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## Frank Borgognoni Memoir

**B644. Borgognoni, Frank** b.1924

Interview and memoir

1 tape, 90 mins., 32 pp.

### ILLINOIS COAL: THE LEGACY OF AN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

Borgognoni, coal miner, discusses his family history and emigration from Italy, violence between the United Mine Workers and the Progressive Miners of America during the 1930's, tactics employed by the coal companies and the unions, hazardous working conditions in the mines, mechanization, cooperation among neighbors, mining communities in Christian County, and the varied ethnic and religious backgrounds of miners. He also discusses the operation of a family tavern which was frequented by PMA members, his upbringing and family life.

Interview by Kevin Corley, 1986

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## Preface

This manuscript is the product of a tape recorded interview conducted by Kevin Corley for a special project, "Illinois Coal: The Legacy of an Industrial Society." The project was sponsored by the Illinois State Historical Society and funded in part by the Illinois Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Additional support came from the Oral History Office of Sangamon State University. Joyce Fisher transcribed the tapes and Susan Jones edited the transcript.

Frank Borgognoni was born in 1924. During the time of the coal mine troubles between the Progressive Miners of America and the United Mine Workers, his father ran a tavern that was frequented by the Progressives. From this vantage point Mr. Borgognoni was able to gain keen insight into the developments of these rival unions. Later he became a UMW employee of Peabody Coal Company and saw the arrival of a new era of mechanization in the mines and its effect on the communities.

Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that it is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, narrator and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. Sangamon State University and the Illinois State Historical Library are not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for views expressed therein; these are for the reader to judge.

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Frank Borgognoni, Bulpitt, Illinois, June 24, 1986.

Kevin Corley, Interviewer.

Q: Mr. Borgognoni, would you please state your full name?

A: Frank Borgognoni.

Q: Do you have a middle name?

A: Pete.

Q: Pete, all right. What was the time and place of your birth?

A: July 4, 1924.

Q: What do you know about your family surname, Borgognoni? Is that from  
. . .

A: That's from Italy. They were raised on a farm, a small farm. My father came to this country, his purpose in coming over here, he wanted to see and locate his father's grave in McAlester, Oklahoma. He got killed in a coal mine over there, and when he went down there, he couldn't find the marker. So therefore he came back up here in Ladd, right after the Cherry Disaster and there he located his uncle. He was sixteen years of age, and in order for him to be able to work in the coal mine, thirty-six inch coal. He worked on his hands and knees, he shot his own places, he shoveled his own coal, and all that. In order for him to be able to go down below his uncle had to take him with him because he was not old enough and didn't have no miner's papers, so therefore his uncle took him under his jurisdiction in there. He worked there a couple of years and did not like it. So he traveled down here to Christian County where he had some friends. One friend in particular, Sam Bernardi, who ran the Hawaiian Inn for a period of years in Taylorville, Illinois. Some how or other, I don't know how, but he got a job at Number Eight, at the coal mine.

Q: How did he know these friends? Where did he know them from?

A: It's just like anything else, his friends that I'm talking about were originally from Italy from the same providence where he came from.

Q: What providence was that?

A: That would be Bologna.

Q: Bologna, all right. And you say it's a farming community in the hills?

A: That was the purpose when they came over here to make some money in order to buy some more land to enlarge their farm.

Q: Yes.

A: His father got killed, so when he was here over a couple or three or four years here in Christian County down here at Mine Number Eight, he did--through my mother's telling me so--he saved a thousand dollars and sent it to his mother. She ended up with 84 acres of ground over there, she bought ground with the money. His intentions was really just to work just a few years here and go back to Italy. But he met my mother, got married, and he stayed here, he never did go back.

Q: What was your mother's maiden name?

A: Corso.

Q: Okay, what was her first name?

A: Louise.

Q: Louise Corso.

A: Better know as Gee-Gee Borgognoni. They called her here, the people that knew her, they called her Gee-Gee, and her real name was Louise Borgognoni.

Q: All right, you say your mother bought the farm then back there, do they still own it, your family?

A: My grandmother bought it.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: On my father's side.

Q: Right.

A: Yes, they still own it. When she died, they sent my father the papers to sign in order to get his portion of the farm and he wouldn't take any of it. He said that his brother had taken care of his mother there for 35 years, that he was going to give his part to his brother and he gave it all to him. His part of it. And that's what. . . .

Q: Yes. How did they send the money? What was the method of getting it there?

A: I think, to the best of my knowledge, that the biggest part of it was sent through an Italian counsellor up here in Springfield. But I'm not sure, but I think that was the procedure that they used.

Q: Yes. Did you ever here the counsellor's name?

A: Never did. Never did. But they had one up there.

Q: Yes. Do you remember the story about a guy in Langleyville, the family who was sending their money to Italy through a counsellor in Springfield?

