

Labor Heritage Panel

Gordon Swartz: The company decided, I think they made a conscious decision to, to cost ... They pitted one mine against another, one company against another. If they -- They owned all three mines: McElroy, Ireland, Shoemaker and Number Four ... But if you don't produce, then this mine will close and that one will stay open. That was how they began their little tactics. And -- But they carried this on even into the mine to the crew. If this crew doesn't produce -- It was dissension, dissension, dissension. It was for the last five years. Man against man. And it didn't seem like good management to me, but it worked because we set records every year. Four million tons the last year I worked, which little less than a year ago, '93. And the -- Then I began to get involved in -- I hadn't been involved in the union at all because I was happy. But then the, the overtime started. Now if you listen to the radio today, on public radio they're having a strike right now Flint or, Flint, Michigan, I believe. They're working them 58 hours a week. That's mainly what the strike is about. Well, the coal mines here have been working 58 hours a week for four or five years now. And this is compulsory; this is not voluntary. But the -- Most people that are on the street, like we are now, think, 'Well, you're making good money for that.'

(020) Well, you are. But after six, seven, eight years of it and you don't want it, it, it gets to you. Now I don't know what Mr. Kline really wanted me to talk about. I didn't prepare a speech, but those are some of the things I had talked to him about.

Michael Nobel Kline: Well, some other things we talked about had to do with your being the father of six young children.

(024) GS: Yeah, I have six children ranging from 19 down to one month. So -- And then the -- My own family, I think the, the problem was being away from home. I couldn't be a father all that time. But that's not necessarily the case. I, I think there was more divorces when, when we got laid off because the women got used to that money, I believe. That's my opinion.

Bill Carney: Were those five day weeks or six day weeks?

(030) GS: These were five, six day weeks. Ten hours a day, eight hours on Saturday.

Bruce Kinser: Five tens and an eight because that's what they can force you into.

GS: That is what they -- And they want you to work more. They, they beg you to work more. They say you're not pulling your load. And they'll try to make you feel bad. 'You need to come out here on Sunday. You need to be working a double if, if you want this mine to survive and keep your job.' Well, evidently some people believed it. But the harder you worked, you're still getting laid off.

BC: Were you trying to get as much coal out as they could before the Clean Air Act shut them down? Is that -- Do you think that's a part of the reason they, that they worked such long hours or made you work such long hours?

(040) GS: Well, the reason is that -- I think they would do that no matter what. The reason is they're, they're paying you time and a half for anything past 40 hours. They'll pay you triple time for holidays, double time on Sunday. So it's adding up to a lot of money, but it's cheaper to do that than to hire another man because of the benefits. So you get, you get two men, one man to do two jobs or two men. One man doing two jobs is still cheaper.

BC: Part of the problem at Flint today is exactly what he just said. Plus, they're hiring part-time employees, and they don't have to pay them any benefits. And what he's saying about working 58 hours, that's the reason you had unions in this country in the first place was because they worked them six days a week.

(050) GS: Well, I'm glad to see the autoworkers trying to do -- Well, the United Mine Workers did try to do something about it, but it, the companies didn't negotiate. Our constitution, the UMW constitution, has 10 things that we're supposed to strive for. And one of those is a six hour work day. And that was signed in 1898, which we haven't come very far since 1898.

(055) BK: I understand a lot of what Mr. Swartz is talking about in, in regards to the pressure put on. When I first started working in the coal mine, and I worked salary. I, I've been a foreman, a production foreman for 14 or 15 of my 19 and a half years. And one of the first lessons I learned is -- And they will teach you that we always want one more lump of coal than what you can give us. There's, there's no -- It is quota. And bonuses are based on it,

recognition, rewards. So there's always a push to get more coal. It doesn't have anything to do with preparing for the future because the industry is so unstable. And that's one of the, that's one of the big pressures that you're talking about families and divorce. There is almost not a time in the industry when you do not work under the threat of not having a job tomorrow. It's -- And that's a burden. That's a heavy weight to take to -- I have my two small children here with me tonight simply because I haven't been able to stop and haven't been home for 15 minutes today. And every day you have to go home wondering 'are we going to have a job tomorrow, are we going to have a --' And again, I represented management. And I'm not misrepresenting them now, but even for, for -- And here I am on the street no less. Finally it did come to pass after 19 years. But there's no time in that period when because of the economy, because of the environment, because of the quality of work or the, or the, or production standards, no time in 19 and a half years was there not a constant threat over my head. There's no job security. There's, there's no promise. And there is not enough. There is no satisfaction. I don't know exactly where all the fault for that lies. But when you try to go home and hold your family together and hold yourself in esteem and, and keep your priorities straight knowing that, that next month you may not be able to live in the nice neighborhood you want to live in, knowing that, that next month when Christmas rolls around you may have to scratch and figure what you're going to do for the kids -- It's not, it's not a fair pressure to put on a worker, salaried or, or hourly, either one. And those cause a lot of the problems you're talking about. It does break up a lot of families. And the displacement. I have friends right now, and I'm sure you know people and, and all of you probably do, where fathers, mothers are working part-time jobs and fathers are coming home every other weekend. A friend of mine is elated; he, he got a job. A friend of mine lives in Windsor Heights; he's, he's tickled to death. He got a job this week Cleveland working in a salt mine. Now there's a good family for you. And he's excited about it. 'I got a job, 16 dollars an hour. In Cleveland, but a job.' So he has children at home. You worry about situations like that. I had opportunity -- I may still have to, I don't know. If I can't keep my lights on, I'll pack up and leave too. I had opportunities to go away, and I've chose for right now because of the opportunities in Wheeling -- It's a good

place to raise children. It's a good place to live. We're going to try to stick it out. I'm down here at Northern. I'm a coal miner with a high school education. I'm trying to be a nurse.

(097) I'm going, trying to get into their nursing program. Maybe it will work for me, maybe it won't. I'm scared to death about it frankly. But I don't know what else to do. And we're going to give it a shot, aren't we guys?

???: Yup.

MNK: Why don't you guys come on in here. Sit with us.

???: ... guys can come in.

MNK: You're welcome to if you want to.

(100) BK: I, I don't mean to, to take up -- But I do understand what you're saying. And when you get fathers living in other states working coming home twice a month, you've got bad situations. You've got -- And the children see -- It disrupts entire family life as far, as far as a man and his wife's concerned. It causes them problems. It causes problems with the children, for the children. It's just such a bad situation.

MNK: You come out of a long tradition of, of coal mining as I understand it.

(106) BK: Basically all of my family's been coal miners. My father worked in the union for 23 years and then took a job as a federal mine inspector. And I'm not from the Wheeling area. We were from the very bottom of the state down in, down in where there isn't any place I can tell you where we're down from, down in Mingo County. And there's no, no big towns to tell you. But my father got a job up here. We, we moved up here. And that's why what I say, not even being a native, I want to stay here. I like it. But my father, his father, my mother's father, my brothers, my uncles, they're all coal miners. And a little bit like I was telling you today, the industry almost nowadays will make a vagabond or a gypsy out of you. You have to pack up and follow it around. I've got a brother that's lived in five different parts of the state of West Virginia and one place in Kentucky going from mine to mine as it closed down. You feel like apple pickers just following the season or something. You don't want to -- None of us want to do that way. I want my kids to grow up

(120) here. I want -- When I get 60 years old I want them living two miles from me where they can bring their kids over, and we can visit. I don't want to have to chase them down all over

the country because they're looking for work. And I don't know what the answers are to it.

