

BEATRICE NOGARE

RM: Well, we want you to tell us a little bit about what life was like in the old days, what it was like in the mines and anything that you'd like to start out on. Why don't you tell us about your life in the mining camps?

BN: Well, it was hard in the mining camps to live. Because, they went to the mines and they didn't get very much pay. They had to come out on strike to have them raise the pay. Then we had to buy everything at the company store. I came from Italy when I was 21 months old, in 1908, but I don't remember then. My daddy came in 1906 here and he went to Maitland Mine, that was his first one. Then he went to MacAnally and to Cameron. And from there he went down around Trinidad, to that mine called Bone. From there the mine, they closed it down, and my daddy got a job at Sofield, I think in 1912 and in 1913 there was a strike, so we had to go down into tents. That was about a mile from Sofield and we lived there. I don't remember exactly how long we lived there, but my youngest brother was born in 1913 and he was only one month old when we brought him under the tent. Let's see, that's in May, he was a month old, and my daddy didn't get another job until he was 26 months off. He was off for 26 months without pay. The union gave us a little bit, \$5 a month, but it wasn't enough. He finally got the same superintendent who was there in Sofield, and he was a good man, and he tried to get my daddy work again but the shift was about \$1.50 and that was all right, if they had the props and rails when they went in. But who was first in the line got there and needed the rails, they took it, and the props and the one on the end of the line, he didn't have the rails and props he needed and they had to come home. No shift. After the 1913 strike, they had rails and props where they worked.

We had to buy everything at the store. The pay was only script money, this was before the strike, like the stamps that they give here now, they were just a little different, but they purchased stuff at the store. You couldn't go to Trinidad, to buy anything. You had to buy everything at the store, with your scripts, at the company store. You probably heard of that song 16 tons,

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it was just like that. If anybody would go down to Trinidad and buy something in Trinidad, if the superintendent found out next morning they would have their check time hanging on the hook, instead of the check number they carry back to the mine in the next morning so the boss would know who didn't come to work. They would have to move away from there, no more work for them there. That was pretty tough for it was hard to get another job right away. What the 1913 strike won was all this freedom. They had to pay money and not scripts. They could go where they want to buy their stuff. That's what they won, and then they raised their pay up.

RM: How about the safety conditions in the mines, did that change after the strike?

BN: Not right away. They didn't change them right away. When they won more was the 1922 strike. Now we were there in 1922, at Gordon Mine. They called it Skinner in those days. That's when they brought up the higher wages, I think, it was \$7 a day then, and they got some more safety rules and then the men didn't get killed like they did before.

RM: So were there a lot of accidents in the mines?

BN: Oh, yes, lots of them. I got a brother that worked at the Del Carbon. I just forget how old he was. He's in California. And the whole top came down on him. And we never expected him to live. He got a big lump on the back of his spine and doctors don't dare to operate on him or it would kill him. They paid him for a dead man. He got a little insurance. They didn't have any insurance, before 1913. In 1918 when they got the Spanish flu, some men would die in the mine, they take they out in the night and just bury them without even the family knowing, because the family was down with the flu. That's how bad the flu was.

RM: So what would happen to the family then? Were there pensions?

BN: No. Nothing. My brother, let's see it was 1942, he got hurt in the mine and he wasn't able to go to the mines no more.

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RM: That was the end of his mining days?

BN: Yes, he got into a business here. The other brother helped him out. And then he moved to California. He's still there.

RM: So you grew up in the mining camps? Where did you go to school?

BN: The first school I started was Hastings.

RM: Where is that?

BN: That's just before you go to Trinidad. You know where Ludlow is? You just go west from there. There was Hastings and Deleque. My dad worked in both mines. Let's see Hastings, in 1908 or 1909. I can't remember when the explosion was that killed many people. I was so young then. I was just five years old when we lived in Hastings. I can't remember all of it. But some way or other, my dad, he moved away from there. I don't know the reason, he moved away just in time. Otherwise he would have been in that explosion, too. There was over a hundred people killed in that explosion. From Deleque, we went down in 1919, see, my dad didn't want to be a scab. He didn't want to work during the strike, the strike of 1919, so my dad went to California, he had friends down there, and my dad knew how to weld, so we went to California, for \$5 a day, not \$5 an hour or more like now. Well, my mother got sick. She went down from here and she was going through a change, so the doctor couldn't do anything for her in California. The doctor said to come back to Colorado, for the air, was a little higher, that would make a difference. When she came back, she got well.