A: I did, I certainly did. At the particular time, I was six years of age and I attended the first grade of school at Langleyville. That's the reason I know how old I was. My school teacher was Mrs. Garandini, and she was an Italian teacher. Just catty-corner across from me was two people living there, one by the name of Pia, and I don't remember the other one. They were sending money through this one counsellor and somehow or another, the money was not getting back to Italy like it was supposed to. They found them both dead in the basement, shot to death. More or less they thought it was the Italian counsellor that was embezzling the money and they thought he was to blame. But I cannot verify that as a fact, just hearsay.

Q: Yes. Do you know if that's the same counsellor your parent's used?

A: I couldn't tell you that. I couldn't really tell you that for sure. I don't know.

Q: Do you know, were there usually more than one counsellors at that time?

A: I didn't know. I was just a kid and I just . . .

Q: Yes. Well, that's an interesting story. I just thought that we'd try to figure that out a little bit.

A: Yes, I remember that. In fact, I even lived there when they had killed two other people across the street from me there.

Q: Oh, really? Two other people?

A: Yes. They were supposed to be then known as part of the Mafia, of which I don't know for sure. But they were, how would you say that, when you try to get people to give them money?

Q: Extortion?

A: Extortion, and it didn't work out that way. The man was waiting for them, from what I hear, with a gun and shot him. He didn't have no intention of giving them anything.

Q: Yes. Now, was that Art Cioni?

A: Art Cioni, yes.

Q: I've heard that story before.

A: And I lived across the street that night.

Q: And you heard the shots?

A: No. No, I didn't. I was just a youngster and, of course, I was woke up after it was all over with. But that's the way the story went.

Q: Yes. What'd they do with the bodies?

A: I don't know about that either. I know that somehow or other whatever he told the state's attorney in Taylorville, that it was more or less looked upon as . . .

Q: Self defense?

A: . . . self defense and justified homicide or whatever, and that was just about it. Then I also lived here across the street.

Q: In Kincaid?

A: In Bulpitt here, when two other fellows were shot by one shot. One shot came out of a shotgun. They had what they called a pumpkin seed in the shell. It went through one fellow by the name of Mr. Jones, and he wasn't a Progressive or a coal miner. But the other one was a Progressive, and they blamed it on a fellow by the name of Hap Donnelly, but it wasn't him. It was a Progressive miner was in the alley with a shotgun, drunk, and the gun went off accidentally. But he was drunk and that's how they got killed. I was also living in Bulpitt then.

Q: Do you know what the Progressive's name was that did the shooting?

A: All I knew him by was Jocko they called him. He was an old Lithuanian Progressive miner. He didn't do it on purpose but he was drunk.

Q: Did he get convicted for it?

A: Nobody ever knew about it.

Q: Nobody knew, it was just stories.

A: Nobody knew about it. Just one fellow here in Bulpitt knew about it. He never did say nothing. He finally told this fellow's dad, he said, "I know who shot your father," after the fellow died, he said, "I just didn't want to say anything." He said, "He didn't do it on purpose, he was drunk, and he told me." The man is a postmaster now down here at the post office, Lynn Jones.

Q: Lynn Jones?

A: Lynn Jones. He knows about it, knows who the fellow was.

Q: Good. Let's get back for a minute to your father and his immigration here. Did he come alone from Italy?

A: He came alone as a boy sixteen years old, not knowing anybody other than his father. He knew that his uncle was up here up north in Ladd, Illinois.

Q: He must've felt very strongly about finding your grandfather's grave.

A: Yes, he did. He wanted to know what happened to him, and he wanted to know where his grave was. He didn't say why he wanted to know where it was at but he wanted to locate it. When he got down there, he could not find it. Why, I don't know.

Q: Okay. So that's just a mystery that . . .

A: It's just a mystery. There was no marker or nothing there.

Q: Are there any other stories that have come down to you about your parents?

A: I had an uncle that lived in Langleyville, by the name of Vincent Corso. He worked at Number Eight, and he was responsible for the whole family coming over here, two sisters and a brother. He made the money working in the coal mine and he brought his mother over here. He went down to the bottom one day and got ahold of Mr. Shaw, the mine manager. He said, "I can't work in that place no more. The roof's awful bad." He says, "It's going to come in any time." Of course, he talked broken English, and Mr. Shaw said, "You get back in there and go back to work or I'll fire you."

Q: Did Mr. Shaw understand him?

A: Yes. So I'll tell you the full story on this just exactly how it went. It was told to me by my father. He went in there, he wasn't in there five minutes, the roof caved in and killed him. It was about a week or two after I was born.

Q: Yes. Did Mr. Shaw get in trouble for that?

A: No, not one bit. Not one bit of trouble.

Q: Did your uncle's family get compensation?