I truly don't, but I know it's very unsettling, very unsettling.

MNK: Bill, we have, we have a --

BC: Well said.

BK: It's a serious, serious issue. We put a lot of thought into it.

BC: Yeah.

MNK: Bill's a fifth generation steelworker. I guess your great, great grandfather must have started in, in steel or iron?

(128) BC: Eighteen fifties at, at LaBelle. And there've been three of us in the union, and two of us in management. I've worked in most of the plants in the corporation. I'm a supervisor at Mingo right now, production control. I've had one grandfather who quit working at Wheeling Steel after a man was murdered during a strike. And he threw his lunch pail against the brick wall that day, walked away and then never came back. One of my other grandfathers shot up the B&O train station. Out on strike one day and got all boozed up. And he must have done all right because a couple years later they hired him as a Wheeling city policeman. So he was either a good shot or maybe didn't shoot one of the policemen that come after him that day. My dad, the fourth generation, ended up -- He started out without a high school education in the mail room, worked his way up to be the manager of the computer center at Duval. So he did quite well for himself. I can relate to what this gentleman says because I think every day since 1965 I felt under threat for my

(147) job. I think the department I started in, which was a basically a new department in scheduling the units, there were probably about 40 or 50 young people, all of us around the same age. And, and today there's two of us left. I don't know whether that was because the two of us were good or because the two of us were damn lucky. But there's only two of us left. It's meant a great deal to my family to have the benefits and to have a steady job. I've never been laid off fortunately. The other ones were. I've raised three children. But, again, there's the threat. It's always there. And what they do with us is they let you set goals. And the goals are based, if you beat the goals, are based on, on a bonus. So if you don't, there's no raises. If you don't perform or something goes wrong then you don't get the

bonus. So you have to be very careful how you even set your goal. Fortunately I work, not like these two gentlemen. I, I wouldn't want to be in, in their shoes.

BK: Don't you find though that when you meet your goal that that becomes the standard regardless, regardless of what good fortune you had? You may have had the most uneventful, the best year you're ever going to have, but if you make that goal today, that's, that's your standard for next year. If you can do that today, you can do it every year. That makes goal setting just, just what you said. You have to be really careful. Or, or do you find it that way? It was that way on mine.

(168) BC: I, I think it's that way. Fortunately with what I do, every year there's different type of goals. So after this year maybe I can forget that one, you know. ...

BK: We were tonnage. We were tonnage. If you go a hundred ton this year, you can get a hundred ton every year. If you get a hundred and two ton, you better get a hundred and three ton next time. It's been nonstop that way.

(173) BC: I can remember my dad saying one time that -- He wasn't, he was never in the union because he worked in the main office in Wheeling Steel. I remember him saying one time that he really felt good because there, when the union came in, because then he wasn't forced. As a clerk in Wheeling Steel he was no longer forced to work on Christmas Day. And he was called out once on Christmas Day to run a payroll. He was no longer required to work overtime without being paid. And he started to get a vacation. And that was because of the union. Again, he was never in the union. So he thanked the union for, for helping him out because none of us would have had what, what we have today if it weren't for the unions forcing them, forcing the issue. And I'm saying that from the other side, but it's true.

BK: From a salary standpoint I agree one hundred percent with that. Most -- I was a front line supervisor. Most of us realized -- You were hourly at Shoemaker?

GS: ...

(185) BK: Right. And I could tell you a ton of names that, that you would know people were ... I actually had a brother worked there at one point. My father was a federal mine inspector here in the area so his name would be familiar to you probably. He was an electrical inspector. But I found that -- I don't know, just the, the whole industry is, is just so

(202) unsettling. But from a management point of view, front line supervisors all appreciate the hourly people. I can't think of any of us that didn't. We understand -- The benefits I got -- If the hourly people got a raise, I got a raise to match it. If they got 80 percent dental, I got 80 percent dental. The safety we had. Safety for me as well as for you. And safety for you and your people all comes from regulations that the unions strived for and pushed for. So they made my job safer too. All -- There's no war, as I see it. I never saw it. There's no conflict between front line supervisors and hourly people in most industries. I think most of the conflict and the bitterness and the hard feelings come from, come from a different level than that. I don't think it comes from the people that work together every day. You almost become -- When you work 65 hours a week with somebody you become family almost. That's more time than I've seen my children. And that's --

BC: Were those tonnage goals individual goals or crew goals? Were you responsible for the tonnage of the men you supervised?

BK: Yeah.

BC: It was your goal, and you --

(210) BK: Well, it wasn't my goal. As, as a representative of management I was given a standard. I was given 'This is your goal. We need this. We have studied. On a perfect day you can get this. So this right here is in between. This is what we expect. We expect no less.' And if there were less you had to account for it. Minutes. I lived by minutes. I lived for years actually by minutes. A 10 minute time span can cost thousands of dollars. If you make a 10 minute mistake, whether it's your fault or not, someone has to answer for it. I would sit every day before I went in the mine and I would plan 480, 560, however minutes. If I was working an eight hour day, I would plan eight hours. I had to plan it, turn it in. When I came out of work, I had to make an actual. This is for each man. If I had 15 men, I planned 480 minutes in a --

BC: Exactly what they were going to be doing?

(224) BK: Exactly what they were going to be doing each minute. Travel time, lunch, every minute. I planned it. At the end of my day I came out, did another sheet, a comparison sheet as to what actually went on for the 480 minutes. Then we did percentages and then each one got

called in individually and explained the discrepancies between what happened between what we planned and what really happened. There's no way you can plan -- If someone has to stop and sneeze there's half a minute gone. If they sneeze twice, there's a minute gone. Throws my whole plan out the window. But that's how I've lived for the past, at least 10 years.

MNK: Gordon, what's been your experiences as an hourly man then?

(234) GS: He's talking about the time where we had those time study people rear their ugly head. They, they watch every move you make. Of course he, he's saying that the line's foreman does that, but they can't watch everybody.

BK: Oh, there's no way. We cheated on the times.

(238) GS: You had to. They'll put this -- It'll be a college student studying engineering, and they'll put him on you. He'll chase you around like, like a guard.

BK: Stopwatch.

GS: With a stopwatch and timed every second you -- And they'll send him days at a time with you. Usually they're timing maybe how fast the buggy runs, how fast you put a bolt in, how long it takes to make a cut. But I, I even had them when I was building cribs, which is a five by seven piece of lumber. You have, might have to walk a hundred yards, pick it up in a wheelbarrow and wheel it over, clear out a place. It's a tedious process. And he's sitting there with a stopwatch every second. One man. And they're paying him to time the work that one man does. I never thought that was real smart.

(249) BK: Yeah, I've seen it. Yeah, there's a lot of money wasted in management. There's so much money involved that they don't, they don't consider dollars and cents. Dollars, dollars -- Fifty dollars wasted doesn't mean a thing. Five hundred dollars wasted doesn't mean a thing.

