ventilation, they were all bad. You had to have proper ventilation.) When you talk about ventilation, That's when you get air forced to you. With fans? With a big fan on top. You had the air shaft on top that would blow the air through the mines. Without that, why you wouldn't even have any air down there to breathe with. (Lastoka - See you had two shafts in the mine - you had the air shaft and where the cage was - the main shaft.) (Deborski - Now if the mine got deep enough - what I mean by that - is extended out further, you had to have another air shaft.) Just keep drilling shafts? (Deborski - Yeah, one wouldn't be enough, you'd have to have another one. Like the old Acme - it had to have two air shafts.)

When it came down for lunch, did you have a specific place - I know you didn't have a cafeteria. Whatever you could find in your own place - you'd sit on a lump of coal, or timber or whatever. So once you got down, you never came back up until the shift was ended? Right, you took your water down with you. Remember some of the conditions they had poured on us when they were going on strike during the war? Before that, you know, it was the Depression and we was a workin' five days a week and seven hours a day to give an extra miner a chance for another day's work. (Deborski - What they called NRS days.) And I don't know what did happen after that - oh, when old Joe Symanski had to come up there and tell us we were back on nine hours work and we only had 15 minutes of dinner time in nine hours, boy I'ma tellin' you, I thought old Joe was going to get whipped up there at the Washington that night. Boy, them guys was ahowlin'. I'm sure - 15 minutes in nine hours. (Lastoka - There was no coffee breaks.) No coffee breaks. (Deborski - No coffee breaks at all.)

What is the temperature down in the mine, Cotton, is it hot, is it cold? If you've got a lot of ventilation and it's about 20 below outside, the closer you get to the air shaft, the colder it gets. The farther you get away from it, the warmer it gets. So if you're down there working for nine hours, when you start coming up in the winter, it gets darn cold then. Yeah, you're in there sweating and your clothes are wet from sweat and then you get on that cage if you have to come up the air shaft, somebody made a law once, you know that they had to have the air go down the main shaft, remember that? (Deborski - Yeah, that was a federal law). It didn't last long, everybody refused it. (Deborski - If you had water drippers down there, hell, it would freeze.) You couldn't

do nothing; the pumps all froze up and the pipes all busted. So a water dripper is just water that's dripping down and if you had the air coming down the main shaft, it would freeze it. Yeah, nothing but a big bunch of icecycles. In that Washington Mine, down through that tunnel, do you remember how wet it used to be? I've seen icecycles there where the water would come out of the coal on the side and then run down - they'd be that wide and that high, just keep the water coming. (Deborski - Like on your roof, you know the ice is - the more water that drips, the bigger the icecycles get. That's the way it was down below. Many a time I'd have to send two or three guys down earlier in the morning to chop the ice away from the track.) Down there - what'd we used to call that damn place down there? (Deborski - the pretzel?) Pretzel, yeah. (Deborski - The Lincoln was worse than that. I had a hell of a bad dripper, maybe 200 feet from the air shaft. And that's right where you started the man trip. Boy, I tell you, every morning in the winter, I'd have to send two or three guys down there to chop the ice to run the man trip through. And what's a man trip? Where the men get their cars and they bring them out. That's another condition we got after the union came in. They took you in and they brought you out. No more walking. No more walking. (Deborski - It was just like if you lived on Broadway and you had to go to work up there on Sheridan somewhere. That's what that amounted to - you'd ride the buses; this was a man trip, the same way.) Who was the boss, what was his name before you took over? (Deborski - Wilson?) No. (Deborski - At the Washington?) Yeah. (Deborski - Wilson). Yeah, but he lived in Lafayette and he had one eye. (Deborski - Ferguson). Ferguson. (Deborski - Bill Ferguson). How is he? (Deborski - He's still living; he's still hanging around; I meet him in Safeway about once a week; he's in there shopping). I haven't seen him. (Deborski - He can't drive, but he gets people to take him out shopping. Him and his wife are both living). I'll be darned. I haven't seen that guy since then. (Deborski - He retired in what, '69.

Cotton, when did you retire from the mines? Uh - the last day the Washington worked. When we came up, I throwed my snuff can down the hole and went and started drinking whiskey. Boy, there was everything in that wash house that you can imagine. (Deborski - June of '67 they closed that up). June, '67. And I started to work there 28 years back from that. Yeah, me and Shine and the Cap set out in that cornfield and waited for old Sidle to come and show us where to start digging that air shaft. (Lastoka - That was Sammy Sidle, wasn't it?) No, Sammy's dad, John. To start the mine? To sink the shaft. (Deborski - 1939, wasn't it?) Yeah. June the 14th. A long time ago.