A: My grandmother got a little bit of money. I don't know how much, what it amounted to, but she got a little bit of money out of that. As the years went by, my father started this tavern and Mr. Shaw came in there one day. He said, "Pete, I know that I'm responsible for your brother-in-law getting killed." My father said, "Yes, I know that." He said, "You have to live with it, I don't." "Pete," he said, "I've really really lived hard over that," he said, "I'm sorry." "Well," he said, "like I said, you have to live with it, I don't."

Q: Yes. So that was punishment enough.

A: That was it. My father never said anymore. That was the length of the conversation. In fact, my father didn't even want him in the place, really.

Q: Yes. But he allowed him in anyway?

A: He allowed him in there anyway, which he felt like he had every right to come in there as any other American citizen or otherwise, you know, how we live in this country.

Q: Yes.

A: We're easy to forget.

Q: Yes. That's good.

A: Forget and forgive in other words. It's too late now to worry about it in other words.

Q: Yes. Let me turn this off just a second. (tape turned off momentarily) Okay, before I turned off the tape, we were talking about your father. What was his occupation in the mine, what exactly did he do?

A: He started out I guess at 58. I don't know what they had, hand loading in them days or at that particular time, but I'm not familiar with that. But I do know that when they first got the first cutting machine, I don't know if it was what they called the Joy cutting machine or if it was what they called a monkey gardener. Mr. Hardy, Mr. Bill Hardy, put my father on this machine. He liked him so well on this machine that at that period of time, the mines would work six months and they'd be off six months. That's the way they operated. He came to Tovey where we lived, and he told my dad, he said, "Don't you take a job no place else." He said, "When they go back to work every year," he said, "like off these layoffs, you'll be the first one to go back to work and I'll come and get you."

Q: Why did he feel so strongly for him?

A: He did his job and he did it well, really. Not because he was my father, but that's just the way he operated. Everything he ever done, he tried to do it to the best of his ability. But they claimed that he was one of the better cutting machine men right from the start that they had along the midland. They had quite a few mines around here.

Q: Yes.

A: He even at that particular time, which you never heard of, he got overtime you wouldn't believe.

Q: They didn't have to give him overtime, they just did it?

A: But they did. Mr. Hardy gave him this overtime because he wanted coal to start out with the next day. He knew my father would have these places cut for him just the way he wanted it.

Q: Yes. Well, good. All right, was your father ever injured on the job?

A: Never was. Never was injured to my knowledge.

Q: Did he ever describe his relationship with his fellow workers?

A: He had a fellow working with him that he said wasn't worth a darn. But he said they give it to him and he didn't care. He said he carried him and the only thing he didn't like about this one worker and he was known as the second man on the machine. But when they went on that strike, that major strike there, my father was standing outside of Number Fifty-eight gate with a banner when the miners were coming home that night, coming out of the gate. His second man, Phil Petty from Taylorville, was sitting in the back seat, he rolled down the back window and he tried to spit on him. This is the way he told it to me, he just dropped his banner. He said, "If I've got to stand here and take this, I don't want no part of it." He never did go back, he said, "I'll never go back to the coal mine," and he didn't. That was the end of his coal mine career during that mine strike.

Q: So your father became a Progressive?

A: He became a Progressive, he run a tavern down here about half a block. He was the only Progressive miner with a tavern in Christian County. He told some stories about what went on. One of them I couldn't hardly believe, that they had a 30 caliber water cooled machine gun on these buildings. I guess it had to be true. The reason they had that was because they needed all the protection they could get, they were outnumbered. They had the Progressives standing guard here one night and a fellow went by in one of these new type Fords. The first V-8 Ford they ever made, and he was really going down the road. They hollered, "Halt" and he didn't stop. The men opened up and let him have it. Well, they cut down on him, they shot him. When he stopped, he ended up on these gas pumps here, dead. He had another fellow with him by the name of Douglas McQuinty. He lives over here in Bunker Hill, Kincaid over here. He crawled across the field on his hands and knees and got away. He lived.

Q: Was he wounded?

A: Wasn't touched.

Q: No.

A: He wasn't touched, and he got away. But another time they caught him down here and a man by the name of Lawrence Store had him on a sidewalk and had this 25 automatic pistol under his chin. He told him he was dead and my father said, "For God's sake Lawrence, don't kill him." Two or three guys had to pull him off and they turned him loose.

Q: Now, was he a strike breaker?

A: McQuinty was known as a thug, a Peabody thug. Carried a gun for them at that particular time, from what I understand. Whether it's true or not, I don't know. I'm just relating the story as it was told to me by the older fellows. I used to sit around and listen to them when I was a boy..

Q: On which building out here did they have that machine gun? Was it a machine gun or just a gun?

A: It was supposed to actually been a water cooled machine gun with a jacket on it, had one of them water cranks on it, sitting on that building. To this day, I can't hardly, but they swear by it, so I . . .

