

**Oral History Number: 056-001**

**Interviewee: John A. "Del" Stark**

**Interviewers: Stuart Conner and Ken Feyhl**

**Date of Interview: January 5, 1975**

Stuart Conner: It's January 5, 1975, and Del Stark, Ken File and Stu Connor are talking together in Florence Sherlock's home and Betty Lu Conner is listening in also. We're going to ask Del to tell us about mining and for coal in Roundup, Montana, and when he was involved in it and his experiences, et cetera.

So Del, you just go ahead and tell us...give us a little bit about your background. Where you were born, who your parents were, and just a little briefly about your own family history.

John Stark: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, you know, and my dad come out here to homestead because he was a baker by trade and his lungs went bad on him. The doctors told him that he'd have to get out of doors if he was going to live long. He'd been raised on a farm, so he thought he'd come out here and get one of these little homesteads and build it up into a nice ranch and do beautiful like the old days. I can remember when we came out here he came out ahead of us and built a little cabin and got it set up. Then he sent for my mother and my brother and I, and we came to Roundup. Across the street from the railroad depot was the Montana House. It was one of them little hotels built out of old box ends and pasteboard and stuff, and the bedbugs in there were about the size of jackrabbits. By god, we got in there that night, and my mother couldn't figure out what in the devil was the matter. The place was crawling, and she turned the light on and, Jesus, here were these big bedbugs. We didn't sleep much. But of course, kids, we passed out.

The next morning Dad had a team and a wagon, and it was 30 miles home to the homestead. So we started out. Of course, my mother had been raised in the city. She was a nursemaid for wealthy people, and she had no idea what this thing was. We poked along over the plains, and it got dark on us. We got out within about, I think, three miles of where the homestead was, and one of the wheels on the wagon folded up. My dad said, "Well, Signa, you'll have to stay with the kids, and I'll go over and bother one of the neighbors and see if I can borrow a wagon." So he took the team and he left, and Mother—living in the city all her life—she was sitting there. The coyotes started to howl, and she was just terrorized. Of course, we was so little, we was so groggy with sleep, it didn't bother us, and he must've been gone an hour before he got back.

Then he hooked on the...put our stuff in there, and we went on into the homestead. There was one of them little one-room tarpaper-covered shacks, like the homesteaders all had. I can remember the only decorations he had was a Climax tobacco tag he'd stuck in the design by the little iron stove. Of course my mother, she looked at this thing, having come from the homes of the well-to-do where she'd been a maid, and thought, "Jesus Christ, what a place!" (laughs) She

was scared to go outdoors even. Dad—he loved this country, and then he did like all the rest of them. He tried to raise grain and tried to make a living on it, and it wasn't possible to do so. So he finally got a few cows, and then they'd milk these and that little lousy cream kept us alive for years.

I think it was five years after my mother got to the homestead before she ever got to Roundup again. She stayed there constantly. As far as that goes, she never did get quite used to the set up out there, but she acted much better than you would've thought she would. Of course, the neighbors was all kind and good hearted, but they were all pilgrims like we were so we had to...

We lived on what they called Chicago Bench because it was that long, flat top of a mesa there, and pretty near all these people were from Chicago. There were stenographers and jewelers and people like that, and they was well-adapted as she was to making a living.

My god, when we got this one cow, a great big old thing—she was a dilly—and just as gentle as a lamb. My mother, of course, had never milked a cow in her life, but Dad showed her how. When he was gone, she'd try to milk the cow, and it took her so damn long, the cow'd finally get tired and lay down. My mother would plead with her, "Maude, get up! I'm not done yet!" The poor cow, she'd just lay there. Finally Ma'd get the broom and prod her, and she'd get up and she'd milk her some more. Then finally Maude couldn't stand it no more. She'd lay down again. One day we came—I don't know where my mother'd been—she took us with her, little fellas, and we come back. It was one of them hot days and the flies were bad. Maude had got into the cabin, and she laid down between the bed and the stove. By god, we finally got the door open enough to get in but we had a hell of a time getting her up because there wasn't room for her operating. The thing about that that I've thought it was in such a contrast to the life they'd lived. I don't understand how she didn't have a nervous breakdown.

The winters were long and miserable and, of course, there wasn't too much company, only the other homesteaders. The grub got pretty low one time, and so Dad had to go to town to pick up some stuff. While he was gone, we used up the last of the food we had, and by god, we had, oh, I think it was a half dozen rutabagas. My mother, she cut them up, and we ate them raw. For two days we lived on them until he got back. She was telling one of the neighbors about it later, and the woman said, "For Christ's sake! Why didn't you come over? The house is only a half mile. I'd have loaned you bread and whatever you needed." Well, Ma'd never been around that sort of thing. It never occurred to her to borrow anything. Ever since then, why, I've been kind of partial to rutabagas because they tided us over kind of a rough time.

Then of course, we went broke out there and had to move away, and we moved from ranch to ranch. Finally ended up in the sheep business. I'm one of these stockmen, about all I know is the living and the dead. I'm the world's poorest, you know. I knew that, and I didn't like ranching to start with so as soon as I got old enough to get around I'd try something else.

I finally got down here among these miners one night, drinking and having a good time, and I told them, "God, I'd like to get in the mines, but how do you go about it?" This little Englishman, he pulled me by my elbow, and he said, "Why don't you go down in the morning and rustle old Snake? He'd most likely put you on." I asked him what to do, and he said, "You got time this afternoon? Go down and get you a pick, cap, and a lamp." They use these canvas caps with a shield on them, and they cost 15 cents, and I think the miner's lamp cost about a dollar or a dollar and a quarter. Then he told me, he says, "I'll stake you to the carbide and stuff." Well, that night I went and stayed with these boys, and they all got polluted as hell. God, I was so sick, when I got up the next morning, it didn't matter much what happened. I went out to see this Robson—he knew me from visiting before—and I told him I'd like to get a start in the mines. "Hell," he said, "we're driving empty down there, and if you want to try it." He didn't think I'd last until noon, small as I was and everything. But he said, "If you want to try it, hell, yes," he said, "you can go on down." Then he told me, he said, "Now when the crew comes on, you go down with Andy-Gump into the Sixth East. He says, "We'll drive an empty there and work there." Of course, I didn't know what an empty was or anything else. I asked the boys, I says, "Where's this man they call Andy Gump?" He was a big Austrian, oh, he was taller than you are [refers to Ken Feyl], not as muscular. Andy sure introduced me to him, and he said, "Yes, kid, you go with me. I'll make a miner outta you!"

We got down in there. When you drive empty, you keep breaking through these water seams. Jesus! That was like a shower bath in there. Cold, mountain spring water pouring down there, worse than in the shower, and, good god, we no sooner got in there and you were ringing wet. Of course, I thought, "Jesus, I got to show these men I've got it. I'm going to work like hell!" I was in there just doing my damndest. This old Andy come over to put his hand on my shoulder, and he says, "Listen, little kid!" he says, "You can't hold this pace." He said, "Slow up!" Twice he said, "You've just got married!" I saw the point. When you're first in it, for some reason, you feel like you're going to smother. You're not used to that air, and I was so cold I was just shaking all over. You had to work fast to keep warm. By god, that old fellow, he knew I didn't know a thing on earth, and he watched me like a hawk. He'd show me, "Now you got to watch this. Now you got to watch that." When I went back to the hotel that night, I didn't thaw out until the next morning. Then they finally told us to get some oilcloth and put over your shoulders to keep the water from on you. Hell, it's just like the Army raincoats, you remember, with the (unintelligible). You'd sweat underneath them until you was just as wet as if you'd been in the shower.

I really enjoyed it once I got...Well, I really never had any fear of the underground, but what I was afraid of was that I'd make an ass of something. Those fellows were really wonderful. They'd watch you, and they'd come over and stop you and say, "Don't do that," and they'd tell you why not to. If there was a dangerous overhang, they'd say, "You better let me take this down for you. He said, "You've not been around here long enough, and I'll take her down for you. Then you can break it up and load it."