GS: Well, you talking about waste, I see them on the longwalls and so on and so forth, they'll leave behind 10, 20, 100 thousand dollars worth of cables, maybe a half million dollars worth of equipment. They'll say it's too much trouble to get it out of there, leave it. But if, if you cheat them on a half hour overtime, then you're fired. Or, or if you walk out with a roll of tape that you accidentally put in your pocket, they're on you.

(259) BK: Or if you just need a roll of tape at home. Which everybody needs a roll of tape sometimes.

GS: You're putting it more realistic.

BK: I've got a couple rolls of tape at the house.

GS: But the waste is --

BK: He's right.

GS: Amazing to me.

BK: He's right. And we can't question it. We can't question it on my level of supervisors. It is more important to get to the next lump of coal than it is spend time back here because --

And I guess we all ultimately pay the price. A lot of that is tax write off. They're not paying taxes. I can't write a darn thing off, but, but the stuff that they leave back there because they're greedy for the next lump --

(270) GS: They say they can't recover it. If they would pay me, I would go in there with a car, and I, in a week's time I could have enough to live for that year.

BK: Yes, there's no doubt about that. That is true.

BC: In the mass, mass production in tons of coal, how does that affect your safety rate? Is it --

Has the accidents decreased, increased, ... level or does anybody have those --

GS: I think accidents have decreased because there's less men. The accident rate's probably about the same.

BK: Those statistics are so easy to cloud up that there's no way of knowing what they really are.

(279) GS: Longwalls, which they use now, are, are a little bit safer for injuries. You can have serious injuries.

BK: There's a lot less people and a lot less exposure. Just exactly what you said, you're right about that. The, the industry, and I don't know about your industry, I don't know -- All I know is coal mining. But my industry for us, we were really were -- We were allowed to make it as safe as we wanted to make it. There wasn't so much problem about that. Mostly because anymore, not the protection from the union, but the civil courts are so generous with their settlements that you have to do almost anything you can do to stay out of civil court. If a man gets hurt because of the least little thing, as a supervisor I worried about all the time. I was responsible for my men. The way the West Virginia law is in the mining

industry, I was responsible if I was -- I didn't need to be even close to him to be responsible. I, I had to have no part of their decision to be responsible. It was my job to see that they were safe. And it's actually worded that way. Not fair to me, but that's the way it is. So we let our people make it as safe as they can make it, as safe as they wanted to just in the hopes that there wasn't a five million dollar settlement down the road. Because as a supervisor, you know, you get something like that if you cost the company three point two mil in a settlement, you know that you're out of there on a technicality. There is no way you can protect your job after an incident like that.

(304) BC: I think, I think all of our industries are safer today.

BK: I would think so.

BC: You guys, you guys -- I mean you had terrible disasters. We lost 119 men at the Wheeling Steel Benwood mine disaster, I think it was 1928. And there's been some terrible -- And that's the third worst in, in the state of West Virginia. So you can imagine how bad some of the other ones were. And I've been sort of fortunate because I've worked for a company that probably set the standards for the steel industry. Wheeling Corrugating particularly started a safety program. They even had a doctor on the premises in some of their plants, and nurses, long before some of the other ones, you know. Still a dangerous place, but a --

(314) GS: Didn't want to make it seem that it wasn't safer than it used to be. If you're going back the first 50 years of this century, there was, there was a hundred thousand coal miners killed in 50 years. A hundred thousand.

BK: Death trap. It was a death trap.

GS: But since then it's, it's going down every year.

BC: Yeah.

MNK: Are there other questions that anybody has out here at this point?

???: I, I have a question about how you ... different ages -- How are you encouraging your children in terms of their futures and their careers?

(323) BC: I have one that's a doctor, one that's getting his master's degree in history, and one that's a travel agent. So the fifth generation stopped.

???: Are they in the area or are they out of town?

BC: My son is in Houston. And the one that's studying history is in graduate school. And my daughter lives in Pittsburgh. And, and if you're asking would I recommend going into the steel business, although it's been great for me as a wage earner, I wouldn't recommend it. No. Particularly because of the way the steel industry seems to be going and losing half its workforce. And so many companies going under. I wouldn't recommend heavy industry to anybody today. And it's a shame because that's where all the jobs were.

MNK: These tapes are really fun because now I have a response from Curtis Oliver who's, was head of the ironworkers' local for 19 years before, before his recent retirement. And he's talking about three generations of ironworkers in his family. And so let's, let's just play a little of him. It -- I think his, his first son became an ironworker. And when his second son wanted to be, he tried to, to rig it, you know, to make it as difficult as he could for his second son because he, he felt that the boy didn't, wasn't natured that, that way to make a good ironworker. So he did everything he could to try to discourage him, but because the boy has not found other work, he's, he's still, he's still working in a situation about which he doesn't have any natural ability. And so his father feels that it's dangerous for him. If I can figure out how to work this.

(356) BK: Can I address that question for just, just a moment while you're looking at that? As, as a single parent with two young children at home, I've got a daughter that's a freshman at WVU this year. She is very concerned about going with me losing my job. I told her 'you find ways, we'll find ways.' We stress education very important, third behind morality and family, you know. Or, or religious convictions and our family. And, and we put education third at the list. And we work at it. And quite a bit of the people I, I know my age group feel the same way about it. We don't want our children facing some of the same things. Now I don't care whether they grow up to be doctors, lawyers or bus drivers, you know. I want them to be proud when they grow up. I want them to have a trade, and I want them to be satisfied with it. But I don't want to see them in the industries, and maybe what we need to do is figure a way to change the way the industries are structured. My personal belief is that a lot of the industries in the United States is probably 30, 40 years behind the times the way they treat their people as far as some of the more productive countries are. I don't

- (379) think we're the leaders we used to be. Education is very important, and we want our children to grow up to be able to provide for themselves whatever situation life might put them in. And from my age bracket, that's the way we pretty much feel about it, most of my friends.
- (385) GS: You want a response from me? Okay. My oldest boy is out of high school; he's not going to college. He's unemployed. There's nothing for him here. He, he's going to have to go. Half -
- Of course I'm from Cameron, not Wheeling, but it's the same, same area. Half the town of Cameron's going to North Carolina. Used to be they went to Cleveland or, or Detroit. That's, that's what's going to happen to him. He, he can't stay around, there's no jobs. Now education, he just wasn't suited for it. My second boy is a brain, but he's going to have to get some scholarships. I'm unemployed. That's -- And the other younger ones I haven't really considered them yet. I hope they can all go on to school, but I'm sure some will and some won't.
- (398) BK: Well, this area right now, and probably a lot of areas, you, you -- They're not just going to walk out and get a good job that they're going to have the rest of their life. You can figure that's not going to happen. Again, I don't know the answers. I worry about my children, but we worry about it together. It's something we discuss together. I don't know exactly how you prepare for it. I, I surely -- I wasn't prepared for one second for this summer, walk around with no job, no income other than the little bit of money you get from unemployment. And that's certainly a change in the standard, I'll tell you that. And it doesn't last all so long. So you, you have to figure it.
- ???: They say in the 21st century that even the white collar professionals will change jobs two or three times during their careers because even professional work isn't that certain.
- (414) BC: Yeah, they're talking about a lot of the white collar workers being contract agents.
- ???: Temps. Sort of glorified temps.
- BC: Yeah, I mean when they need your services, you'll hire out to them, and then you go somewhere else. So what we're going to end up having is a nation of transients.
- ???: Gypsies.
- BK: Right, gypsies and vagabonds, whatever we are.