Q: Which building was it sitting on, do you know?

A: It's the third building down from right here. This was one, two, third building down.

Q: Okay, so that's on 104 . . .

A: No, it's right here on this street here.

Q: What's the street called?

A: That's Main Street.

Q: Main Street.

A: The building right now has got a big name on it, Joe's. It belongs to this fellow next door to the oil man.

Q: Was that a tavern down below at that time?

A: It was my dad's tavern.

Q: Your dad's tavern.

A: My dad's tavern.

Q: So even though your dad didn't work with the Progressives, didn't become Progressive and stay with the coal mine, he went back to his tavern and most of his friends were Progressives.

A: In favor of the Progressives because actually that's what he started out as, a Progressive. He did take the Progressive side. My father was a well respected man in this county, I mean not for nothing. Well respected, highly regarded as a man with a lot of principle about him. For a person who was born in Italy he didn't even talk broken English. What I mean, he spoke good American English. But anyway, they even used him as a mediator at different times when they wanted to get something through. Like for instance one time, a well known Peabody man, he wasn't a bad fellow, he just happened to be on the other side. He came up and said, "Pete," is what he said. "Pete, can I talk to you for a minute?" He said, "Why, sure. Come on in and you can talk to me." He said, "Pete, if you got any friends that wants to go back to work, you tell them they'd better go back to work. It's been two years now they've been on strike, they have lost this thing." Which was true, they had lost.

Q: What year was this?

A: Two years after the mine wars started, whatever year that was.

Q: 1934 about?

A: Somewhere in about 1934. So my father said, "Well, I'll talk to some of them." So he went to Tovey and just different guys that he talked to here in the tavern, he told them what the man had told him. It was surprising how many of the people that got mad at him and said, "Whose side are you on?" He said, "I'm still on the same side, but I'm just telling you what the man told me." He said, "You do whichever you want to." That's just the kind of a guy he was. Then during the war there, I was in the service. He was chosen one of the men in Southfork Township to go out on and make sales for government, for U.S. Savings Bonds during the war. That's just how well he was thought of.

Q: Yes. Tell me how he came about owning the tavern.

A: Owning the tavern?

Q: Yes.

A: He didn't want to go back to the coal mine no more.

Q: Where did he get the money to buy the tavern?

A: He borrowed the money from Mr. Orlandini. He loaned him the money.

Q: Now, Mr. Orlandini, where . . .

A: Nick Orlandini from Tovey, Illinois.

Q: Okay.

A: He liked my dad just like he did his own brother. He had a little money, and he said, "If you need it," and my father said, "Well, if you'll bring the papers here, I'll sign the papers for this money that I'm borrowing from you." He's got one son still living there in Tovey and he can tell the same story I'm telling. He said, "I don't need the papers. Your name's good enough for me." Which made my father feel good.

Q: Yes.

A: He was just that honest.

Q: Yes. What was Mr. Orlandini's occupation?

A: At that time they thought he was more or less supposed to have been a bootlegger.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: Of course, like I say, I was just a youngster and it was no place for kids at that time, whatever they was doing.

Q: Yes. All right. Did he ever get caught with bootlegging?

A: Not to my knowledge, not to my knowledge.

Q: Did he loan money to other miners?

A: I don't know about that. All I know is he loaned my dad some money one time and that was it.

Q: Yes. That's interesting.

A: Because they were the type of people, whatever business you did with them was between you and them. They didn't discuss it with anybody else. They were just that good a people. They helped a lot of people from what I understand, that needed money I guess.

Q: You're talking about the Orlandini's?

A: Yes. They were the type of people that if you needed help and they could help you, they'd help you, and they were just a good type of people.

Q: Yes.

A: As far as I'm concerned.

Q: Yes. All right, let me stop this again. (tape turned off momentarily) While the tape was off, you were telling me about a shooting that took place and with a National Guardsman?

A: Yes, in Tovey, Illinois. The man was standing and leaning up against a fence, minding his own business. The best I know is Mrs. Miller, said, "That's the man that's supposed to have been causing some trouble" or something. A National Guardsman got out of one of their vehicles and shot the man in the knee, and later on died from it. There was nothing ever done about it, nothing.

Q: Now, she was accusing this guy of being a Progressive troublemaker?

A: He was a Progressive. She accused him, I guess, of being one of the Progressive troublemakers.

Q: Do you know what his name was?

A: I think his name was Andy Gany.

Q: Oh, that's right. Andy Gynes I think. I think it was G-Y-N-E-S or something.

A: Well, his boy went by the name of Gany. I went to school with him.

Q: Oh, Gany, that's probably how you say it.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay, I remember that. How did the community feel about the National Guard there?