So we went down there in 1919, and I went to school, 13 months there in San Francisco. That was when I was about 13 years old. Then we came back to, Colorado. We went to Durango, instead of going to Trinidad. My dad worked in the mine, and we lived in Perspeak Camp. He was out there for a couple years. Then that slacked, they'd lay them off. So he had to look for another job. So he came back here to Walsenburg. That I can remember better because I was older. We packed all our things. We shipped our furniture, we came here to

Walsenburg and there was nobody we knew. We were four children, I was the oldest, and my dad and my mother, and we started walking from Walsenburg. And we arrived at Gordon or (Skinner) Camp. My daddy knew the road and we walked up to Gordon carrying our suitcases. I can't remember how we got to know a man that worked there, he was Italian, too. So this man's wife, I remember, they gave us supper, and we didn't have to place to go, we didn't know where to go without much money. So they put us up, and the next day they went out to the mines to the superintendent and dad got a job there. So my dad stayed there until I got married, in 1926.

Then they moved to Big Turner, which they called DelCarbon, you know, there was Little Turner and Big Turner.

RM: Not far from each other?

BN: About a mile, yes. Big Turner is right there where there's a tippie yet. You're from Gardner? When you came from Gardner, don't you pass through DelCarbon on the old road. DelCarbon Mine is before Gordon Mine and still has a tippie.

My dad moved up to Big Turner and he worked until he retired. Then he passed away.

RM: How old was he when he passed away?

BN: 72. He had Asthma of the mines, so he passed away in Big Turner.

RM: Was that related to having worked in the coal mines?

BN: See, there's two types of Asthma. There's the mining Asthma and the one that you inherit. And he had the mining Asthma.

RM: Is that similar to Black Lung disease?

BN: Oh, I don't know, if they combine together, or what.

RM: It's a lung disease from mining?

BN: Yes, from mining. At that time they didn't even think about Black Lung, the way it is now. Never heard of it. But the Asthma, yes. It may be possible it is the same thing. Could be the bad air or dust in the mine that causes the

Black Lung.

After that my brothers worked in the mine. One brother passed away in 1974, he had Black Lungs. He was in Pueblo, a custodian before that, he worked in the mines. He started at 16 years old, he graduated from the eighth grade because many parents did not have the money for them to continue their education. He went to work in the mines instead. That's how they used to do. He worked up to 1950, and they closed the mine. Otherwise he would have died in Big Turner, but they closed the mine and he got a job up at Lakeview school in Pueblo from '50 to '73. Well, he was a retiree. About a year when they found him dead. See, I took care of him, you see, I had a son in Farmington, my own son he got cancer. And so I had to go up there too, because he always wanted me to go up there, and I knew I wouldn't see him very much longer. So I went up there about 8 times, when he was operated for tumor of the rectum then. From there it spread to both of the lungs, and to the brain. He was operated on the brain, lived a year yet. Finally it moved to the bladder and the doctors didn't want to operate any more. It was terminal and he died. He didn't know he had cancer of the bladder. The daughter-in-law didn't want me to tell him, but it was better to tell him, cause I like to know what I have and that's the way he was. He always asked, "Why am I like this?" And I couldn't say cause if I did she'd get mad and I didn't want to make any trouble. So, anyway, he died. First my brother and then my son. So I had to care for both of them part time and I couldn't be with them steady.

Then, my husband got cancer in '77. Do you want me to tell you all this family and personal stuff?

RM: That's what makes up your life.

BN: Well, my life was a terrible one.

RM: You've had a hard time, haven't you?

BN: A hard time, boy I tell you I have. Thanks to the Good Lord Jesus, he help me to be strong and healthy.

RM: What kind of work did your husband do? Was he a miner also?