They were wonderful lads, and by god, the more longer I worked it, the better I liked it. Then I finally got where they saw that I was interested and I really worked. Well, then they'd give me extra shifts so I could...like tending the pumps and all that kind of work. I picked it up fast because when you've been around machinery a lot. This Snake Robinson's brother was Wild Bill Robiinson and Wild Bill was right. He was really a hellion and what he did...when him and his brother went to a dance one time in Arkansas, they both got drunk, and they got in a fight with the crowd that was there. Wiley said he knew they were going to get hell whipped out of them so they backed into the dark kitchen. The lights from the room they were dancing in was back of these people that were coming in. When Bill got in there, he saw one of these old flatirons—you know how they were made with the long point and that handle on them. Well, he grabbed that. He was standing here beside the door, and as these fellows were coming in. They couldn't see Bill, but he was knocking them out with this flatiron and he hit this one man too hard and wound up and killed him. It broke their father up. He was a well-to-do farmer down there, but it broke the old man keeping him from hanging.

Then, of course, when they got a chance they got out of there because people were pretty sore about it. But they were a wild lot. I can remember seeing him on the cutting machines. He was drunk all the time. Him and this other fellow down there...these cutting machines, once you put them in...They're made like a long...like a chain saw. Laid on its side, and they dig its way in under the coal. Once you get it buried up to where the machine's body is against the face, there's not too much danger, but when it starts in, the goddam thing will buck and jump like a wildcat if you're not watching what you're doing. Those two drunken bastards would be in there whooping and a'hollering, and that machine would be bouncing around—raising hell. Why they didn't get killed, I don't know, or why they were doing it. They were just drunk. By god, I'd watch them and I could...Then the other machine men'd tell me, "For Christ sakes, don't work with either one of them! You could get killed!"

Finally they put this Wild Bill on as night boss. Christ, they might as well of had a ten-year old kid. He didn't give a damn about anything. One night he came in there blind drunk, and he was going to catch the triple-loaded cars as they was coming out of a side entry, swing it out onto the mainline going up the hill, and he made a pass at the car. You rode the chain links and the bumper between the car. Well, he missed the damn car, and he fell and his hand was on the track. But the load comes out pulling around the bend, the flanges and everything pull away from the rail on this side. All it did was just break three fingers. He got up and he shook his hand, he said, "By god," he says, "that wasn't too handy!"

I said, "Well, Bill, can I help you fix it?"

"Oh hell no," he said, "it won't start to hurt until I get out on top!" He only had a little ways to go. By god, he went out, you know, he put some powder box splints on them and went home. Never went to a doctor. They healed up crooked, but it didn't bother to him. Then another night he was in there with me, and he was going to load a machine up. You back the machine away from the face after you cut and pull it up onto these trucks, and he was so damn drunk,

he had ahold of the truck to balance himself. He forgot to pull his fingers away, and he pulled this five- or six-ton truck machine up across his fingers. Well, we stood there frozen. I didn't know what the hell to do, and he reversed the machine and rolled the three-ton truck back over his fingers again. I looked at them—they were kind of flat—and I said, "Jesus, Bill, I'll help you! Let's get outta here and get a doctor!"

"Oh hell, there's only two or three hours left," he said. So he got some powder box, so then we cut some splints and we took this friction tape and I fixed them for him and kept on working. But they was still numb. When we started out that night, they were beginning to hurt. By god, by the time he got his shower, boy, he was white! But I never saw such guts in my life.

He was the same boy that when he left here, he took off with 4,000 dollars of the union funds. They were part of the Mafia...what is that big mine? [Sunshine Mine, Moscow, Idaho?] You know, that big, hard rock mine out here in Idaho, just not too long ago had a disaster? He was working there, and this detective come up and talked to him and he saw...Bill didn't have a dime on earth and he had a family and the man said—well, he knew the money was gone—and he said, "Hell there's no use to bring you in and try you for this," he said, "it'd be just a lot of expense for nothing." He said, "Now we know the circumstances." He said, "You stay here and take care of your family, and we'll just skip this." The union just passed it up. But you never saw such a lad!

SC: Well, what did he do?

JS: Well, when he was in the hard rock?

SC: Yes.

JS: He had to go into the hard rock mine because he didn't dare to go back into the coal mine because these reports that'd been going in after he stole that money. You see, they'd a had him. So he had to stick to the high rent work in the hard rock. The last I heard of him, he died of tuberculosis because he was an awful drinker. I know one night after pay day I had, I think, 35 cents left. It was about two o'clock in the morning, and I was going back to the hotel. I met Bill coming up the street, and he said, "Have you got any money?"

Well, I said, "I got 35 cents, Bill."

"Well," he said, "that won't feed either of us." He said, "Give me the 35 cents, and I'll run into the blackjack game. We'll build it up, and we'll both have a good supper and then we'll go home." In about two minutes, he come out and he said, "Well, you better go on down to the hotel!" And by god! (laughs) His brother finally got...this pit boss finally had to take his check and turn it over to his wife because if they paid him at the mine, he never got home with a lousy dime. As far as a gambler went, why, good god, any ten-year old kid could've taken him. He was just one of them wild, reckless people but a lot of fun.

I know (unintelligible) so the mines weren't working very good. It was winter or something like that, and I used to go to the liquor store and for 85 cents I could get a pint of squirrel [cheap] whiskey. I'd go down to the mine, and I'd say, "How she going, Bill?" Just visiting with the boys, and we'd have-a few drinks and sit around talking.

"Well," he'd say, "it's about time to go downtown...to go down and get to work." He'd turn to me, and he'd take another drink. "Oh hell," he said, "get your pit clothes on and go with us." He said, "I'll give you a shift!" By god, I'd go down there, and for 85 cents, I could make two dollars. I figured what...well, 30-some cents. By god, of course, we didn't kill ourselves, but it'd work every time because he was flat broke and anything for a drink of whisky. I thought, well, it wasn't exactly cricket, but one has to survive. I really enjoyed that poor soul. They were all a bunch of wild "Arkansasers" that Jeffries brought up here because he didn't have to pay them union wages.

This Snake, as they called him—Wiley was his name—he eventually ended up as the state mine inspector in Alaska. Every pay day, why, he'd...all these boys would bring him tribute. One'd bring him a quarter of beef, another would bring him a case of eggs, some would bring him bottles of booze of all kinds. Everything you could think of. Well, he'd invite me up to the house and he never said anything and I didn't either, but I walked through the kitchen—here'd be these apple boxes full of booze, this meat and this eggs and stuff that these guys had given him to hold a job. He knew I loved gin, and he'd get me loaded. Finally I'd realize I had to go back to the hotel—I was blind drunk—and I was afraid to get on the sidewalk for I'd fall off. So I'd walk down the middle of the street. Every time I'd go by a restaurant, the smell of that food would make me so dog sick, I'd just get down on my knees! (laughs) But he was one of those guys you liked—he'd do anything in the world for you.

There's a lot of men with seniority rights over me, but he'd cook up some reason that he had to use me. Of course, the union men knew that they didn't dare cross him up because he could...they could louse you up to beat hell. I had a wonderful time with him. Well, I just enjoyed the darned outfit, but I knew what they were...you know. I knew how they operated. Then finally, I don't know what caused him to quit here, but he went back to Arkansas a little while. Then he quit it and went up to Alaska and got on there as State Mine Inspector. He was one of these boys that if anything went wrong, well, you could cross his palm with silver and everything was beautiful again.

Let me see. We had about 50 inches of coal. I could walk by bending my head, but a man your size, he had his butt always trimmed off with the...He'd hit the roof and rub the hide off—

SC: How tall are you, Del?

JS: Five foot two and a half. (laughs) By god—

SC: Is that with socks or without?