A: They were terribly upset, but they did need that . . . my folks were Progressive and I don't know what all, but they did need a National Guard but they didn't actually do it right when they did come in. They were partial towards the UMW of A at that time. But they needed a National Guard to hold down all the trouble. It could've been worse if it hadn't been for them and they had a ten o'clock curfew. If you were on the streets at ten o'clock, they'd run you in or they'd take you to headquarters and you were questioned why you were on the street. It was dangerous, people were carrying guns, PG's and all. How bad it was--a car load of these Peabody thugs that was carrying guns for Peabody would ride down the street and actually grab guns, PG's, off the sidewalk . . .

Q: Now, what's a PG?

A: PG's they called them, Progressive miners.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: . . . and haul them out in the country on the rural roads and just literally beat their brains in. Then take them back into town and dump them in the ditch. That I know for a fact. I seen one man that wasn't even taking either side that got a beating, and he wore a headband for over three months, I know, by the name of Williams. His father was just a dairy farmer, and he didn't have no part of it, even in the war. But he got his head beat in.

Q: Who was the leader of some of these Peabody thugs?

A: Duke Livesay was the big man, head man around this part of the country, but he actually never would get out and do any kind of dirty work himself. He was more or less the big man. He had a guy like Fat Orlandi and Andrew Daugherty and a few other fellows that would get out and then force their demands, whatever they wanted them to do. Just do a lot of dirty work that was all uncalled for, unnecessary.

Q: What was Duke Livesay's position with the company?

A: He wasn't with the company, what he ended up with was being board member of district twelve here. That's what he ended up with. What he was doing at that particular time, he was more or less like a pit committeeman. But he was actually on the Peabody side.

Q: What can you tell me about the pit committeeman in your father's days, say before the mine wars. Did they have a big role in helping to control things?

A: I never did hear my father ever talk too much about a pit committeeman when I was a boy. They more or less at that time they was just trying to form a union. That never really got rolling until later on after that big mine strike that they had. They actually had a union going for them, as far as I know.

Q: So the UMW wasn't too powerful until after the mine wars.

A: No, until they went on that strike. John L. Lewis was the head man then. But the whole reason, from what I understand, they asked the men to take a cut in wages and they wouldn't do it. Things were bad, it was. We all know there was a great big crash there that . . .

Q: Stock market crash?

A: Well, yes and then they had, what do you call that, that particular era?

Q: The Great Depression?

A: The Great Depression, and they had to take a cut, but they wouldn't do it. If the men would've been smart, like a fellow told my dad, after about three years and said, "To hell with it. We've lost it, let's go back to work." But what they done, what was sad, really sad, they let Peabody import some of the world's worst crumbs that you could ever dream of. Come up to this part of the country and take these people's jobs. There was a lot of good people, but there was a lot of crumbs with them.

Q: Where did they come from, most of them?

A: Most of them came from down around West Frankfort, Benton, and Herrin and down in that locale down there. There's a lot of good fellows that came from there that wasn't all that bad, but the biggest problem was the ones that they took out of these jails and brought them up here.

Q: Where were they from?

A: I don't know. They brought them out of them jails. You can imagine what they were. They were animals, really. I mean it's all over with, but they were animals. They made life miserable, unbearable for all the people around here.

Q: How so?

A: They'd abuse them in different ways. If they had a chance they'd start something, maybe start even just a fight with them, anything.

Q: Let's talk about then when you came around. Let me ask you a little about your household when you were a child. We'll just change the subject completely here for a second and get back to it.

A: All right.

Q: How were the rooms used? How many bedrooms did you have?

A: At my house?

Q: Yes.

A: We had two.

Q: Okay.

A: Now, I was one of the fortunate ones. My father had saved enough money, he was working just that short time in the coal mines, that he had Mr. Yearly, a carpenter, build him a house. The Italian fellows helped him build the basement, they dug it by hand. When Mr. Yearly and Mr. Westbrook got done with laying the blocks, the concrete and the building the house, my father owed Mr. Yearly \$1,900. He told him, he said, "Pete, your house is done." He said, "It's all yours." He said, "How much do I owe you?" He told him, "Nineteen hundred dollars." He said, "Don't go away, I'll be right here in about two minutes." Came back, gave him \$1900 cash and paid him. We had a new house when we lived there. The house was built in 1928, I believe, approximately.

Q: Okay.

A: I was about four or five years old. I was just young enough I could just barely remember it.

Q: Yes. You'd said something about the Italians helped to build it.

A: Yes.

Q: Was most of the community at that time Italian?

A: Ninety percent of them was Italian.

Q: Now you're talking about in Tovey?

A: In Tovey.

Q: Right. What about in Kincaid and Bulpitt?