(420) GS: This -- The man that's in charge of this program that we're on, the Clean Air Act, is a contract worker. They brought him in to handle this. When this is over, he'll move on somewhere else. Exactly what you said. And he's a white collar worker.

BC: Have you -- If you look at what's happened to our city, and I'm sure people will disagree with me, it's been a depressed area for 30, 40 years. We've lost half of our population. The city of Wheeling has lost half of our population. It gone from 60 thousand or better to 30 thousand. And those are all good paying jobs, and they're all gone. And that's the reason you see so many houses around that are vacant and being run down, you know. It's terrible. It's just this community, I don't know where you live.

BK: I wonder what the answers are, does anybody know? Just thought I'd ask. It might have made it easier for me!

???: We got to figure out a different way to treat our people.

BK: Yeah.

???: You can't have an organization that hires and pays people without a more egalitarian, equal treatment, more of a partnership.

(442) BK: That's my belief.

???: Between management and labor because what's happening is even the professionals are becoming gypsies because they're fleeing the large institutions. You just can't hold a large institution together anymore. The old hierarchy doesn't work because we're Americans; we won't stand for it. We want equality.

BC: Do you know how to fix it?

???: The coal mine will still be there.

MNK: Who knows how to fix it?

???: If, if you can burn that coal, it will still need people to mine it. You can't mine it the way they're mining it now because that's slave labor, that overtime. Fifty-eight hours a week is, is --

(454) BK: That was 58 hours a week for the hourly. I worked, I worked salary management. I've worked a 65 to 70 hour work week as a single parent for at least the last seven or eight years. Maybe that's why I'm a single parent! I don't think, but I -- No, that's, that's not

why I'm a single parent. But it is, it is quite a pressure. It's quite a pressure.

GS: Yeah, the foreman, who he comes in an hour before and stays an hour later. That's paperwork.

BK: Yeah, and the Sundays that they can't make you work, they can me.

GS: Right.

(465) BK: And I have missed a lot of Christmases and Easters with these guys as they can tell you because it was my turn to work. And you make those sacrifices because jobs aren't a dime a dozen. There isn't one across the street you can run to. They, they do hold it over your head. 'If you can't be here, that's fine. We know 25 people that can.' So you're there whether you want to be or not.

MNK: I, I think with some good help here we've gotten this machine to work.

(473) Curtis Oliver: An honest day's work for an honest day's pay. And I'm not sure that happens with the nonunion even though there are a lot of good people. I've met a lot of good people. Some of my best friends are nonunion workers, nothing wrong with that. Yeah, unions aren't for everybody, but thank the good lord we have unions because it brings everybody's style of living up.

MNK: So that -- What you're offering is more skill per, per hour --

CO: Individual.

MNK: That your, your dollar per hour will ...

CO: We have a apprenticeship training program that goes on for three and a half years. We take care of that. And all local unions do. All crafts, they all have training programs. They all go through a three, three and a half, some of them five years. Like the plumbers and steam fitters, I believe that theirs is a five years. I believe that the electricians are a five year program. So we go through extensive training period. And of course they're also learning on the job site. Normally the classes are held in the evenings, the apprenticeship training programs.

MNK: Can we back up a little bit?

CO: Sure.

MNK: And could I ask why your father moved to Wheeling in 1940, was it?

(499) ???: This is where ... start right here.

CO: Yes. He moved, we moved into Wheeling in -- I was born in 1935, so it was around 1940. And he, his -- He used to work on the railroad and doing some other jobs out in the Woodruff area, or the Cameron area better known to a lot of people. And again, there was no work there. So he got a job welding at what they call City Welding in the Benwood area. And he did some work over in Martins Ferry in a plant. He wasn't a construction ironworker at that time. He was -- You could relate a little bit to the steelworkers trade. He belonged to what we call a, a different part of our international. We have also the shop local unions. They are the people that, that fabricate. I don't want to say they fabricate, (520) but put together the structural steel. The length, the lugs, meaning the holes to make the connections. So that is what they do in the shops themselves. A little bit similar to steelworkers. They work steady. You know, they're under roof. They -- Again, just, just put together, do the things they have to do for the erection of the structural steel. Well, my father was doing that. Up till 1945 he worked in a shop putting the structural steel together. And then since we're affiliated with one another even though there is no similarity between the construction ironworker and the shop division ironworker, then he was able to transfer into Ironworkers Local Union Number 549. And so he's been a member since 1945 of the local union. I've been a member since 1954. He was also on our executive board. He was also the assistant business manager. And so that brings up a, could be a question nepotism, you know. You hear a lot about nepotism. Most generally, fathers do (543) not want their sons to be ironworkers. And the reason they don't is because it's tough to budget on that type of an income of not knowing where your next job is going to be. And again, the seasonality. You can imagine trying to work in the rain, climbing the structural steel, you know, up a hundred feet to a hundred and fifty feet. Well, you can't do that. You know, that's how people get killed. So you don't work those days. And then also the snow. Bad days in the wintertime. You don't work during those days. So naturally, I did not want any of my children to be ironworkers neither. But you have to do something. Even though they may go to college, when they come out of college, there is no job. But they do have to take a test, you know. Nobody else can take those tests for them. And we do not -- I'm

saying the officers do not grade those scores and that. So they have to earn it on their own. They do have a good background. They know some of the answers to the test only because of hearing the lingo, so to speak, around the kitchen table or whatever would be. And that's where I learned a lot. When I was 12 years old or so I'd hear my dad talking, and I had a little bit of a background. But again, I did not intend to be an ironworker

(572) years ago. I wanted to be a civil engineer, but I just didn't have the money to continue with the college education, especially when I got married and had a family, you know, at an early age and everything. My son is, is an ironworker. I have two of them that are ironworkers. One of them lost his arm about seven years ago in an accident, and we -- Again, our work is very dangerous, and it was up at the Wheeling Nissan plant up in Follansbee, West Virginia. He got into 25 thousand volts and it come, you know, they had to amputate his left arm. And the electricity came out through his feet and so both of his feet, his insteps are gone. He's lost some toes and that. But I'm only pointing this out. He's doing very fine, but I'm pointing this out that our work is very dangerous. But getting back to the nepotism, if anybody relates to their own children, the only thing they can really help them with is what they're involved in. Other than if you have contacts. Take the, the theater, the --

(597) MNK: Okay, so any response to Curtis Oliver? Anybody?

GS: That was a good point, the last one he made there. How else are you going to help your kid besides what you're in. So you can't take him -- A doctor could push his kid to be a doctor, but it's kind of hard for a coal miner to teach his kid to be a doctor.

???: What's, what's -- Who, who disapproves of nepotism? Is it the union. Do unions make rules against it?

GS: There's no, there's no rules against it.

???: I didn't think so. He's talking like it's bad ... like we're looked down on.