JS: I guess that's with my socks and boots on! At that time we used carbide lamps, and they were...you wore them your cap, but after you got the belt lamp, the back, it would protect you from rubbing against the roof. I loved them carbide lamps because they'd...the water would feed and it'd kind of plug up, and the lamp would get fainter and fainter. Then you'd reach up, open the valve, let a little water in and that flame would shoot out there for about 18 inches and light up the whole country. Then it'd dwindle down and dwindle down. You always had to have water with you because if your lamp run out of water, it'd stop, and you know...There was a natural means like they had in the days when they had the war gas. If you ran out of water, well, you always had an available supply, but the odor was kind of rough and god...I was wondering about these girls that worked in the mines would've done in the carbide days. It would've been a hell of a job to get (unintelligible). The carbide lamps were good, but the light varied so much, where a battery lamp was steady and made a hell of a good light. Then, of course, like when you're moving coal with a hoist and everything you have to depend on light signals. The man that's handling the trip, he signals you. Because I used to run the inside hoist, and, of course, I could see him down there 400 or 500 feet. He'd signal me whether he wanted uphill or downhill. Like you'd pull it up past the switch and I wanted it back down, he'd signal me and I could handle it. Oh, there's a kind of good life because I loved that banter among the men. I just always enjoyed that, and everybody always had something good to say when he'd come along. What I admired so much about it was the kindness of those fellows to watch a greenhorn, to see that he didn't get hurt. They'd work with you, lord. Course, I would never made a much greater miner than I would a sheep man because I was a born day dreamer and I'd forget what we were doing about half the time. I always had a lot of fun at it, and I did try it because this was (unintelligible) joke. Everything they had was just wreckage. These Jeffries would go down to Arkansas and buy that trash that they'd thrown out of the mine and bring it up here and patch it up. Nothing would run for over two hours at a time—just broke down.

Ken Feyhl: You're talking about the machinery?

JS: Yes, not the men! (laughs) No, they didn't break down so fast. They were tough cookies. But my god, those union men were at heart...They were Jeffries men, and he could do anything he wanted and get away with it. What used to tickle me, if we got...We pulled six car trips a load at a time out to dump, and if we got 20 of those six-car trips a day, he sent down a keg of beer which would cost him...Oh, at that time, I suppose four dollars or four-fifty or something like that. These poor bastards would work like hell, and they'd get that lousy keg of beer. They'd be paying about a dollar and a half, giving him all kinds of labor. What a lousy deal to get that can of beer! I thought, "Jesus! Of all the stupidity!" It wasn't up to me to change the setup at all. I laughed at them.

KF: They knocked themselves out, really?

JS: Oh yes, but just the idea that they thought they were getting something for nothing, and they would love (unintelligible) a lot of that. Then finally, I don't know what caused this Wiley to quit, but Tony Boyle's brother, Jack, he was pit bossing then. There was a real Scotchman, and god, did he have an awful temper! Well him and I got on beautifully. He was forever fighting with the men, and by god, one day he come down one day to change clothes in his locker. They had a clock over the top of his. Locker door, and there was a hole in there and somebody had lowered a bottle of wine down in there—kind of butter things up. When he found that bottle of wine, boy, did he blow up! He called everybody to attention, and he said, "Listen, boys, I'm making pretty good money here, and any goddamn time I need a drink," he said, "I can buy it!" He says, "There's nobody buying any favors from me!" He really read the riot act to them. But I found out how to handle him, and I always used to—when I left the hotel—get an extra one of these cakes with filling in it and everything called the Blue Moon. I'd put that in my lunch box, and when he'd come by I'd say, "Well, Jack, how you doing? Are you hungry?" I'd say, "I brought you down a piece of cake down here." He'd stop and eat that, and he'd visit with me. He'd tell me all these other guys that were giving him such a bad time. I would say, "Goddam, Jack, they're Jeff's men, and there ain't much you can do with them. You're doing a fine job here. Whenever there'd be a chance to put me on a better job, he'd do it. Of course, he had no right to do that over the seniority men, but he'd get away with it. He was a guy that had, oh, a wild temper. One of the men was telling me he used to go with him to the dances. Jack was married to a very nice girl and he'd get into something. He said, it never failed, when they left the dance, he said, "I had to lead him home. His eyes would beat shut." My god, he couldn't help himself. He was just one of those violent people, but after you knew how to get along, he was a swell chap. I like him and—

KF: Scotchman?

JS: Scotchman. Full blooded. He ended up...he fought the union for 30 years, and then by god, when he retired from the mine, Tony Boyle, his brother, was a big shot in the union. This Jim over here was a, oh, rep...I forget what they call those representatives, international something or other, I forget what it was. Anyway, what did they do but after all this battling with the union, they take Jack into the union and they give him a bigshot job. They went down here to a convention for the union, was having a big time there. I guess Jack just got a few too many within him, and he died with a stroke down there. He dropped dead right on the convention floor.

SC: Who was Jim?

JS: Jim? Jim Boyle. He was a district representative or district president. I forget what the hell they called him. He was a brother of Tony and Jack, and this Antoinette Boyle is the daughter—Tony's daughter—and she's an attorney over there. Not only that, but a very beautiful woman.

SC: Did you know Tony Boyle?

JS: I met him a few times. But I never got acquainted with him. He was never here much, but...if there was ever a man that loved himself, it was Tony. When I saw him, I thought of that old French writer, whoever he was, he said, "Learn to love yourself. It is the only lifelong romance." I thought, "By god, if that wasn't just about right!" (laughs) Tony really loved himself. We used to get that Miners Journal, and if his picture wasn't on at least every other page, there was a mention made of it. (laughs) But that was what he had—what happened to him. He just outgrew his position in life and, by god, now when he hired this...Actually, I was surprised, to think that he would be stupid enough to go for that because...You know that if you and I commit murder, there's a chance for leak because there's two of us in it. With about 30 of them in this deal, how in the hell he thought he could get away with that, I can't imagine! I would've sworn that he wasn't involved, but by god, it turned out he was! It was that egotist in him that made him do that. It wasn't the money so much as the fact that somebody else was trying to step in.

KF: How long did you know him, Del? Where did you personally meet him?

JS: Well, I met him down here at the Arcade one night. We were down there for a drink and he came in and, of course, it was up to him, being the gun of the union, to buy us all a drink.

SC: Who was the other guy that was there?

JS: Just a whole bunch of miners. The man that was with him, I think, was Steve Mazene. He was what you call your...oh, district something or other. He had a job paid him about 16,000 dollars a year, and all in the Christ's world he did was go around and make trouble. He was a real pain in the behind. I detested the fellow. But of course, I didn't know these men well enough to know where things stood or how it stood. I was never that much concerned, and one time they made me a member of the pit committee. The idea there was, there were three of us. There was a grievance come up—the men were dissatisfied about something— they told us about it, and we were supposed to go to the pit boss and tell him about it and want the trouble straightened out. But some damn fool thing came up, and they called for me to go up and see Jack. I went up and talked to him, and hell, I forgot really what it was all about and didn't pay any attention. Finally when the decision was made, I forgot to call the guys that were supposed to know about it, and the next day I was uptown having a good time drinking there. This Georgie Morgan, he was one of the union guns, and he said, "Did you call so and so?"

I said, "About what?"

"Well," he said, "about the grievance."

"Christ," I said, "I forgot there was a grievance!"

He said, "Jesus, you didn't call them?"

I said, "No!"

"Well," he said, "he's in Lewistown now. I'll have to try and get him on the phone."

"Well," I said, "what the hell's the difference,"—if I didn't (unintelligible) him—"Wait'll he comes back!"

"Oh no," he said, "he should be notified!"

So they called him up because I didn't give a damn what they did with it. I didn't want any part of that stuff, and what did I know about it? I'd spent my life on a sheep ranch. I didn't know all this damn stuff and the boys misinterpreted me. They thought I was intelligent because I read a lot. I laughed, and I had completely forgotten about the whole damn thing! (laughs)

They didn't bother me with any more of it because...But you know they always accused me of being a company man because...Well now like I was coming out of the mine, and I knew the drivers had to come in with the empty cars and everything so I'd keep the switches and get things lined up so that when they came in, they didn't have to do it. Or I'd check the pumps and stuff and geez! they'd get on me and say, "Goddam, you're subject to a fine. You're doing another guy's work!"