BN: A miner, yes. He came in 1922, from Italy, and he came from Venice. Well, not right in the city of Venice, on the outskirts, and they call that place Skio, where he was born and raised. And he was in World War I and in 1922 he came to America. I met him in 1925 here in Gordon. He went to Rouse, first, he said, I didn't know him then. He worked in Pryor. I think Rouse was where he started. And then the mine was slacking down and they laid him off, and he came up here to Gordon. And that's where I met him. He worked there till the depression. Then we bought this home here in Pictou, and we moved down here in 1937. Pictou is near Toltec. At the time we bought our home we were living at Morning Glory Camp. The mine closed down. Gordon was only working a few men three days a week. One was lucky if he worked three days. My brothers, and dad were working at Gordon and he was out almost a year. He was on WPA, he got \$32. We had the home to pay, we paid a little bit each month, for \$32. Was not much for a family of 4, even though everything was cheap. There was a man that was working at Big Four, I told my husband, "Why don't you ask that man, he is a nice man, maybe he will help you out." Cause they always have to get another man that worked in that mine to ask the boss if he had a job for a friend. The man asked, and my husband got a job. So this is the way my husband quit the mine. I don't know the name of the man, but I knew his wife, she worked at Montgomery Ward, she was a manager there. Her husband was Italian. Anyway, this man worked with my husband in Big Four Mine. They called him slug, I don't know his real name. Well, this man got hurt in the mine very bad. He wasn't able to work in the mine any more. The whole top came down on him. I think this happened about ten years ago. They lived in a trailer down here in Walsenburg. Course his wife went to work and he was doing some work and what started a fire nobody knew and he died, because he couldn't get away, because he was helpless.

Then another accident happened in a short time in the same place my husband

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was working. Before this happened my husband was the head man on the machine. The machine is called, conveyer. Then my husband didn't want to be head man anymore because it was too much responsibility, so he was a helper. And he was working with Smiley, I don't know his real name. This man had a family of 10 children. One of them maybe he was the oldest, I don't know that, well, he got killed in the Air Force. Then not very long after this happened Smiley the father of this boy got killed in the mine and my husband got shocked too, and he nearly got killed, and out of that he didn't want to go to the mines no more. He tried it, but he didn't succeed. So in 1952, he went out to the ordinance to work, to (Pueblo Ordinance Depot). He retired in 1961, or 62, he was sick. He's not feeling too good but he's still alive. Let's see what else I can tell you. Can I tell you about ...what happened to Tony Benassi?

RM: Uh, huh.

BN: Did you know Mr. Benassi? He had a hall here in Toltec. It used to be a dancing hall, and it been down now.

RM: Was that here in Toltec? Yes I knew the building but I didn't know Benassi.

BN: When this happened, because we were still in Morning Glory when we moved here one day he came here to our home, he told us what had happened.

BN: You know the building where it burned down? Yes, there was also a six-room house near the hall, the six-room house, some Spanish people bought. And they tore it down, the big six-room house. Benassi used to live in it. But the lady owned the house, Benassi he owned the hall. He was boarding with this widow woman. She took in boarders. He was working here at Pictou Mine, this is what he told us. We weren't even here when this happened. We were at Gordon Camp. He was working night shift. When he went into the mine there was no snow but when he came out of the mine there was snow. So he started out to go home and he went down near one of the shafts down he went. It was a wonder he didn't get hurt or killed. It was deep, he said. I know, sometimes I used

to go up there and I've seen a lot of those holes. The woman he was boarding with, she was expecting him home at a certain hour and it was way over the hour when he should been home. So she went over to another friend to get help, told him Benassi hadn't come home yet and she wanted to go see about him, the man and her went to see what happened, if he got killed in the mine or something. So this man and her went up towards the mine and they came near this shaft and they heard somebody holler. So they hollered to him and that was how Benassi got saved. The other man went home and got a rope and put it down, and this woman and him... Benassi was a big heavy man, but they got him out. He always said that woman saved his life.

Then we had the Wobblie Strike of 1937. But it was a Wobbly strike. We didn't gain anything then. I forget who put that on, that wasn't the union. I don't remember who it was.

We had a lot of little strikes every so often, until our wages got up high, now they are way up high.