BK: My father certainly didn't want me in the coal mine. That's the very last place in the world he wanted me. All my life -- When I was 12 years old my father told me he'd rather see me digging ditches than working in the coal mine. When I -- In 1974 when I graduated from high school and I thought college or the coal mine. Coal mine's a lot of jobs, booming, you

can go get a job, good money, good money. I said, "Dad, I think I'm going to get a job in the mine." I says, "Can you get me an application?" He was a mine inspector, he was around. He said, "Son," he said, "don't go in the coal mine." He said, "It's a shaky industry. On its best day, it's a shaky industry. You'll never know when you've got a job." He said, "Tomorrow --" It was good to me for 19 years. I don't like not having a job. My father didn't want me in the mining industry. It was better for me than it has been for a lot of people. I stayed in one place for almost 20 years. That's a rarity for

(634) most people anymore. I'll move on and not be too bitter about it. But yeah, if I listened to my father, I'd have probably went to school and been doing something different, I don't know what. He certainly didn't want me there.

MNK: Here's a woman who went to work in the steel mills when she was 16 years old. And worked from 1936 until, I believe, in the '70s when her husband had a stroke. She finally had to get out of the steel mills to take care of him. And she grew up in a fairly large family in the Depression. Her father was an unemployed coal miner and helped her lie

(651) about her age so that she could get a job in the steel mills.

Cynthia Thames: I made furnace pipe. That was my job. And I made a good living at it. During the war, many a time I worked two, three doubles. That was 16 hours. I would go seven o'clock in the morning and work till eleven at night. So -- Then one thing I remember that I thought was kind, you know, since it's a little bit about labor -- If you worked a press and you broke the die, not on purpose. If you broke it, you had to have three days off. They didn't take into consideration when it's your fault. They say it was your fault even if it wasn't. And they would give you three days off without pay. But the company was good to me. I can't say anything bad about the company really. So --

MNK: Did you ever break a die?

CT: No, I was fortunate.

MNK: This is Wheeling Corrugating.

(671) CT: I was fortunate. I worked a lot of machines, but I never broke any. But I remember the older girls, they would try to go faster probably than I did. When you're 18 years old, 19, you're not going to work as hard as a woman that worked there, you know, 10, 12 years.

And when I started there, I got thirty-seven and a half cents an hour. And that was big money. And a woman come up to me says, "Boy, are you lucky young lady." And I said, "Why?" She said, "We just got a raise. We only got twenty-eight and a half cents an hour and worked 10 hours a day." They had to work 10 hours a day for twenty-eight and a half cents. But I guess in those days that was good money. Because my dad wasn't making any more than I was making in a coal mine. Like I said, we made a good living at it. Then a lot of times when -- If we missed the last streetcar, we had to get a train to go home, either a train or a Greyhound bus. Now since you said, you know, not familiar -- It would leave at Wheeling like maybe two o'clock in the morning. I'm not sure about the time. And would go down South Wheeling and over the Bellaire, you know, bridge in Bellaire. And that's how we got home because there was no other way. We never had cars or anything. Well, hardly anybody had cars then, you know. I remember the '36 flood. It was bad. We were in the flood. And the factory was in the flood in 1936.

MNK: Really?

(707) CT: Oh yes. That's when they hired a lot of people, right after the flood. That's how we got on.

MNK: Oh really.

CT: After the flood, uh huh. They hired an awful lot of people because they had a lot of clean up, and they got behind in their orders. Now we got laid off a good bit. And we caught turns, what they call catching turns. You go out in the morning at seven o'clock and sit there hoping they need somebody, you know. And if they did, they'd call you in and sometimes you'd get two and three hours and that's it. But it was enough to hold your seniority, you know, in the plant. And we'd go home. And sometimes we'd go back at two o'clock, try to catch another couple hours or a shift. Because there was no such thing, you know, as overtime then. We worked all holidays. I know I worked Easter. I worked Thanksgiving. I worked New, like I told you, New Year's Eve, New Year's Day. We worked all holidays.

MNK: Christmas?

(730) CT: No. That's one --

(side 2) CT: A friend of mine, another girl, we got off the streetcar, and we had to walk this mile. We didn't know where it was. Of course we found it, you know. And I went in that plant and

had to walk up about four flights of stairs, real steep stairs. And I didn't know -- I kept looking around, didn't know a soul. It, it was really a, an experience. And the boss told us where to go, and he looked at me and says, "I don't think you're old enough, are you?" I said, "My dad said I am!" Yeah, I says, "My dad said I am." So they showed us what to do, and we started to work. I don't think I run the press the first time. I think they gave me a little hand job. I think they kind of knew I was young. But I don't remember too much to be truthful. I remember working, taking our break, you know, whenever we got the lunch, going home and getting the streetcar, running down to grab the streetcar so we wouldn't have to wait till that two o'clock in the morning for the -- Because if you missed it, that's what you had to do. But my first --

(013) MNK: She's, she's wonderful. She goes --

???: Pencil.

MNK: Anybody have a pencil?

(014) BC: Yes. I remember a fellow that worked for me at Yorkville, a supervisor who -- When he was hired, he lived in Martins Ferry. His wife used to pack him a lunch, and he would walk all the way to Yorkville. Then he would stand out in front of the boss out in the yard, and the boss would come out. And he would pick 50, 100 guys. And if you weren't picked, then you'd come back the next turn. Two weeks he walked three times a day from Martins Ferry to Yorkville carrying that same lunch till he was hired. And finally when he was hired, then he was never laid off again. He worked the rest of his life, he worked for the company. His first job was to get in a caboose of a car hauling our steel and follow the steel to the customer. Because in those days we didn't trust railroad companies to deliver our steel so we assigned an employee to get in the caboose and travel with the train.

(025) Jack Brannen: And all the friends that I had around there, they got jobs down in the Benwood mill. Well, you had to be 16 years old to get a job. And I went down to try to get a job. My poor mother packed me a lunch in a brown bag. I'm down there -- Back in those days you started work at ten after six in the morning. You didn't quit until six o'clock, six thirty that night.

MNK: This is Jack Brannen, Margaret's uncle. He's 82, and he put in 50 years at, at Benwood.

(031) JB: Twelve hours a day. I'd be sitting there on a bench like this, sitting there with my back up

against the wall. They only had one man in the employment office at that time. Just one person. I ... I never will forget him. He was from South Wheeling too. And he's a, would sit there and just look at me. I was only -- I only weighed about 115 pound, 14 years old. I just looked like a child looking for a job in the mill, in a pipe mill. He'd say, "I'm sorry, son, nothing today." I said, "Okay," and I picked up my little bag. I'd go back home. Next morning I'm down there at five thirty in the morning. Same thing. I'd sit there. About eight thirty, nine o'clock he'd look at me, "I'm sorry son, nothing today." This went on for five days. I'm down there every day. It finally comes Friday. I'm sitting there all by myself. He looked at me and he said, "You must want to work." I said, "That's what I come down for." He said, "I'm going to put you to work." ...

(043) MNK: And to get, to get a little, a little bit into some of the earlier traditions of, of coal mining in this region, we, yesterday or the day before -- Recently we interviewed John Kogut over in Martins Ferry, whose father was, worked in the mines near there way, way back years and years ago. And he, he gave us a lot of detail about his father's experience.

MNK: Let me just ask a, a general question about, about the union in your father's day. What, what sorts of stories did he tell about getting a union organized?