"Well," I said, "Listen, what I'm trying to do is help out a buddy. \ I'm not getting paid for this! I want to make his life easier. If you call that...this old bullshit about brotherhood--if that's the way it is, I don't really care for a hell of a lot of it!" I said, "If I ever had any favor with the company, all I wanted to do was to help another guy out!" They were that kind. By god, if something was left there that you had forgotten to do, they wouldn't do it for you. Hell, no! They'd wait until the boss come down and saw it and then raise hell about it. Well, I thought, what is the...if you're working with these men and you could do something to help them, for Christ's sake, why not? It's only the decent thing to do. I used to get into it over that, and then they'd tell me, "Well, you can't do this and you can't do that."

"Well," I said, "if that's what you call brotherhood, I just don't want a hell of a lot of it, that's all!" I don't know. Their attitude was that way, and they thought the company was some kind of...well, you might say it like the Communist regime hanging over you—something that was to torture and torment you. I finally told them, I said, "Did it ever occur to you fellows that it's as much your interest to keep this mine going as it is the company? We're all eating off of it, and if the damn thing shuts down, you're going to hurt a damn sight quicker than the company is."

"Well, that's not the attitude for union men."

"No, but," I said, "if you got brains enough to realize that after all that, if this thing don't run, we're all in a hell of a spot. I don't see why you boys can't wake up." Finally, they got to where they quit pestering me, but god! I just couldn't understand their attitudes, because if everybody

would help, it makes it easier on everyone. Winters like this, we'd get one day's work a week, sometimes not that much. I'd come in from the homestead and work all winter, and I'd owe 20 to 50 dollars board when I left here. I'd have to go make it somewhere else. But I couldn't quit it because I like it too well.

SC: What did you like about it, Del?

JS: Well, I don't know. When you're underground like that, it seemed to me you were kind of safe and secure. You knew your surroundings, you knew what was going on, you knew where you were at. Then I loved to work with the crew. I loved their old bull and their horseplay, and then I never saw a place in my life where the time passes as quickly as it does in the mine, because you're working fast and there's something doing all the time. You never get bored with it like you do a lot of other jobs. As far as the danger element went, why, if you knew what you were doing there was no real danger. You could protect yourself a damn site better than you could on the (unintelligible) everything, because like they said when you're working around bad rock, you test it. If it's bad, either timber it up or take it down, and you had every opportunity to look after yourself. I used to work alone in the mine night after night because I kind of...well, it didn't bother me. I enjoyed it, was by myself, and I could do as I damned pleased. I knew what had to be done. Then when I had to pump out these places—these rooms—Jeffries had an old pump and they give me cause. The damned pump had no foot valve on it, and so I'd have to go up to the entry and gather up this mule manure and then pack it into the pump to make a plug. Then when I'd fill the pump with water. I could start it, well, the water would be coming. Then it would take the manure out through the pump, and away she was going. Now, a foot valve wouldn't have cost only four or five dollars, but Jeffries wasn't about to spend that kind of money. The things like that that always tickled me.

SC: Well, did you have mules in the mine?

JS: Yes, when I started they would use pit mules then. They were clever little devils, and I used to get a kick out them. The men were mean to them, and they'd watch their chances. When they saw they had one of them cornered, they'd kick the living Jesus out of him. Then there was one guy, and he was a mean bastard anyway. He had a (unintelligible)—a long piece of metal pipe that you stuck in the holes in the wheels, and they hit against the body of the car to stop the load. They called it a sprag, and you used that to stop the car with. Well this guy had this sprag, and he was going to hit the mule with it. The mule knew what was going on and just as swung down, the mule stepped forward and he hit himself across the arm and broke his arm. (laughs) Jesus you ought to heard the men (unintelligible) about that and said, "Too bad your head wasn't here!" But he was really mean.

Then we had one little mule called Star, and she'd watch her chances and they have a butt chain that was on the (unintelligible) feed behind the mule. You hooked that in the links on the car to pull them with, and if you didn't...The men that knew her left the butt chains on because it'd catch on the rail or something, she couldn't get up. But if you hooked them up on the

harness, she'd be like Snowball—the next thing you'd see, she'd be going up the entry, just on a dead run and she'd go clear out on top. It was about...oh, it was a good three-quarters of a mile out there. Then the driver had to walk clear out and get her and bring her back. Well, I was sitting down one idle day, and I'd never done any of this driving but Wiley said, "Oh, you go down and do the best you can. There's some coal to clean up, and you pull these cars." I got this old granddad and got him going on the car, and by god, I forgot about these crossbars—these timbers over the mine that support the roof—and I raised my head up at the wrong time and it pulled my cap off and I lost my lamp. There in the dark, it fell in the water. Well, here I was down in the pitch black, and I didn't know where anything was and I couldn't sprag the car to stop it because I couldn't see what I was doing. I heard old Granddad going on down the entry. He knew that run, and when he got to a certain place he just swung off the track into one of these dark holes and stopped. He braced himself and he held the car. Well, I crawled around in the water until I found my lamp, and I dried it out and got it going. Then I went back down there, and here was the old boy waiting patiently for me to unhook him and let him go. But was that a good picture of Snowball, was that a good picture of that dog? He's a fine fellow.

But those mules, honest to god, they were just like him, they were just as smart as a fox.

KF: How long did they work them there in the mine? How late?

JS: You mean, the hours?

KF: No, when did they quit working mules in the mines?

JS: Well, they took the mules out of the mine there...Well, I quite that mine and went to this railroad mine then. They quite using the mules, oh, I'd say it must've been along in '41 was the last...No, no, it was before that. It must've been in the late '30s they quit using the mules.

SC: We need to know your mother's name and your father's name and your brother's name.

JS: Oh, my mother. You want her maiden name? Signa Sophia Malm. She was born in Sweden—full-blooded Swede. My dad's name was Lewis Israel Stark. He hated the Israel, and he was born in Indiana. They were Pennsylvania Dutch people. My brother's name is Ernest Benjamin Stark—

SC: Now when was it that you people came out to Montana?

JS: Well, now I really don't remember, but I think my Dad came out here about 1910, and we followed him along, I imagine, in a...He put in a winter here fixing the cabin. I think we came in 19...Early 1911 we came out here, and he had the homestead set up and then—

SC: How old were your parents and you and Ben when you came?

JS: God, let me see. My dad must've been in his late 30s, and my mother must've been...Well, she was only a year or two younger than he was, and I think I was...Let's see, I would've been a little better than five years old, and Ben would've been...oh, he would've been only a year and a half or two years old at that time.

SC: Now you mentioned your cow and you used a word for it, I think, a name. Was it Maude?

JS: Maude. Yes, old Maude. Yes, she was a big Holstein, a big quiet old brute—pleasant.

SC: Now another time you were mentioning something which sounded kind of like Maude when you said it, but I think it was Ma. You said something about she'd never borrowed anything and you were talking about Ma.

JS: I meant my mother, yes. Never occurred to her to borrow anything. They didn't do that in Chicago.

SC: Okay, now, another time you said something about rustling old Snake, and then it turned out that that was Snake Robinson?

JS: Yes. He was the pit boss, and when we're rustling you're just down and out looking for a job.

SC: And then you talked about entry into what sounded to me like six deep or something like that.

JS: Sixth East. You come down the main entry and when they turn these other entries off, and you went down these side entries then you drove off of them. Well, the Sixth East was the last entry there was driving. The mine was going deeper and deeper, and after the Sixth they went down another 100 feet and turned to the Seventh and so on. We offered that one, the Sixth East Entry there, we'd put in maybe ten rooms going...they always drove them uphill to get the grade to carry the load down to the mule, and they'd pick them up on the main track. Well, when the driver would come along, he'd yell up in there, "Drop out three!" Then we'd sprag the car up, pull the blocks out, and let it go. If you forgot to put the sprags in and pull the blocks out, Jesus! Down that car would go, and if it didn't go off the track, the trailer would go hell boiling down the line and the driver would run out there yelling "Wild car! Wild car!" Then the other drivers coming up, they'd unhook the mules and get off the track and let them bump, but so many times (unintelligible). Forget and trailer loose. Jesus! Would they go, loaded with a couple of ton of coal.