RM: What did they make before the strike in 1913?

BN: About a dollar fifty a day. If you could work.

RM: And after that strike what did it go up to?

BN: They raised it up some how, I don't know, I think it was not raised to much but it was better then before they had more freedom, they paid with money not scrips they could go and buy food in other stores. We moved to Delegeue in 1918 then the strike of 1919 broke out, we went to California.

The best I can remember is Hastings, I started school there.

RM: How many children would be in the school? Was it a abig school, or a small school?

BN: It was a big school.

RM: Did they have school year round?

BN: Like they do now. They had summers off. Then at Delegeue, that was a big school there. I went to about fourth grade. No, I was in the sixth grade when

we went out to California. Their teaching out there in California was much different. I didn't like that. I loved school but this putting back, I didn't like it. I always remember that we had to recite George Washington and I couldn't catch on because we just read it up here at that time. There you had to memorize it too and I didn't know how to select the important points. I would just like to read it and I could not understand these ways. So one day there was this George Washington so what I do I study it and that was Friday and they gave us that lesson for Monday so I studied all Friday all Saturday and memorized. I said, "I'm going to make it that way." I studied on Sunday. I made sure I had all that George Washington just like it says in the book. So comes time to recite and so here I wasn't first, because they knew I didn't know, so they ask the others and nobody knew it. Nobody studied on the weekend. So they came to me. So the teachers asked me about Washington and I got up there and I just began just like it said in that history book. I just said every word like that. Well, I had to recite more questions because they didn't know the right answers. I recited it all the same way. Then the teacher told me "Beatrice, you don't have to learn the book like that, just the important parts." But I couldn't catch on what it was. It was hard. But after I caught on I was all right. That's what happen to me but I caught on then my grades were 95,98, 100, the teacher put me back in the sixth grade. I learn this where there is a will there is a way and I love school. My trouble was we had to move too many times to different schools.

RM: Did your parents speak Italian at home?

BN: Yes, my mother didn't hardly speak any English at all, but she did learn the English language.

RM: And then your father learned it where he was working?

BN: Yes, my father had learned it. He had third grade in the old country and that's eighth grade here.

RM: And had he worked as a miner in Italy before he came here?

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BN: No, he was a welder.

RM: A welder, uh-huh.

BN: He welded that bridge, that you learn in geography. A French company started that bridge, and they called it Chappou. It was from Como Italy to Switzerland, was for an electric train.

BN: I went up there on that bridge. When we went back in 1956 to Italy. I went to see where I was born. The people who lived there didn't ask us in. My aunt, my father's sister, didn't know the people too well. So I didn't see the inside of the house. It was a two story house. It didn't belong to my dad no more because they sold it. So anyway, I saw the outside. And that's up above Turin, they call it, I have to tell you in Italian, Cuorgne. Not very far from Turin. So I didn't go up where my mother was born and lived. That was way up on the Alps. We didn't have enough time, because my husband was working at the ordinance and they only got so much time, if you don't be back by that time you lose your job. So we didn't want to lose the job.

RM: So how did your father decide to come to this country, from Italy.

BN: Well, I guess he needed a job. I think, he had somebody over there, that had been in America and had come back to Italy, then he decided to come back to America so my dad came with him. I can't remember now too good. Certainly he didn't come alone. He came with somebody, so they came to this country, and they happened to come to Walsenburg. It was a long time ago, 1906. I was born 1906 in February and he arrived here in December. Two years after my mother and I came. And my brothers all were born here. I was born at Cuorgne at four P.M. My mother said there was about 7 or 8 feet of snow.

RM: That's a lot of snow, isn't it?

BN: Yes, it was very cold too, my mother said.

RM: It seems to be getting cold outside.

SC: So, how many children were in your family?

BN: Three brothers and myself.

SC: And did they all work in the mine?