(052) John Kogut: Of course that was long before I went to the coal mine. Most of those stories was abuse by the companies. And getting the shaft, getting shafted. When it come to the weight of the coal that they had put out, then they always had the, what they called a dirty coal threat that they held over the miner's head. Let me try to explain now what a dirty coal would be. See, a vein of coal is very pure mostly, but they have, they have parts in them what they call, it's sulfur, sulfur veins. And that is very hard, and it will not burn. And a lot -- If you ever try to burn in a furnace would be a lot of bad odor come out of it. Well, naturally the company didn't want that dirty coal loaded into their, you know, along with their good coal because when they dumped it, it would all get mixed up and just ended up somewhere in some furnace. Somebody would complain about it. So the threat that I'm talking about -- If they were dissatisfied with you in one form or another, they would threaten you with the dirty coal. And if you got three dirty coals, you were fired. If for some reason -- Now this is all told to me by my dad, of course not by my mom, mother, because she didn't work in the

(070) coal mine. But if they had -- If you were apt to stand up to one of the bosses for any reason or other like some of those people did -- My dad was a feisty one. He didn't let anybody spit in his soup as we always say. If you had the guts to stand up to a, to one of the bosses for any reason or maybe sometime there was a possibility of a little bit of dirty coal, you got three of those, and you, you were fired. Then you -- Either you had to go back for your, your job back. Like I put in the book there, if you were married, your wife would have to go plus sometime and beg for your job behind closed doors in an office. Now this might be a little, little farfetched, I couldn't prove it, but that's what my mother said. Then what went behind those office doors, my mother wouldn't, wouldn't say. She was too much of a lady, but at that time already, we were old enough to realize what, what could have been going on.

(080) MNK: Does that ring any bells for Mingo County?

BK: I grew up around, I grew up around coal camps. Anybody ever see a coal camp? I grew up around coal camps, and that's what they were. These strings of houses that all looked the same. And jobs, jobs were fought over by everybody, and families were connected. And, and politics played a big part in it. Yeah, it was real nasty business from what I gather. All of it was, was like that. And there probably were incidents like he's talking about and lots of things done to get your job and then to keep it. Yeah, my dad in his early days hand loaded. They counted cars and, and they would go out and check. And if they found stone in the cars, they would -- There may be just a small bit of stone in the car, but they would take the whole car off of you. Well, sure they would use the coal out of the car, but you wouldn't get credit for it. And a lot of those things did -- I've heard a lot of the same things myself. And I saw the people, the song *Owe Your Soul to the Company Store* by Ernie Ford -- We grew up, and I'll swear, I saw when I was 10, 11 years old, I saw my dad bring home paychecks with no money on them where every bit was taken to pay -- Not everybody

(098) grows up that way, and, and it's different. But, but I saw that. I saw that personally. We were -- My father worked in the union for Island Creek Coal Company, and at their store at, at their price you could buy anything from potatoes to shotguns to tractors to tires and meat for the freezer, and the freezer. And you got everything. You, you own nothing, you

didn't buy from them. And once you got into that circle, you could not get out of it. It, it was so hard. And my parents escaped with a lot of really hard work. They, they pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, but I see a lot of people that don't. And right now I haven't heard -- My dad's charge number for Island Creek was 44864. I heard that so much when I was this tall that I will remember that till the day I die. And you can get anything.

(108) I bought my lunches for school on it sometimes. You'd go into the coal camp store right there by the school, and you would get a bag of chips and, and a pop or a candy bar or nothing. And there was times when there was nothing. But yeah, that's true. Coal camps. You lived in a little communities, every house looked the same. They would come around and paint them about twice a year. I mean about once every two years they would come around and paint them. They'd dig you a new toilet when you needed it. And, and that was life, you know. That was life for everybody.

(115) BC: I think that's was the way with a lot of industries. It was the way with steel and coal. And anytime they could build a company house, then you were captive because --

???: Oh yeah.

BC: They rented you the house. They had the company store. You charged everything. You didn't pay a cheaper price.

BK: Oh, you paid a more expensive price.

BC: ... right you did.

BK: Their price.

(119) BC: That's right. I've, I've been fortunate to be able to go through a bunch of those, those credit vouchers or whatever they, they called it at the time. And I'll bet you if I read 90, there were only 2 or 3 where the guy made any money at all. Everything else went to the company store. And then they had you because then if you wanted to form a union, the way they did it was by threatening to throw you and your family out. And if you remember in those, those days the coal mines were way out. You couldn't get there from here. That's the reason the company stores and the company houses were there. Because if you lived in town then you couldn't get to the coal mine, okay. Unless you had a good horse.

BK: That's why they called them camps.

(128) BC: Right. So it -- If, if you went out on strike, then they took your house away from you and your family. So they sort of had you. I mean it was, it was like a circle.

GS: I know the state legislature at that time in West Virginia decided that that was like a slave-master relationship. They didn't have to give any notice that they were going to throw you out of the house.

BC: No.

GS: They threw you out in the middle of the night or whenever they wanted to.

BC: Right. And I think, I think it would be good for all of our children to really realize how much danger there were, there was, and strikes and Pickerington agents and people brought in to break heads. *Golden Seal* magazine had a great article here about the Cliftonville Mine, which is up at Wellsburg, where there were eight coal miners killed and a sheriff in a gun battle. You know, we hear about Matewan in the southern part of West Virginia --

BK: Can I, can I stop you right --

BC: But this is, this is really --

BK: Here for a half a second?

BC: Sure.

BK: You want to know how we pronounce it? Matewan.

(141) BC: Matewan. Okay, I'm sorry!

BK: You're right, that's, that's how I hear. And I, I've not even seen the movie because I grew up 20 miles down the road, and I got a brother living downtown Matewan right now. So, so I do, I do know, but --

(145) BC: The point I was trying to make, it was, it was terrible in those days.

BK: Yeah.

BC: And it was all over. It was in the steel industry and the coal industry, almost any industry that you went to. They brought the -- That's the reason we're in this building today was because what happened at Homestead with Frick and, and Carnegie, and the fact that we didn't want a library here because of that terrible situation. So we built our own, which is what we're in today.

MNK: So Carnegie made the offer to, to build a library and it was turned down?

BC: Yes. He made the offer to us, and the unions made sure that, that it was voted out. And then they were responsible for building this library, which they did.

GS: I think more study needs to be done. I've read a whole lot about the southern West Virginia, a lot of history written about it. Not too much about northern West Virginia. And the people I work with -- I know there's stories here.

BK: That's a really good point. And, and where I come from, we've gotten more of a black eye and a bad name for, for some of the things. And it has been -- Not only this state, Kentucky. God, I could tell you stories about some of the things that's gone on in, in that edge of Kentucky. And believe it or not it's, it's -- There's places down there that are poorer than we were, which is poor. And, and you're right. Up here -- What I've found up here there's just a, just a rich history of workers of every type.

GS: That, that *Golden Seal* article, I read that. And I never, I never knew anything about it. You'd, you'd think you'd have heard something like that, you know.

BC: Yeah, there's, there's a reason why you haven't heard. It's because of -- I'm not going to mention it on tape, but it was because who owned it. Who owned the coal mines. That's why. They're still -- This is -- I've collected this. This is just on, on some of the union wars, people that were killed, shot. This is just what I've, I've run -- This isn't steel. This is everything but steel.