Yeah, I've had some of these guys down here ask me how you do things down there. You know, there's no coal miners left in this town. I'll bet you could put them all in a -- (Deborski - Paper bag.) Yeah. About half a dozen of us. And there's only two of them that ever comes to town. But us two, once in a while there'll be three - we can get in a corner and dig a little coal, you know. But the rest of them, I don't know. I don't know what the devil they do. (Deborski - You've got Shine and you've got Johnny Holley.) (Lastoka - Is Johnny Holley still there?) He lives right across the alley; that's his house there. (Deborski - I went to his 50th anniversary. He sent me a card. I went down and had a few drinks with him down at his kid's place there in Northglenn.) I'll be darned. (Lastoka - There was Johnny Shocker and Johnny Holley.) Oh Johnny Shocker's been dead a long time.

Did any of the big union organizers ever come out into this area? Oh yeah. How about John L. Lewis? Oh, they'd send one of their big international representatives like down to Ludlow or if they had a big deal in Denver, they'd have one there. I don't know of John L. Lewis ever coming West. So then, actually, all of the organization and the implementing of things were done by local union representatives? Yeah, here - this area in here - Joe Symanski, he was the last one. He was the international warden, is that what you called them? (Yeah.) Every so often, well everything was done by telephone, and every so often, they'd get them all on a plane and take them back to Washington. Now, when it started out, after the Columbine, and the UMW became a lot stronger, did the local men elect the officers of the union? The local men elect them all. (Deborski - See we've got an election coming up here - when the hell is it?) I see, so it's just not locally. We all get to vote. But they vote for the big - right on through. (Lastoka - Like John L. Lewis, after he left, what was the one that took over when John L. Lewis died?) Miller. (Deborski - No, before Miller was - the one that shot old whatchacall him - that Lewis put in there as his right-hand man for a long time - what the hell was his name - the Italian - they put him in jail for shootin' that Polack? He killed the whole family - what was that - I remember it now - oh he died in prison. He killed the daughter and the mother. Yablonski!) Oh I remember that. (Deborski - I can't think of the guy that promoted him and he was our president.) The guy that promoted him - he came from Montana, that ought to help out a little bit - what the hell was his name? (Lastoka - John L. Lewis was president for how many years?) Forty. Was he the first? No, Mitchell was the first. If I'm right, I got one year in under Mitchell. It seems like I did. (Lastoka - John L. Lewis was a great man

for the miners.) (Deborski - He paved the way for everybody. They all started organizing. Not only that, even the ones that never organized got better wages.) (Lastoka - And he drew up all the contracts on this retirement and everything, and black lung and everything.) He was quite a man, that guy. Like Sunstrand and all of them - they had to pay better wages in order to keep ---. You know when the Russians were raising hell and Congress was worried about them, afraid they were going to have a war with them - one of the Congressmen got up and he said, "What the hell are you talking about"- he says "You want the goddam thing squared up", he said, "Get old John L. Lewis and send him to Russia". They was gonna run the congressman out. Boy, he was quite a man, that guy. But they said his dad was just the same. They said it was common to see him and his dad and his mom walking down the track - they'd find out what there was and they'd fire them.

So you didn't talk union for quite a while. Even though you had a union card, you had to be careful. Oh, hell, we all had secret cards; I remember when we used to have to sneak up to the hall here and pay our dues - 75¢ a month. (Deborski - If the company found you out, you were down the road). Yeah, you were down the road.

But it sure surprised me to find out that somebody was going to check up and make something out of that Columbine deal. But I guess it's like you said - it's a little too radical. Yeah. But everyone of those guys was old miners and they were all old UMW union too. But the ones that started it were Wobblies? Well, the ones that done the shooting, they were Militia. (Deborski - Colorado National Guard.) They were sent in by the governor? (Deborski - Ammons, yeah. There was a bunch of them standing up there at the Morrison Camp even. The Bokan tribe was feeding them. Staying right up there in the bunk houses. Brought their horses with them. They'd ride horses. The damn dog would come barking at the horses' heels, why they'd shoot the dog. Shot a lot of dogs up there. They were a bunch of crazy outfit; they'd get in a fight among themselves.) Just hoodlums more or less. Them was the days, wasn't they? (Lastoka - Them was the days that men were men from the time they were boys. Joe Mathias was in that.) Is he still alive? No, Cotton, he died. Him and Welchie both. Welchie's wife, she passed away a long time ago,didn't she? (Deborski - Even the kid's dead, Welchie's kid.) He died first, didn't he? (Lastoka - Yes.)