One time I was working with this kid...He was full of hell. He was a big Austrian fellow, and they'd been hollering about we'd been loading too big a lumps. When they'd hit the crusher, they'd throw the belt off, He said, "We'll fix old Ben!" That was the top boss. So him and I jacked the back of the car up and blocked it, and we had a great big chunk of coal that just

about filled the car. We took a jack, and boy, we worked for about an hour and a half and we pushed that big lump and we pried the gate up. They had an end gate that opens when a car on a chain and dumped it into the hopper, and we got that big lump of coal in there, shut the gate, and then we covered it all around with little chunks of coal and loose coal. It looked just perfect. When it went out on top and they went to dump it, it come...it came up here to these...well, they were kind of hooks there that held the car for a moment. The boys come along and give it a little push, and then it tipped. This end gate had a hook on it caught on a chain that opened the end gate, and then the coal shot out of it down into the grind...the crusher. Of course, when they opened this goddamned gate, it was lucky it opened up enough to let this big lump out, but when it hit that crusher, it threw every goddamned belt off and that crusher and everything else in the mine. They flew off and dropped about 40 feet because the tippie had them way in the air. That top boss then, he said, "If I can catch the sons of bitches that did this, they'll never get a job again in the coal fields!" (laughs)

Oh, how we worked to get that. I suppose the thing weighed 15, 18 hundred pounds—that lump. But we jacked it in there and nobody ever give us away, and we were careful. We were supposed to check these cars. You had a little check you put on it to show whose car it was, but we left the check off. I think Ben knew who did it all right, but of course he couldn't prove it. God, we laughed about that for years. The boys said the belts flew in every direction, but that's funny. It just stopped up at the...Of course, it was too big, they couldn't move it. They had to use one of the men to bring an electric drill up there and a bit. They drilled it and put a light shot of powder in it and fractured it. Then they took it apart with picks and bars, and we had (unintelligible) loused up for about two hours.

I wouldn't have done it myself because I hated to see the extra work for the men, but this Jim, he was just one of those kind, great big bastard. He thought that'd be a lot of fun because then...Of course, Jim was one of them kind, he was habitually broke. I never met him on Main Street, but he asked me for four bits and they'd go over to Billy and go broke. Then they'd phone in and say, "Well, I can't make it today. The generator went out on my car or something is broke."

Ben'd say, "That's all right, you lying bastard!" He said, "I'll send you enough money on the bus to come back, but," he said, "you better damn well be here tomorrow morning!"

We had that Smoky Joe Louis. God, he was a drinking bastard, and he'd come to work early because if they caught him drunk, they wouldn't let him go in the mine. But I've seen him go down into the mine ahead of time so he wouldn't be caught. He'd forget to fasten his belt, and his lamp would be dragging in the water alongside of the track. Finally he'd get sick and when he hit that warm air, lay down...Then he'd fasten up his lamp and go on in and once he got down there and got to moving, of course, and got to drinking water again, he'd come out of it. But, god, you're not supposed to let a man go down in there drunk like that because he's liable to kill himself. Then one time he went to Billings, him and another guy, and they drank up everything they had. They had these two girls with them, and they didn't know what the hell to

do. They were out of gasoline—they forgot to gas up—so he called up Wiley, the pit boss, and told him, he said, "Gee, I'm in a hell of a shape!" He said, "The generator went out on my car, and, by god, we're here and we got the girls. We don't have breakfast money or a damned thing"

Wiley said, "Listen, you lying bastard," he said, "I'm going to call a friend of mine. You go there and he'll give you 5 dollars to get your breakfast on and feed the girls and get you gasoline to get back here." When they got back it was about 11 o'clock in the morning, and so they needed more—they wanted another drink. Smoky, he took his shoes off and hid them under the stairs up the...into the office—where the coal office was. When he went up there in his sock feet, he told Ben, he said, "Goddam it, Ben, I might as well be honest with you." He said, "I got drunk last night and I went to sleep in the bar, and some son of bitch stole my shoes! I got to have 5 dollars!"

Matthew said, "Listen, you cheap liar," he said, "here's 10 dollars. Go down and sober them all up, and you be at work tomorrow morning," he says, "or you're done!" By god, they went down there, and of course it didn't take them over an hour to drink the rest of it up. But I laughed about that. He walked up them stairs in his socks feet, and, of course, everybody knew what was going on. Bhey were a crazy outfit, but they were fun.

SC: Del, how old were you when you started working in the mines?

JS: Let me see. I was about 28.

SC: Twenty-eight. Now you spent all your mining time in coal mines, underground coal mines in the Roundup area, right?

JS: Yes, I never worked anywhere else. I always wanted to try the hard rock, but I was afraid of it.

SC: At one point early...when you were talking about Snake, you mentioned that he got in a fight in Arkansas with somebody or something and I couldn't understand.

JS: Well, it was at a dance and now, he was one of them, they got tangled up with a...You know how the people down there fight all the time. But it was his brother, Bill, who killed the man.

SC: Okay, but you don't remember the word you used as to who Snake got into a fight with.

JS: Oh no, no. I never heard it from him and his brother.

SC: No, I meant just a few minutes ago and you don't remember the word you used. You said that he got into a fight with somebody.

JS: No, we didn't know who they were.

SC: No, you! You said this.

JS: Oh.

SC: You used a word earlier today when you were describing the fight in Arkansas, you used some word as to who they got into a fight with. You don't remember?

JS: No, I didn't know. It was just a crowd there. I don't know who they got in the battle with, but it was his brother Bill and him that were getting the lean end of it. So they backed into this kitchen, and they found that flatiron. That's what saved their hide because they were tough cookies down there.

SC: You mentioned two or three times making splints from a powder box for Snake Robinson, and when you talked about a powder box you meant a box that...a wooden box that the dynamite came in?

JS: Yes.

SC: Were the dynamite that you used—

JS: No, we used black powder. It came in them sticks. No, dynamite is too fast. It'd shatter the coal, and you need a slow explosion and that's not hard coal. It came...oh, it was big sticks. I imagine, about two inches around and about a foot long. They sent the powder down in a case at a time, and we'd distribute it out of the—

KF: Call it powder, but it was...but it wasn't really a powder.

JS: It was black powder.

KF: Oh, it was.

JS: Black powder, but it was made up in sticks. In the old days, they used to send the powder down in these cans—just iron cans with a screw top. The miners took newspaper and made a cartridge and filled it with this black...loose black powder. It looked like little...about the size of navy beans—they tiny navy beans—and they made up the powder themselves and put the fuses in it and then tamped them up. Then you made your dummies, the same way with newspapers to shoot it. It would smokier than hell. Two or three times they were short of men, and I had to help the shot fire. We started at the bottom, and we had to light, oh, eight or ten of these shots in each room. God, you lit it with your lamp and, after I lit the first one, it seemed that the time...the time was just dragging because, of course, I didn't realize how long a five-minute fuse took. I'd be so nervous I could hardly hold the fuse. Then we'd run to the next

room and light that. But we had to wait until we heard if all of these shots in each room went because if you put in five charges and four went, you had to report it because there was powder there that the men couldn't dig out safely. I remember, we tried to keep ahead of the smoke because it'd start pushing that smoke like a London fog, It'd just strangle you. If you got...made two or three mistakes, you'd be in a hell of a shape. You'd be working, and that damn powder smoke made you sicker than a dog.

SC: Del, if you went to work in the mines when you were about 28, which is what I think you said a few minutes ago, this would've been about 1933 or so?

JS: When did they first start paying social security? [Nineteen] thirty-five wasn't it?

SC: I really don't remember.

JS: Well, I started to work in the mines the first year they paid social security, and I think it was '35.