BN: Yes, all three of them. One, the first time he started, he was working on the tipple, and tipple burned down one day. I was already married then in July and this happened in September. The tipple burned down and I had six boarders. Houses were so scarce. It happened there was a widow and she was going to the old country and she had the furniture to sell and the only thing we bought new, the bedroom set and the rest we had to buy hers. When you have the boarders you can't have new stuff, better to get some old ones. So I had six boarders and one of the boarders there was kind of off. He got injured down in the mine back east somewhere and he had a brother up here who was also boarder with us and so his brother came up here and he was working in the Morning Glory Mine where my brother was working. And my brother didn't work in the mine. He worked on the tipple and the tipple burned down and the next day he went duck hunting, with this man. He had a car, and he asked my brother to go hunting. My brother loved to go hunting. So my brother comes down, because my folks couldn't afford very well and so my mother sends him down, said, "Go down to your sister and see if she will give you a dollar for the shells." You know, me, when it comes to giving something like that, I am very careful. I told him, I said, "Joe," I said, "You ask me anything else," I will give the dollars not for shells, just like if I knew that something was going to happen. Which I was glad I did not give him the dollar or I would have that on my conscience. Then my mother had credit, too, and that's how he got the shells. He went out to the Buttes to this lake. It's a lake near Pueblo. With this man. And they shot ducks and my brother was going to go in to get them. He was a good swimmer. And that's why I always said that something happened to him because I know he was a good swimmer. I couldn't see how he could drown. It was an argument, I guess, like that. The other man said it was him that shot the ducks down and my brother knew that it was him. So he was going to try to go in to get them. You know the big BVD's they were call then, underwear, well, he had these BVD's

on and he had his shoes on. He didn't have the time to take those off to go in, because my brother, of course they didn't have no swim suits then. I know that he would take his clothes off because he was a good swimmer and I told my father and mother, I said, "I think, something happened." It was the truth. Somebody saw them. They saw when the man threw him in. See, there's why the BVD's and the shoes were on him. Cause I knew my brother would take his clothes off. And he threw him in there and then he came home and said, that he drowned. And my mother came down and they hadn't found him yet. My eyes were red and she thought I'd been quarreling with my husband she said, "Well, I can walk down tomorrow and find out." Me, I was trying not to cry, not to show her that something happened, cause I knowed, she would get more sick again, course we didn't have the money to get here to a doctor, the mine where my dad was working wasn't working too good at the time. When my brother started to work he said, "Mom now that I am working go and see a doctor, I'll pay the doctors, so you can get well." See, that was the kind of boy he was. Well, anyway, they didn't find him till about three days, and I had a boarder Mr. Ivy, his name was, a nice man, with a daughter, he was a widower, and his daughter was a school teacher, and he was boarding with us, and he said, haven't they found him yet? I said, "No, no luck today either," three days in the water, the fourth day, this man lost a shift to go over there and he fished him out. And the man that was with him, when hunting, he was telling them the wrong place, he was just about 8 feet from the bank and he said it was way over in the middle of the lake. That's why they couldn't find him. This man found him right away. We had the funeral in September and he was only 17 years' old. Well, that boarder I had, and he had a car. They called them roadster, you know, these cars, just two can ride on. Well, down at Morning Glory. That's where this man got killed. Somebody killed him. I assumed that somebody killed him. Because he was mean to people. That's what happened cause we never found out anything else. His brother was in the old country. I think, the county buried

him.

My mother and my other brothers. They went over to this lake for some reason, I don't know why. I don't know if they were gathering wood, or something like that. There's a home right close to the lake and a farm, and those people there they came up and they recognized them and they said, "You know that your brother didn't drown. You know that man fought with him and threw him in the water. I was right all the time, thinking that way. And my mother, you know she was a good singer, and you know, she never sang no more. It was like she lost faith in everything. She died when she was 82. She broke her hip. She fell and broke her hip and her age was against her.

RM: Do you remember any of the union songs?

BN: Union Forever, but that's all the words I know. I sang that so many times in school, but that's all I remember.

RM: Was there a feeling of brotherhood or comradeship among the miners in those days?