A: They had a lot of Italians in that, but they also had like Bulpitt here. Bulpitt consisted of 90 percent Lithuanians. Kincaid had just a duke's mixture, just everything. Johnny Bulls, English, that's what the Johnny Bulls are, Frenchman, Italians, just all kinds of people in Kincaid. Irish, had a lot of Irish people in Kincaid.

Q: What was the largest percentage in Kincaid?

A: I couldn't really tell you. I always kind of thought that the English was about the biggest percentage of the nationality in Kincaid.

Q: You're talking about in 1928, 1930?

A: Yes. That's when all those coal mines got started. They all lived in Peabody company houses they had built across the tracks.

Q: What about in Langleyville, what were they?

A: They were 90 percent Italians.

Q: So Tovey and Langleyville were the two big Italian areas?

A: Right.

Q: All right, where did most of the Italians come from back in Italy?

A: Mostly from Rome on up. From there on down, it was very, very rare.

Q: That's where your family was from, from Bologna which is . . .

A: Bologna and then there was another race of people there, it's practically under the Bologna providence. They call it Budumase and around Venice, Italy and them places, a lot of them in Langley. That's what Langley was full of, and they had a few Frenchman in Langley.

Q: Since all these Italians came over here together, would you say that they did things together socially pretty much?

A: Everything.

Q: Everything together.

A: Yes. You've got to see that. They understood each other's language and they got along fairly decent. But I talked to a fellow one time, I said, "Why is it that you people came to these foreign parts, to Peabody coal mine?" He said they needed a job bad and they were good workers. That's the story that I got, excellent workers. They didn't come down there just to goof around, and they worked every day. You didn't have to worry about them not working. When that whistle blew they'd be there, which was something they didn't have to worry about was the absenteeism, which is a great factor in any of your industries today.

Q: What did the Italians do when the mine wars started? Were they split?

A: They pretty much stuck together. They pretty much stuck together. They stuck pretty good until about 1936, 1937, then they all finally just drifted back. I guess they got to worrying about their families and they thought it was time, the kids were getting bigger and it's time. I think they probably wanted to see their kids go to school, you know. They didn't want them in the coal mines, and you couldn't blame them for that. Everybody wants their kid to get an education.

Q: Yes. What force in your community was pulling the Italians together?

A: It was just mostly that the, like even on a Saturday or Sunday when they weren't working, they were off, they would always get together. Say, well, let's go get so and so, let's go, and they'd get out and play this bocce or they'd roll that big long cheese, that big round cheese.

Q: Yes.

A: And they'd play that bocce . . .

Q: Bocce ball?

A: . . . unbelievable. They got along, they'd get drunk and get a few arguments, which is only the natural incidence, it's going to happen. It happens in every race of people.

Q: What about church?

A: Catholics. Ninety percent of them were Catholics. Of course, what made it a big Catholic community was that you had your Irish in there with them too, see. You had your Italians, 90 percent of the Italians were Catholics. You had your Irish, and that's what it mostly consist of, was Catholic religion with them people.

Q: What about the role of the priest in the community? What role did the priest play, was he an important person?

A: At one time the biggest part of these Italian men, they didn't seem to care too much about the priest. It seemed like they weren't interested in the priest. They liked the church and everything, but the women, more or less, they catered to the priest more so than the men. I don't know what it was about the priest. They just didn't seem to cater to him like they should have, really. I talked to my father one time, I said, "How come you were such a strong Catholic over there in Italy and you come to this country you don't go to church?" He said, "I don't know." He said, "I don't know if it's because my mother forced me to go to church every Sunday and I didn't want to go all the time. I got so where I hated it. But," he said, "I don't hate it now. I believe in God, I want you kids to believe in God. I don't tell you to go to church, you're big enough to know what you want to do." I said, "That's good enough for me." That was about it. I have a priest here that I tried to get along with him and everything, and then first thing you know, I wasn't getting along all that well with him. But we never had no falling out or anything. But we had a little incident there that happened and I got away from it.

Q: Would you like to tell me about that or . . .

A: No, I'd rather not discuss it, because it's a priest and I figure just let it go at that. It was just something that wasn't really none of my business and I didn't want to get involved in it.

Q: Let's get back to your family for a minute. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

A: I have a brother and a sister. They're both married. My sister works for Frank Switzer in Taylorville, she's his secretary there. I've got a brother that lives in Pawnee that worked at Peabody Mine Number Ten for a period of approximately 25 years. He was the male nurse there. His name was Jim Borgognoni. They were doing away with his job and how come the union was letting them do away with their boss, his job in other words, and that made him be without a job. He's got two more years to go before he can get a pension. If he loses them two years, why he won't

get the pension. So they offered him a job as a top boss and he took it. He said, "I can't afford to lose the insurance, I can't afford to lose that pension." So therefore he's still working.

Q: So he's going to serve as the top boss for a couple of years.

A: For a couple of years for sure.