SC: Then how long did you work in the mines?

JS: I used to work in the winter from then on, and then when I come back from the service, I never went back. I was sorry always afterwards that I didn't. And I had—

SC: Well, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute, now, in the first place, when you say the service, you mean World War Two.

JS: Yes.

SC: Okay, but you did work again, because after you sold out your sheep operation then you did go back in the mines and when was that?

JS: That was ah, in 19...There was a 20-year gap there. I went back in 1961, I think. I went back to work again, and then I worked ten years straight for Bud Nies out here. As far as I can find out, I'm drawing compensation yet a mine injury and that'll go on my time. I'm having a little trouble. I've been trying to get my pension out of them.

SC: You say Bud Nies?

JS: Yes, Bud Nies or Nees. They pronounce it N-e-e-s here, but it's really N-i-z-e. But you know how people'll something in pronunciation started. He was a good kid. I really like the boy.

SC: What was the name of that mine?

JS: N-I-E-S Coal Company.

SC: What was the name of the mine that...oh, I can't think of his name now.

JS: Well, that was Jeffries Coal. Jeffries Coal Company. I went from there to this Klein Mine which is the Republic Coal Company, they call it. It was owned by the Milwaukee Railroad. We dug coal for the Milwaukee and that mine you worked the year round there because they had to have railroad coal all the time. I know I got in a little jackpot there because as soon as a man was killed out there—out there at that railroad mine...There was a shotgun outfit. Everybody in town that was with the mine would race out there to see if they could get a job. Hell, they were there before they got his body out of the mine, By god, the fella that boarded down here, this Mrs. Besel, she was kind of a friend of this superintendent for the Milwaukee, for this mine deal out here. She hit him up for a job for me, and he said, "Yes," he said, "you tell him to come out at a certain time." Well, here I go out there, ahead of all these poor devils that are roughing for six months or a year and go to work. Well, it didn't help my popularity a hell of a lot. (laughs)

They put me on with a guy to work, they called him "Crazy Mike" and I was nipping for him. He run the joy loader, and he was always...well, when I went down that morning—first morning I went to work—"By god," he says, "it looks like the man's been using chains here." He says, "They used to run the Republic Coal Company. Now they're running the New Owl Cafe."

I said, "I don't care, as far as I'm concerned, Mike, who the hell runs it, as long as I got a job!" That man was really a mental defective, and he was an impossible guy to work with. They told me there was 80-some men quit rather than work with him in that mine. When he wanted to work, he was as skillful and fast as light, but if he got a bullying spell and got ornery, you knew you couldn't do anything with him. Finally, he got smart with me one time and give me a bad time. I'd pull the cars under that boom of the loader, and he'd get one of these mean spells and he'd cut the machine off. If there was 200 pounds of coal in the car, I would just take it out and send it on out and he said, "By god, you can't do that!"

I'd say, "You can't?" So I'd send it on out and finally word would come down, "What the hell's a matter down there?"

"Well," I said, "whenever Mike quits loading the coal, I send the car out. If there's enough to cook your breakfast, that's fine with me. I don't give a damn how he loads them"

They said, "Well, by god, you could lose your job!"

"Well," I said, "it would be a pleasure after working with this son of a bitch!" By god, then one time we got into it and oh, he got mean as hell. I just took a swing at him, and I thought, "Well, goddamn his soul, I'll just bop him one!" Well course, he was so much faster than I was, why, he hit me about twice. I lost my light and everything else, and then I finally found it and I said, "Well, Mike, by god, if you want to load coal here, you load it yourself. To hell with you!" I went down off out of the main entry and told that face boss—they had a man for each section—and I

said, "I'm not going to work with that bastard anymore!" I told him why. Then there was another fellow there, George Bidar, and he said, "George, you go up and take his place."

George said, "Oh no, by god, I'm not going up there!"

He said, "Are you going out?"

I said, "I certainly am!"

"Well," he said, "I'll go with you!" We went out on top, and then I went to see this, oh, I don't know what they call him...some kind of a manager there. I said, "Do you run the mine, or does that idiot down there run it?!"

"Well," he said, "you know, he's a wonderful man. They had him as a pacesetter he was so damned good." They'd give him the pick of the run, they'd give him the pick of the men, anything he wanted because he set a pace the other men were supposed to try and keep up with. He said, "What's the trouble?" and I told him. "Well," he said, "he gives me a lot of trouble."

"Well," I said, "that's your heartache, not mine! I said, "I just will not work with the son of a bitch anymore!"

"Well," he said, "You know, you could get laid off."

I said, "I'd prefer that, by god, to working with him." So, he knew very well that Mrs. Besel had been close enough to hold my job for me, so he said, "Well," he said, "you come back in the morning and we'll put you..." He sent me down with another outfit, and then they'd keep sending men into Mike. They'd stay two or three days, and then they'd come out again. They wouldn't work with him. Well, finally he got so bad that one time the general manager from Chicago was down there, and Mike and him got into it and he tore the fellow's shirt off down there in the mine and boy! that fixed it. They laid him off right then and there.

SC: He tore off the big shot's shirt?

JS: Yes! He grabbed him and tore his shirt off and that's...I knew it was going to happen. But I didn't really blame Mike because the man was...Well, he was a psychopath. He wasn't right mentally, and he was a good worker. When he wanted to work he was a nice guy to work, but I hurt his feelings one time because I told the men I was working with, I said, "I don't trust that bastard! And if there's an accident down there and I'm hurt or killed, I want you boys to see that that son of a bitch is charged with murder!" They went and told him. The next morning I went down, and he called me to one side and he said, "You know, you really hurt my feelings!"

I said, "How's that, Mike?" Then he told me about it. "Well," I said, "I mean it, Mike! I believe that!" I said, "You're just the kind of a bastard that'd do a trick like that!"

"Well," he said, "you know I wouldn't!"

"Well," I said, "I'm not too damned sure!"

SC: What was his last name, Del?

JS: Bladic. B-l-a-d-i-c.

SC: And was it the New Elk Cafe.

JS: New Elk Cafe.

SC: And that was run by Mrs. Besel? How do you spell her name?

JS: Mrs. Besel. B-e-s-e-l. She was quite a gunner. She was a committeewoman for the Democratic Party, and the way they used to use her was pitiful. She'd feed these politicians and make her contribution that she couldn't afford to. She was old country Austrian, and she just loved that feel of power. But she was a good friend of mine. She put up many a battle for me, and they used to tease me down there in the mine about hiding behind a woman. "Well," I said, "it don't matter what you get behind. In case of trouble, you know you're safe!" I had a good time out of it, though. She was a pretty good old egg in a lot of ways. She came to this country a peasant girl, and she married this Besel. He was a miner, but oh, he was a tough son of a bitch!

She worked at Giffon first, out of Great Falls, here, a miners' boarding house there, and she boarded 400 miners and she...Mind you, that woman would walk down the row of dinner buckets while these girls were putting up the men's lunches, and she knew what each one of the men wanted in his dinner bucket. She would check those girls out, and by god, she put up some good meals. She was a hell of a good hand that way but had absolutely no education and she had no records whatever. When the income tax men come down to check on her, there was one fellow stayed there three weeks, and then he just broke down and went back to Helena and told them that it was hopeless. He said that nothing could be done. He said, "I estimated what I could and the rest," he says, "there's no possible way in this world of checking." Because she carried the money in her stocking, and she had a wad in there that looked like a growth on her leg. She paid cash all the time and she was generous with the money, but she didn't know what it was to make a record of anything. By god, the people she billed, she was good-hearted. If you were up against it, she'd board you for a year and never say a whimper about it.

Of course, I was down there and just lived at the hotel, and I'd go in there when it was. Lots of time I'd come back from the mine, and put my dinner bucket down and she said, "Well, hurry

up and eat your supper," she said, "the cook is uptown and drunk again, and you'll have to go get him." So I'd hurry up my supper and she'd give me a 10 dollar bill. I'd go uptown and I'd find him drunk and I'd buy him a few drinks to keep feeding him to come back to work. Finally the 10 dollars was gone, then I had to use my own money. Lots of times I'd get him down to the back gate—I had him all most in the kitchen—and then away he'd go back uptown. I'd go in and tell her, I'd say, "Mrs. Besel, I got him damn near in here." Well, she'd go and get another five or ten.