(171) GS: I've worked with people whose fathers and grandfathers worked in the mines. And they told me -- Well, he told me about this guy getting shot and the big battle they had there. I've never read in any history books about it, that's for sure.

BK: In some of the areas a lot of the history -- Down, down home I've got -- Did you ever hear of the Blair Mountain War in -- Yeah, I'm sure you did.

???: What is it? Tell, tell us about it.

(177) ???: It's when the coal miners, the union men, they fought up on the top of Blair Hill ... about five miles away from where my grandmother lived. And they fought in the war because --

BK: Help him out. The unions trying to organize. It was, it was -- My grandfather, my mother's father, they lived at the foot of Blair Mountain actually, right at the foot of it. And he

fought in that -- You still -- I know people right now that have gone up there and found old ammunition and things like that. But a lot of that heritage that you don't hear -- You don't hear anything about things like that. They teach -- They taught you a little bit of it in school, didn't they ...

???: Uh huh.

(188) BK: But down there, everybody knows the story. Everybody had relatives that were involved one way or the other. And it would be a shame to let those things get away from all of us because, because gosh, we need to learn about things like that so that our children aren't facing the same thing we're facing now.

BC: The winners always write the history books right?

BK: That's, that's the sad part of it.

MNK: Well, it's a pretty dangerous situation now with all of you unemployed coal miners getting into universities and, and some of you are going to bring this experience to, to the academy, which has, which has been largely ignorant of it. And I think it's going to greatly enrich the possibility you're talking about for ... story tellers.

(198) BK: And it's, it's a lot of different industries too. It's the steelworkers. It's the --

GS: Autoworkers.

BK: The autoworkers. Almost every industry. I'll tell you what, if you go down here now -- Not all colleges are the same. I know this is a community college, and the reason I'm there is because it's what me and my government can afford. But anyway -- And there's a ton of people out there. If you go down there, Wheeling is filled with people that are in big trouble work wise. Good people, good workers. People that, that know a trade and, and don't have a place to use it. People that would be good at anything. People that want to work, hard workers. And you see them down there just like me scratching around and scratching their head and their tail trying to figure out how they're going to make a living and what they're going to learn to do next. A lot more people, half the people you pass on the street have to figure a new life for themselves halfway through their life and are trying to figure it. And, and it's just -- It's almost an epidemic I would say. That's what I get out of it just from being down there at the college. I mean how many people you know in the same boat I'm in, the

same boat you're in. And you've been fortunate, but it could have been you.

(213) BC: Sure. Could be me tomorrow.

BK: Could be you tomorrow.

BC: Right.

MNK: Could we, would we summarize this discussion a little bit by talking about where, where you see all this going? I mean it just sounds like it's becoming so intolerable for, for people. And, and so much unemployment now. How, how do you see this thing playing out over the next --

(219) GS: What you just mentioned, the academics, the distance is getting much bigger between the rich and the poor. I mean you got the elite, and you got the distances getting greater and greater. Some -- People don't seem to realize it. The college professors that I go to now, they, they don't, they don't understand. But there is one history professor that's even doing a study about this, the same situation. But he's doing a study in a detached point of view. He doesn't understand. He gives us long speeches. Going to Hungary to study coal mines. Why do you have to go to Hungary. He's getting a big government grant to do it, but, but then I get up and I say, "Well, you've told the problem very well." He did; he knew the problem. I says, "What's the solution?" There was complete silence. Those people, they are brains; they have brains. They need to start working on the real things instead of far off things. That's my opinion.

(234) BK: I obviously don't have a solution or I'd be doing -- Education -- The displaced worker is being education. He doesn't have a choice. If we can educate the corporate leaders in how to treat people to make it to where, to make it a unity. If we can teach them and if we can teach the government not to be so damn greedy and not to sell us out so quick to do something to keep our work and our products as much as we can, and our resources here in the continental United States. In the United States, not the continental United States, but the United States. If we would -- Instead of giving those people the tax breaks, give our people the tax breaks, give our people the jobs. Penalize what goes away from us, what we're giving away. They sold us out. I don't even know who owns the United States anymore. It probably isn't us. And when we can stop that at the government level to where

(252) we get fairly represented, and we're not now. We are sold out big time. All the workers, every worker in the United States is being sold out every day by government. And I know we're the government, but, but still that's what's happening. If we can do that and change the attitude of the, on a corporate level to where workers are treated like people not like, not like a tool to be used till it's worn and then discarded. And that is basically the attitude. When, when corporate management learns that, and we could fix the greediness and the ignorance of the government as far as taking care of its own people, then we're home free. We've got, we've got a resourceful country. We've got resources. We've got good people. We've got good laborers. Anywhere you walk downtown you can find somebody that will do a job for you and wants to do a job for you. It's not a lazy country like people paint it. It's just, it's a stifled -- People aren't given the opportunity so I see.

MNK: Great.

(264) BC: You're, you're going to end up with a, a bigger division between the educated and the uneducated. If we're going to become a high tech based country, then what happens to all the people that aren't educated now to get into that high tech. If you take away all the automotive, steel, coal, all these type jobs that go with the high tech, what happens to all those people. They can't all work for McDonald's.

BK: Bigger segregation. You've got the real poor and the real rich.

BC: Absolutely.

BK: That's exactly what you said earlier is happening fast every day.

(272) BC: You now even have states fighting against each other to get businesses. You have states that are willing to take all your jobs out there away from you and move them to Tennessee like up at Titanium. Titanium wants to move to Tennessee because Tennessee's going to give them tax breaks and the state of Ohio won't. So what happens then when the city of Wheeling decides okay, we're going to outbid Tennessee. And we're going to have that company moving up here now. Titanium's going to move to Wheeling because we're going to give them everything for free, you know.

BK: That's great for the people that work for Titanium in Wheeling, but the rest of the people that live in Wheeling that have to pay more taxes because of the tax break they're giving

them, that's a bad circle too.

(282) BC: That's a very bad circle, very bad circle. I, I just see this widening, every day of the high tech --

BK: ...

BC: With the rest of the jobs. And if all the rest of the jobs aren't there, then you got a real division in this country.

BK: And it will get to the point --

BC: And when you have division in a country like this with all those guns out there, you got anarchy.

BK: It's scary.

BC: Right.

BK: It's very scary.

BC: It is.

BK: And it's going to get to the point where, where you can't cross the line. Where more people don't have an opportunity to get an education, don't have an opportunity to get a good job. Then you got an angry bunch of poor people. And boy that's a scary combination.

(291) BC: I went to a class, a management class, two years ago or so where the professor at the end of the six weeks, or whatever we took this, asked us how many people today believe that you can have a revolution in this country. And I'll bet you 80 percent of the people -- That's right. Raised their hand. Now if you'd have said that in 1944, nobody raised their hand. So it's, you know, it's widening. Every day it's getting worse, you know. And if you got all this high tech, and all these kids are running around here that's causing all the trouble today, they're not educated. They don't want to go to high school. You know, what's happening. It's going to get worse.