Q: Yes. Was that good of the union then to help him get that or did the company . . .

A: The union didn't help him. The company gave him that job.

Q: The union didn't . . .

A: See, he was a company man as a male nurse.

Q: Okay. All right. So does he have ill feelings against the union right now?

A: No, no. They didn't want to accept him when he first got that job and they asked him, the union members there. I think they said something about, "What advantages of this job going to do for us, with this job that you got for us?" He said, "I'll tell you what advantages it's going to have for you. Everytime one of you guys get hurt, you come into see me. I'll take care of you, whatever it is." He was a male nurse in the service for four years, and he was three years in St. John's Hospital with three specialists, he went along with them. They wasn't paying him in that hospital, that's why he took the job at the mine. But then he told these guys, "Everytime you get a major, minor cut or bruise or whatever, I'll take care of it. If it's a big deal, I'll send you to the hospital and I will log every bit of that. That will be posted here in my books, and you'll have every right to these books anytime you want to. In case you had an accident and you want to refer back to the date and everything, I'll have it right here for you." He said, "This way, the company can't cheat you out of anything."

Q: Yes, because he had done that before.

A: Yes.

Q: That's a good deal for the workers then.

A: He said, "This is to your advantage, nobody else but yours." So actually for a change, the union opened their eyes and said, "Well yes. Hell yes, we'll take him." Believe it or not, they got so they really liked him, they really did, had all the confidence in the world in him. It was a good thing, it had to, the union and the company can agree on something like that, that was all right.

Q: Okay. What years were your brother and sister born?

A: My brother is 53, that would put him in about 1933, and my sister is 15 months younger than me. She will be 62 next March the 14th. She was born maybe about 1925 or 1926.

Q: What was her first name?

A: Mary.

Q: Mary, okay. Did anyone else besides your parents and brother and sister live in the house when you grew up?

A: No.

Q: No other relatives or lodgers or anything?

A: No. Well, we might've had some come visit for maybe a month or two, but that was about it.

Q: How did the housework go when you were young? Who made and mended the family's clothes?

A: My mother, but we all chipped in to help my mother. I had my chores to do at night, the coal and the kindling and all that had to be on the back porch every night before dark. My sister helped my mother in the house with her household duties.

Q: Was that family tradition then?

A: Yes, definitely.

Q: Were any clothes bought new or second hand?

A: Well, always bought new at that time. There was no second hand clothes.

Q: What did your dad do around the house?

A: Nothing.

Q: Nothing?

A: Nothing. He was the provider and that's as far as it went. Other than maybe make a garden, that's about it.

Q: Did you have to help in the garden?

A: No. I was too small at that time we was living there.

Q: Did your mother ever work?

A: Never. Never worked in her life. My father didn't want her to work no place.

Q: Okay. Why do you think he was against it?

A: He felt like it was his duty. He really did, he felt like it was his duty to provide for the family. He told her, "You've got enough in the house and your family. The kids, you take care of them. I'll take care of the other part."

Q: Did most of the people in Tovey feel the same way, most of the families?

A: The old timers, yes. The new generation coming up, like even in my generation, a lot of these guys is married and they've got their wives working. They think it's all right, that's the way it went.

Q: How long did you continue to do the work around the house?

A: Us kids?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, I did it up to the day that, even when . . . I had to do a job here that was sickening. If you would tell a kid today to do it, why he would just literally laugh you down the river. I had seven spittoons that I had to wash every morning.

Q: In the tavern?

A: In the tavern. That was my job every morning before I went to school. I had to do it. When I got back from the service, I was told that the state passed some kind of a health law that there was to be no more spittoons in these taverns, and I was one of the happiest fellows in the state of Illinois. (laughter)

Q: I don't blame you. Okay. What was your first job that you had, how old were you?

A: I was approximately 22 years old. John Burke was a pit committeeman at Number Seven. He got me a job at Number Seven on the third shift. I was supposed to have been hired in as a repairman's helper in the washer, I spent a year there and all I ever done was shovel. I asked the superintendent, Lloyd Starks, I said, "Is there going to be any chance of me getting off of that third shift?" and he said, "No." I said, "I'm afraid I'm not going to stay. I'm just going to give you my notice. I'm not going to stay. I was hired in as a repairman's helper and I've been on the shovel for a year. I think it's time that I'd better go. There's something better somewhere."

Q: So what did you do then?

A: I was off for about, I don't know how long I was off. I had a friend over here--they called him Ben Turpin. He said, "You working yet?" I said, "No." He said, "You want a job?" I said, "Well, yes, I'd like a job." He said, "All right, I think I can get you a job at Number Eight." Well I said, "I'd appreciate it if you'd get me a job there." So two days later he come back and said you go so and so morning at so and so time and you sit outside the office, Mr. Abrell was the superintendent.