"Well," she'd say, "stay with it. Try to get him back." God, sometimes it'd be two in the morning, and I had to go to work at five. I'd get up and be out to the mine at five. What I sweated out with those boys! Then she'd fight with the cooks. She had a violent temper. I remember we'd get up in the morning, and I'd hear them down there—her and the cook would be quarreling at the back door in the kitchen. He had his own knives and his own tools, and he'd get mad and he'd grabbed them up and put them into this little grip he had set up there. Then she'd plead him, and he'd go back to work. I'd come down, and she'd say, "Get Tony." That's their son. We'd all stand there. "Charley, for Christ's sake, don't quit now! We're up against it. No chance to get a cook." We'd plead with him. Finally, "Well..." he'd go back and he'd work. Maybe to an hour later all the (unintelligible) go through again. I used to work like hell in there. Of course, she appreciated it. So she always put up this battle for me to see that I got a job. If I'd tell her my troubles, why she'd land right on the manager from Chicago and raise hell about it. Then, of course, he'd get on the superintendent out there, and for a while there I was rather unpopular among the boys because I was getting too much help. But I thought, "Well, I better use it!"

SC: Del, early today you mentioned something about a certain type of whiskey at 85 cents a bottle, I guess. Squirrel?

JS: Yes. No, I don't know what the brand was, but they called all that cheap whiskey "squirrel whiskey." I don't remember the name, brand, but it was the cheapest whiskey you could buy. Of course to those boys, it didn't make any difference as long as it was alcohol.

SC: How much did you make a shift back when you first went to work?

JS: Three eighty.

SC: And then how much were you making when you...when the mine closed down a few years ago?

JS: When I was drafted, I was making seven twenty a shift. Then, see, I come back, and I was called back to work and I never went. That's one thing I'm having a little trouble with the union over. I was supposed to have gone back to the mine when I come back from the service, but they were having a jangle out there farting around, having too much labor trouble. I thought,

"Oh, the hell with it!" I didn't think about this pension thing at the time, and finally the union made so damned much trouble that they just shut the damned mine down.

SC: How much were you making in Bud Nies' mine?

JS: Well, I was making about 25 dollars a day there, and then Bud paid me a little extra because I had to go down about an hour and a half ahead of the men to inspect the mine. Then I had to call out and tell them that everything was okay, and the men could come in. When I went out at night, I had to make out a report and sign it, and of course, at that time we had all this safety stuff starting up. I was supposed to check out all the...to see that the (unintelligible) was okay and that the air was coming in at the...Then I had to test for gas. They paid 400 dollars for a damned little outfit.

I forget what they called it, but they cost about 400 dollars apiece, and they weren't a hell of a lot bigger than that. You took them down there, and then you had to have a safety lamp, and you tested all these places for gas. Well, there was no gas in this field. It was a hopeless gesture, but it had to be done. I'd go down there and go through this horse's ass performance, and then sign the papers and (unintelligible) the men. I'd call all the men to come on down. Bud paid me extra for that. I was taught like everybody else, window dressing, horseplay, but if it's the law, you got to do it. At night I had to take these papers after I signed them, and we put them in a metal box, away from the min. In case of fire, the records wouldn't be destroyed, so that if there was a disaster they had a last moment record of what was going on. But it finally ended up it just got so damned impossible, Bud quit it. I didn't mind it because I liked to go down there.

There was only once I really spooked up. I went down there once in the spring real early, and in the early spring when the earth kind of melts—kind of thawing out and expanding and contracting. I was down there alone in the mine, and all around me I could hear this rock breaking and failing and cracking. By god, I listened for a bit, and there was three or four ton (unintelligible). I thought, "God dammit. I'm here alone!" I walked clear out on top, and I stood there a few minutes all by myself—I never (unintelligible) anybody—and I thought, "Hell, it's been there for millions of years. It ought to hang a couple hours more." So I went back down and never told him and stayed with it, but it was the earth unpredictable because you don't have time to sound out all that area. He told me, he said, "Whatever you do, take care of yourself. Don't worry about anything else."

He was a good lad to work for. But it did break him up in business because that's the only thing he learned, you know, in all that time. Now he's got himself a motel down here about the little town of Cameron near the west gate of Yellowstone [National Park]. They've got a motel and all that stuff in there. But I don't know. I hated to see them shut it down because I sure loved it! Now if a fellow had it, lord god!

Another thing that interests me a great deal was that medical protection, that miner's welfare and that sort of thing. That's worth more than the additional wages because you're so fully protected. When I went to St. Vincent's over there, there was never a moment's fussing. They pay everything.

[Interim conversation, aside from the interview]

SC: What was the pitch of the veins of coal in this area here?

JS: I would imagine most of it'd run about three percent. It was fairly levelling but there was just sufficient...Course you would hit...it's uneven, just like an old lakebed. There was phosphorus ran up 15 or 20 percent—that would be only one room or two—but on the average I would say it didn't run much over three percent in the mines I worked with.

SC: Del, there was one other question, to go back. You mentioned earlier that Jack Boyle eyes were shot at the end of the dances. I assume that was from him being in fights and having his eyes blackened and so forth by other guys' fists.

JS: He had a violent temper, and he was always fighting somebody. Then in the company, this Pit Committee, they'd come out with a grievance, and then Jack'd settle with them. He'd wait until he got off of company property and fight with them there. Once in a while he'd run into a man he couldn't handle, and boy, they would work him over because they loved the opportunity.

SC: When you said something about going as fast as Snowball, you meant Snowball, the little white dog that you have here?

JS: Yes, he's really a good dog!

SC: Del, I've got an awful lot of background questions which I had designed here which we, as usual, don't have time to do. We never have time to do anything that's fun it seems like, so I'm going to save these questions and hope that we can go ahead another time and maybe complete more information.

JS: It was a shame to see the town die like it did. Because it was a wonderful set up here. Everybody was making good money, and I can remember in the old days when these Austrian women, raised as peasants...You'd go down to the house and here they'd come out going uptown and they had a sealskin coat or beaver coat on—an expensive fur coat, 500 or 600 bucks. They had a pair of sheepskin moccasins they made themselves. They just laid the hides together and sewed them around and cut out a hole to stick their foot in, and they'd paddle home just like a beaver. Here was this 600 dollar fur coat on because their husbands...At that time people were earning 40 dollars a month, and a machine man was paid by the shift and yardage. They paid you for every yard you made because it was work and they wanted to as

long as you could. Geez, they were making 600 dollars a month, and at that time that was the equivalent of about 2,000 dollars now. When the men bought a car, they didn't give a damn about the make or how many cylinders it had or anything else. If it was the biggest car that money could buy, and good god, they had some of them when they were parked in front of the house, you couldn't see the house. They were so happy! I never went into one of their houses yet, but when they come off shift, they showered and went home and they all wore that heavy wool underwear with...You got to wear that where you sweat a lot and then you don't take cold. There they'd be, setting at home with that big gallon of wine in their...in this underwear and had their pants on and their shoes off and by god, drinking to beat hell. One of those guys could drink a gallon of wine and never bat an eye. Ma'd be paddling around here in these big moccasins and the little kids...I used to go down there when I delivered for the grocery store, and she'd tell me what she wanted and I couldn't understand her because they didn't hear very good English. The little kid would be there, and he'd say, "For Christ's sake, Ma," he'd say, "Speak American!" He'd say, "You're not in Austria anymore!" He'd give her hell.

I'd say, "What did your mother want?" Then he'd tell me. I'd take...go back to the store and get it for her. But I was delivering raisins. They came in 20-pound boxes. They were moonshining at that time. One day I went down to this one place with ten cases of these raisins, and I never thought...I stopped in front of the house and started carrying them in. She come out there, and she says, "Christ sake, man, you got no brains?!" She said, "Go around behind!" She said, "They'll catch us at this."