BN: Yes, except at work, you know, some didn't like the union. I remember something else. When we were in the tents a mile from Sofield, one day while I was in school. My mother told me this I wasn't there, when this happened. My mother was doing some laundry, and she was out hanging clothes. My brother the one born in 1913 was crying while she was going to see the baby there were two men not far from her, they hollering at her, and they were militia men, they said stop and she couldn't understand so she started to go in and see the baby, they came in ask my mother if she would move they would drive the horses on her, they thought she was going in the tent to hide the guns. And she at that time couldn't speak English. She was fortunate that a neighbor not too far from our tents saw what they were going, to do to her so he hollered for her to stop because they were going to drive the horses on her and kill her. She stop and the neighbor came over and the two men that Mrs. Madlena, she was only going in the tent to see her baby was crying, so they wanted to come in and

search the tent, she let them come in and they did not find any guns, so they saw mother was telling the truth so they left her go. Nice that neighbor helped my mother, they might have killed her.

At school one time they were going to burn the school down. So the teacher had been warned about this, and she sent the kids home right away, and tell the kids to hide down in the arroyo, cause there was an arroyo there. So that's what happened there. We done this many times we had to do that. It was a serious business down that way. You know, it's the young ones now that are gaining the profit of 1913, but it was the older people who did it. How much they suffered. Many lost their lives. Now, the young are having a better life. The strikes don't last so long now, either.

I heard it so many times from my father, it was told to him. I don't know which place it was but it was in some camps, the 1902 strike. But where it was I don't remember. But anyway, there was a woman then, who had a little child, and they had a little goat and they would give the child goat milk. And you know they had to build a house down under the ground, to hide themselves. There was a lot of massacres in that strike, too. They made a house underground and they went down there and all they had to eat was that goat's milk. It lasted a long time, too, that strike. Where it was, I can't remember that. I was trying the other day, but I can't remember. That was a long time ago.

RM: Do you have in your family miners?

BN: Yes. Just my husband. One son had a business, he passed away. The other is teaching welding at Junior College in Pueblo.  
What you going to do with these tapes?

RM: This will be transcribed and typed up and we will bring it back to you and you can look at it and make sure we have everything right and then all the information, the tape and what's typewritten will go in the basement of the library, as part of the new county archives there. And so anybody that wants to know about history or anything about the old days can go and find this

information. Another thing that they want to do is have some programs for the schools on their local history. Because they just don't have much about their own local area and the history right around here.

BN: The young children, like my brother's, they don't know either. My son's don't know. But my brother's after they started work in the mine they had quite a few experiences with strikes but not like the previous ones.

SC: How many children did you have Mrs. Nogare?

BN: Two boys. I would have had three, but I got scared, and I lost him. I was carrying him. I was due in about a week and he was born dead, in 1935. I got scared because my brother, this brother that died, and he got poisoned with mango. Many people were.

RM: What is that?

BN: Peppers. He liked the salads of peppers, and tomatoes. My mother wasn't home and he prepared it himself. They came home from looking for dandelions, when they came home he was already sick. My mother made him some cammomile tea, but that didn't help. He suffered and suffered and my dad came to call my husband, because he was getting bad, and he called him, "Get up. Jimmy's going to die." And I heard it first because my husband worked in the mine and could not wake him right away. I had three boys. No girls. No sisters. And my daughter-in-laws got two girls, no boys. One had three girls, one she's going to be a nurse. Now she graduated, do you want to see?

One time in the tent we had a big snow, 1913. We had coal outside, but we couldn't get to the coal. There was so much snow on the coal, we couldn't find where there coal was. We had these monkey stoves. We would take the ashes down. There would be some coals there yet and we'd put them in the top again to get a little heat. My daddy had to go out, because the tent was coming down. He told my mother to hold the screen door, but my mother was short and he didn't think my mother would get a chair and hold that screen door up so it would hold up the tent, so he could shovel snow off the tent. By getting

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on the chair, she was taller and the tent was low and my dad was shovelling off the snow, he hit my mother on the head with a shovel and nearly killed her. He didn't know she was on the chair. He thought she was holding it from the bottom. She thought it was better to be on the chair, but it was a bad idea. It just about killed her.

RM: That was during the strike of 1913, when you were living in the tents.

BN: Yes.

RM: That's a lot of snow.

BN: There's another things, I don't know if I can tell you.

RM: I can turn the tape recorder off if you want.

BN: I think you'd better.