There were a lot of different nationalities in the mines. Well, they shipped all the extra men from all over Europe to come and work in these mines because to get the railroads west, they had to have miners. (Deborski - They shipped in their scabs, that's what it was.) (Lastoka - That's one thing, though, you know - like the Italians, they settled in Louisville. You found the nationalities would all get together.) (Deborski - Clannish.) Clannish as hell. Well, look at Lafayette - was all Polish, wasn't it? And look in Erie - was all Johnny Bulls and, well, there was English, Irish and Welsh in this town. Because before my time, there used to be two blocks down here at the north end of town for the French. They wouldn't allow the French to live in the town here. And they had two blocks full of them down there. There's two water plugs - I don't know if they're still there or not. (Lastoka - Well, Louisville had a French town too.) (Deborksi - We had what they called Little Italy up there, you know and on the south was French Town. And the Welshmen were up west, Welsh and Johnny Bulls they called them; they were up west.) My dad was a Johnny Bull and there were quite a few Welsh lived in homes up here. When my dad got old, me and my sis, we'd put the rocking chair out there and we'd take him out and put him in this rocking chair and throw a blanket over him and let him stay out when it was nice like this. You could hear them old Welshmen coming down there, "Hello, how you feel?" They liked to get a can of beer and there's be three or four of them come up here, all Welsh, and they'd sit here and talk about when they came to different towns out here a hundred miles ahead of the railroad, you know, looking for gold. Because that's what enticed them over here, you know, was the gold. $20.00 an ounce - if you got it, it was yours, no matter where.

So, when you first started in the mine, mules were down there. All mules; there were electric motors for a way back in, I worked at the State Mine up here one winter with an old fella, old Eli Oakley, maybe you know him. Ted Oakley's dad, I worked with. He wanted me to do the shoveling; he marked out the places. I had to do the drilling too. It was hard work. Of course, he was an old man and I was a learnin' from him. I worked there in the fall of '20 and the spring of '21, I think, until I got laid off. They let them work but they laid us old guys off, you remember. What little coal they needed, why they gave it to them. (Deborski - I remember the time you'd go down the mine there and you'd wait all day long for a car so you could load it. It all depended on when the coal truck came in and they dumped a few cars then you got a coal car to load.) Now, you'd have a coal car and you'd load it and they'd take it out; then would you load more than one car a day? Oh yes. (Lastoka - You couldn't make a living unless you got at least 10 cars.) That's right. (Deborski - These cars would hold about two tons.) (Lastoka - And you'd

get 42¢ a ton.) So you'd have to wait until they emptied that one and bring it back to you. (Deborski - They wouldn't dump any coal unless a coal truck came out to get it.) When the bins were full on top, they had to quit dumping. So, there were days when you didn't make that much, even though you spent those hours in the mine. Sometimes you'd be in the mine all day long and get one car. You'd make 80, 90¢ that one day. (Deborski - Nothing to have a 10 or 12 dollar pay check in two weeks.) Yeah, I remember old George Mazzini once drawing $3.65 for Christmas pay. That was quite the talk around here for a long time 'cause he didn't cash it - he showed it to everybody. (Lastoka - I can remember, my dad didn't make enough you know, that we couldn't even get groceries. There wouldn't even be enough money for us to get scrip when we went into the office.)

Were the miners' buckets always the same design as I remember, with the water and round - was that how you always had them? (Well they had the oblong ones too, built the same way with the water on the bottom - Deborski) Oh, your water bucket? Yeah, your water on the bottom and a little thing slid in there on top and then if you was nice and society, you got another little pie plate up here and a piece of pie in it. Remember them? (Lastoka - And Joe was always a heavy eater so he always had to carry his apples and everything in the water.) Yeah, an apple or an orange in the water. And that's the water you drank? Yeah. That's somethin'.

(Lastoka - Then come home and fill the old galvanized tub with water for the bath.) Yeah, an old number three tub. (Deborski - Heat the water on the stove.) I'd work out at the Puritan on the night shift and get home at 2:00 in the morning, dirtier than hell and tired, the house about half cold. The old copper boiler on top of the stove - that's how you heated the water in that thing to take a bath. By the time you got dried off, you was shakin' like a leaf.

As far as your tools - you bought those yourself? Oh, you had to buy your own tools. I never realized that. (Deborski - you bought all your hand tools yourself.) You bet. (Lastoka - You had a pick and a number two shovel.) An auger and breastplate. Now, what's a breastplate? That's the back part of the auger that you drill with. It come on your chest here and you had to push on that while you were drilling. That's where you got your leverage. (Deborski - Just like you do with an electric drill now, you had to force it.)

Do you remember old Dutch Hodgson? (Deborski - Oh yeah.) I wonder if he's still alive? Oh no, hell, he'd be older than you, even.) No, he wasn't too much, we run around together

quite a bit. (Deborski - I think he's dead, been dead quite a while.) The last I ever heard of him he was down in Bakersfield, California. And he joined religion. And he quit chewing Skole, snuff. (Deborski - Well, maybe he's still around then, if he done all them things.) Yeah, god, there wasn't much left of him, was they? I'm just as bad, you know, when I got off the cage up there at the Washington, I throwed the snuff can back down the shaft.

You ever in an explosion, Cotton, in the mine? No, but I was close. The Washington had a little one once, you know. But we wasn't in that area. Well, they come out of it - jeez, them five guys come out on that motor and it was arollin' just as hard as it would roll and they was ascreamin' and ahollerin'.