I said "Hell, I thought you was making a lot of raising pies!" She just really blew! That whiskey they made, Jesus Christ, you got drunk on that and your head would go just like

KF: They distilled it, too?

JS: Yes, but it was probably run through once, and between that and ether was that ether was under government regulations. Geez, that came damn near killing you. But I loved to hear these women swear. You couldn't get it just right, but oh god, how they could cuss. But they looked so ridiculous in their fancy fur coats and these homemade sheepskin moccasins about that long and about that wide. When you'd go to collect your money, she'd go and get one of them...well, they're gallon fruit cans, I think they're called, that you buy pie fruit and stuff in. That goddamned can was just stuffed solid with bills—50s, 100s. I bet they'd have 3,000 or 4,000 dollars.

KF: Well, they were making a lot of money.

JS: Oh, they were making...Those men working on contract were making 600 or 700 dollars a month.

KF: You say, they were paid by the yard?

JS: Well, no, they were paid by the day with additional pay for the yardage in there. You know, for every three feet you made, you got extra pay. Well, that would encourage the machine men to push it because they wanted to get those entries down there as fast as they could. Goddamn, they were making money! These peasants had come from a country where it was (unintelligible) survival was a good thing that they never lived before. When they got into this thing, oh god, brother! I went down one time to deliver groceries, and they were having a birthday party. There was 14 accordions going in that little room. I don't know how goddamned many jugs of wine and whiskey and stuff there was around, but they were having a ball. They were pretty chummy people. They didn't want anybody to get wise. They never offered me a drink because they thought I might talk. But when I'd take them raisins down, god they'd get mad if you didn't sneak them in because...but the whole camp was moonshining and bootlegging.

SC: Del, what was a miner's working season?

JS: The older men started along in August. Then as the business increased we'd go on according to seniority rights. I was young. I didn't have many seniority rights. I would go out along, oh, perhaps in September or October. Then along in April, they'd start laying the men off, according to seniority rights. We usually got four or five months of work a year, and of course, hell, sometimes we'd only get one or two days a week. It wasn't a living—it was a damned existence! It was better than the ranch. They didn't need me out there, and I didn't like ranch work so I'd rather go down there and just make a bare living than go out and work on the damned ranch. I liked being with those guys, and I enjoyed mining. Of course, we had a lot of times we'd romp and play but no money. By god, we'd be standing around town there, and we'd finally take up a collection. Everybody'd put in what money he had, and we couldn't go in and buy a drink a piece so we'd go and get a can of beer. The bartender would give us a big one, and then we'd go out in the alley and drink it. God, it was rough! But that's one thing I liked about Mrs. Besel. She never worried about my board. I could pay for it whenever I damned pleased.

KF: Did you work in Roundup before the unions came to the mines?

JS: No. Everything was slowly unionized.

KF: When you came there?

JS: Yes, when they first brought the unions in here, they had quite a battle to get it unionized. When they brought the machines in—these cutting machines and all that mining equipment—the miners here went berserk, and they weren't going to let them put the machines in the mine. So they brought in the National Guard here, and they had to have the National Guard—I don't know how long they were here—but they were with them when they took the machine into the mine and put the men on top.

SC: About when was that?

JS: That would have been, I imagine, in the late '20s. Before that time, you undercut the coal with a pick. You just laid on your side and cut back as hard as you could reach with a pick to leave a scurf so when you shot, the coal would have someplace to fall to. Well, of course, it took a hell of a lot of work. A man would maybe work all day making an undercut and timing his room. Then he'd (unintelligible) in the shadows when he left the mine to get away from the smoke. Well, in the morning, he'd come back, he had this coal to load out. At that time you laid your own track, did your own timbering, did everything. Not only that, but you had to furnish your own tools. Then, of course, the things begin to gradually change over. The company operated and brought in these cutting machines, and then they undercut the coal and shot it for you. You were paid for loading it—that was hand loading—and then after that, like this railroad mine, as soon as you were done with these 23 loaders, the machine-loading machines, that was all. That changed the whole picture then, and it was all-day work. Then they brought the motors in and did away with the mules.

SC: What were the various thicknesses of veins around Roundup?

JS: Oh, it varied from ten feet to, oh, I imagine, like Bud's out there were blasting 34 inches. It was just like working under the table here. But you crawled all the time. Of course, it was good coal, and Bud had to mine...To do that, well, these empties, where you brought your empties here to load them, you had to shoot up the rock for three feet and part it back and lay your track in there because you had to get this loading machine over the car to dump the coal into it, so you had to get the clearance. So we had to brush all these empties, all these empties where we were loading because where we worked, we just worked a 34-inch seam. We had a pan-running deal. What it was, there was about 14-foot pan that we hung on chains and timbers. Then we had a unit down there with an eccentric on it that just shook this pan line, and you had a loading head on that which you operated, with a...it had a long panel with saw teeth on it. You ran that in onto the coal. Then when you'd load it out this coal, you'd put a guard on there—a piece of metal about that far. You'd have a ratchet, and you pull this thing under the coal as it loads it out and it shook it down that 400 feet to where I was at the loading head there and it...The coal fell into the car, and I just loaded it up just to make all I could on a car. Then I'd stop the machine and drop another empty down and load it and then drop and empty down until I had six cars loaded. Then I sent those out, and then we had a back switch here where the empties were in. As soon as he pulled the loads out, I could pull another thing of empties up here and drop them in under this loading boom again and start loading. It was a lot of work because the damned bolt that held these pan lines together would break. These timbers would go down, and you were forever patching and fixing. But we got a hell of a lot of coal that way.

Out at Klein, they had these jar-loaders and they were just like a caterpillar tractor. You just moved them around anywhere, and when we came into the room with the empties you could only load one empty at a time because the boom would come off of this machine. You'd run your empty under that, and then he'd keep going down the track until he'd hit the face and the coal was no longer in shot. Then while you took...you backed up and switch this load out and

come back with the empty, he'd (unintelligible) over and bolt on this side of the track. He'd start loading again, and he'd clean this side out and then clean the other side out. But you handled it just like a tractor. It had levers on it, and it was a fast system. Of course, the idea there, they wanted the fastest men they had in the mine on the motors and on the hauling because if you... the quicker you loaded, the more coal you got.

They found out that I could move like a rabbit, and by god, I always was putting me on the (unintelligible), loading coal. Goddamn, I had a wonderful motorman. He was a born drunk, and he was...he was practically (unintelligible). I'd have to carry his coat and his lunch bucket and stuff, and once he got on that motor, he was a genius. We'd go down there and we'd load that coal, and I'd whistle to him and Jesus, he'd back out of there. I'd get the switch uncoupled and back in, we'd go again and get another load and come out again as fast as we could. Of course, I'd be out of breath, and I can't whistle through my teeth like you fellows can. I had this (unintelligible) whistle like the basketball coaches use, and I'd be so out of wind I could hardly blow it. Johnny, he'd tell me, "Well," he said, "'if I didn't know what I was doing, I'd be in a hell of a shape because," he said, "that huff, huff that you give me," he said, "who the hell could know what's going on!"

I said, "Johnny, goddammit, I can't (unintelligible) and whistle, too!" But the idea there was steep, and that's why we killed and injured so many men out there. They took no...Safety, at that time, wasn't thought of because every night 'when we come out of there, after our bath and started home, there were ten or fifteen men rustling for a job there. If you were...like suppose they killed a man, there were ten men there wanting his job before they got his body out. Course it was steady work the year round, and that's what made it good.

SC: In that one mine that the railroad ran, you mean?

JS: Yes.

SC: But in the others, it was just wintertime work essentially.

JS: Yes they were commercial.

SC: Well, Del, we just got to cut this off. It's premature to do it but we got to get back in there, and we'll pick it up at another time.

JS: Yes, well it was fun!

[End of Interview]