MNK: Good point. Well I, I think that, I think that we've seen some, some very interesting developments in, and very painful developments in, in labor and industry as evidenced by our discussion tonight. It's easy to go back to the hand loading days and look at the injustices and, and the pain of those times. But the, the public relations being generated by the industry now, I think, has led most Americans to think that, that the people working in

the industries are, are really better off than they've ever been.

(313) BK: Great PR job. Great PR.

MNK: Great PR job there. These people are paid more. There, there are better conditions. The unions have, have been so effective that they priced themselves out of, out of a need for, for being, and we ought to get rid of them anyway. And, and I don't think that, that the greater society, except the people directly affected by it as you said tonight, have, have a very clear sense of what's coming down. And I think if we don't begin to communicate across class lines and, and -- That we're suddenly going to wake up to a very, very rude situation. And I -- So I wanted to leave you with, with this brief little piece. This, this is a, a short little radio piece that was funded by the Humanities Foundation back in 1981. So I made this program 13 years ago, and I think it's self-explanatory.

(330) MNK: (*singing*) Oh say did you see in the winter ... this morning. He passed by your door on his way to the coal. He was tall, he was slender and his dark eyes so tender. His occupation was mining, West Virginia his home. Oh what will I say to his poor little children.

???: I just fell in love with him.

(338) MNK: (*singing*) And what will I tell his old father-in law. And what will I say to my ... My heart that's clear broken if my darling is gone. Oh say did you see in the winter ... this morning.

MNK: The memory of November 19, 1968 is painful for Sara Kosnoski. She lives at Barrackville, just a few miles down the road from Mannington where her husband worked the midnight shift at the Number Nine Mine. He worked 45 years in the coal mines since he was a boy of 14. And he knew the danger signs.

Sara Kosnoski: My husband worked midnight in -- Well when he came home the last day from work was Sunday morning. He ... about eight or a little after. And he came home, and he says, "Come down here, I want to tell you something." He said, "That mine's going to go." He said, "It's so full of gas, and we have the machine covered up." He said, "They're more concerned about the ... than they are the mean." And seeing his ... and he'd take all them readings. When he'd take the readings, they were bad, you know. Too much methane. So I said to him, I said, "Pete, don't go to work anymore." I said, "I'll help you. I've helped you before when your strikes, and we'll make it. And I will work. I'm not too proud to work. I

- love to work.” And so he said he’ll sleep on it. So then he came up and he went to post office. He couldn’t sleep, you know. He -- And then pretty soon he laid down. He got up that evening, and I made his evening meal. Then he -- We came in the living room
- (371) and they was playing *Honey I’ll Miss You* on this television, ... song. He said, “You know if you’re in the other room, I’ll miss you.” He said -- I said, “My goodness, Pete, I think about that every day. If you’re in the other room I miss you too, we’re just so close.” And I said, “When you’re outside I miss you.” Because if he’d go down the road to go to post office or go to the grocery store, I’d always run to the den and he would toot his horn and wave down by the road, and I’d look out the window and wave to him. That’s how close we were. He’s just that good of a guy, I’ll tell you. ... that evening when they was playing that, well then we made the remarks to each other. And later -- Well, we both loved to dance. He was really agile. We loved to dance. We could do all the dances. And so we were dancing around here in the living room too. And then we played a game of cards, 500 rummy. And it was getting about ten o’clock. And he said would I make his bucket, make his lunch. And I said, “Peter, you going to go?” He said, “I have a job to do.” So he dressed and then he said, “Good bye, I’m going to work.” He kissed me good bye, and I said, “I love you, Pete, I’ll see you in the morning. Be careful.” And he went. So then I couldn’t sleep very
- (398) good. I’m always an early riser. I get up sometimes ten till six in the morning. I get up early that morning, and I turn on the *Today* show. And it told about the tragedy on the television. And I was alone sitting on this davenette. Right here on this davenette. And, I don’t know, I just guess I was in shock, but I ran to the phone. I called my son. I called Pete’s brother who lives next door over here. And then I just took out ... screaming.
- (408) Hazel Dickens: (*singing*) We read in the paper and the radio tell. ... was to raise our children be miners as well. Tell them how safe the mines are today. And to be like daddy, bring home a big pay. Now don’t you believe them, my boy, that story’s a lie. Remember the disaster at the Mannington Mine where 78 miners were burned alive. Because of unsafe conditions, your daddy died. They lured you with money and ...
- (428) SK: I didn’t go up to the mines few days because I couldn’t walk. My young son and my husband’s brother, they stayed up there day and night, waiting to see if they could get any

sign of life, and if they could get him. And I always dream about Pete. My pillow would be soaked, I'd be crying. Just sopping wet, all my clothes, for over a year. And I'd always dream, and he'd always come smiling and he say, "I didn't get killed in the mine. I was just away." And one night I was lying on the davenport, and I was alone. But all at once I just, I raised up because something cold just went by me. And I looked, and I reached out to feel it, like a wind is the way it was. So I think that was Pete's spirit telling me I'm okay or something.

(445) Hazel Dickens: (*singing*) There is a grave way down in the Mannington Mine. There is a grave way down in the Mannington Mine. Oh, what were their last thought. What were their ... as the flames overtook them in the Mannington Mine.

MNK: The story of the Manning Mine disaster was told by Sara Kosnoski. The song of the same title was written and sung by Hazel Dickens. Jane Ritchie wrote the *West Virginia Miners* song. Engineering was by David ... and field recordings by Jerry Millis and Michael Kline. Joint funding came from Davis and Elkins College and the Humanities Foundation of West Virginia, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities. To get in touch with us, write The Homeplace, 114 Boundary Avenue, Elkins, West Virginia, 26241. This is Michael Kline. Come back and see us at the Homeplace.

(468) Hazel Dickens: (*singing*) How can God forgive you, you do know what you've done. You killed my husband, now you want my son.

BC: If I might add something. I interviewed a woman who lost her husband in the Benwood mine. Actually through her daughter because she didn't speak very good English. But the day the mine blew up, they heard this terrible explosion. Of course everyone knew what it was. It was so violent that a mule in the entrance to the mine, it, inside Benwood Wheeling Steel, blew a mule from the entrance to the mine over into Ohio. They found part of the mule in Ohio. That's not where the men where. The men entered up on the hill. And she said first thing that she heard after about three minutes were the women walking toward the mine, very few men, but the women with children in arms and grandmothers and sisters. Because all the other men were working. And she could hear very faintly, and then louder and louder and louder as they came by her house, the crying. And she said it was

just like a wail, you know. So it was really, really sad, really sad. I didn't mean to make you cry.

(493) MNK: That's the bottom line though, isn't it.

BC: That's the bottom line.

MNK: That's what it all comes down to in the end. Thank you very much gentlemen for --

BC: Thank you.

MNK: Being here with us. Thank you so much.

BC: ...

(500) BK: We all figured it. You know, you just get up there and figure it.

BC: I hope you find work.

BK: Well, I will. I'm like everybody else. I've been to a lot of funerals, I never seen anybody starve to death.

???: I was looking in the library at the old newspapers. I thought I would look at what happened, what they said in, about Labor Day a hundred years ago in 75 ... A hundred years ago there was tens of thousands of people in Wheeling ... to march. ... people. And the papers covered it really well. And 75 years ago they were talking about the biggest Labor Day celebration ever. ... All they had about Labor Day ...