Q: Johnny Abrell?

A: Johnny Abrell. He said, "He'll see you and when he wants you, he'll holler at you and you go in and see him." I was sitting under the tree with two other fellows and I heard a knock on the window and I look up,

we didn't know which one he wanted, and this guy said, "Me?" "No." Finally they pointed at me and they said, "Yes, come on in." I went in there and he said, "I heard you're looking for a job." I said, "Yes sir, Mr. Abrell, I'm looking for a job," and I said, "but I didn't think you'd give me one." He said, "Why is that?" I said, "I don't like to bring this up, maybe it might make you mad at me." "No," he said, "you won't make me mad." I said, "Well, my dad threw you through the screen door in his tavern one time when you was drunk." He said, "We don't talk about those things." He said, "When I'm drunk," he said, "I ain't worth a shit, I don't know what I'm doing. It wasn't your dad's fault." I said, "You mean that?" He said, "Yes, I do. You're to forget that." I said, "I sure will," I said, "I think you're a hell of a man to be able to tell me something like that." He said, "Well, I'm going to give you a job too. Here's a slip, you give that to Bill Sharp and he'll give you a check number and you will start work here tomorrow morning on the day shift on top."

I worked there from 1947 to 1954. They shut the mine down and I couldn't get a job around here. I went to California, I couldn't get a job out there. I finally got a part time job, enough to get gas money, I came back home and I got a job at Allis Chalmer in 1955. I spent approximately thirteen years there. They had a new superintendent here at Number Ten, and he told my brother, he said, "I want to give your brother a job." "Well," he said, "I'll call my brother Frank up," and he called me up. He wanted to give me a job as a watchman. I said, "No, I don't want no job as a watchman. I just ain't cut out for that."

Q: When was this that he called you?

A: This was in 1960, latter part of 1960 in the month of December. So I said, "Thanks a lot," and I said, "I'm going to go home," and I went home. My brother called me back up and he said, called him Carl, he said, "Carl wants to see you." So I went back and said, "Carl, I'm sorry." I said, "I appreciate what you're trying to do, but I just don't want that job." "Well," he said, "I've got another job for you." I said, "What's that?" He said, "I'll give you a job on top. You'll start on the midnight shift January the second, start the year out right." I spent from 1969 until last year, 1986, then I quit. I quit at 61 years of age on my birthday there for the simple reason that they were going to put me down below the surface.

End of Side One, Tape One

Q: Okay, before I turned the tape over you were talking about how they offered you a job below the surface and you turned it down because you had never been there.

A: Yes.

Q: Okay.

A: I had been on a job, elevator job there on the bottom, and they told me I couldn't have it because I didn't have miner's papers. Said the federal said it was against the law to have anybody go down there without miner's papers. I said, "Well, if that's the rules, that's the rules. I'm no better than anybody else. I have to abide by them too." So I let it go at that. Then another job came up on the bottom, on the main shaft, and I bid on that. They told me, said, "What are you trying to do, be funny?" One of the committeemen told me that. They said, "You know you can't have that job." I said, "Okay." So when they used this new deal they came up with that they were going to take a bunch of guys on this realignment off the top jobs and put them down below, they were going to put me on block and stoppings.

Q: What's block, what's that mean?

A: You seal off places that's unsafe and got gas in it and stuff like that.

Q: I see.

A: I said, "I can't go down there. I don't have any papers." He said, "Well, we're going to send you to school." "Well," I said, "no, you're not going to send me to school." I said, "I bid on a job down below on that caging job and you people wouldn't let me have it. You didn't send me to school then and you're not sending me to school now." I talked to Mr. Herman. He tried to be about half way nice to me. He said, "Why don't you try it? You might like it." I said, "Absolutely not. Absolutely not." I said, "I'll eat every block and stoppings I lay down in that coal mine."

Q: What did you mean by that?

A: In other words, I will not go down there and lay block and stoppings.

Q: Yes.

A: So therefore, I said, "I'll be in to sign the quitting slip." I ended up as the loser on the deal. I gave up a job and I've been living off of \$398 a month for a year, and that's not easy. I couldn't get no unemployment because I quit the job, and I couldn't get no outside help at all. I've got two months to go and I'll start, September the first I'll get my first social security check. Then I've made it and I'm going to go from there.

Q: Then you'll be happy then.

A: I'm happy now. I'm happy now.

Q: You seem like it.

A: Hell, yes. I haven't got much longer to live anyway, what the hell.

Q: You said you started in the mine when you were 22 years old.

A: Approximately 22.

Q: And before that you were in the service?

A: I was in the service.

Q: All right, how old were you when you went in the service?

A: I was nine days out of school and they drafted me, eighteen years old.

Q: What year?

A: 1943. I went to service, the first place I landed in was Fort Custer, Michigan, spent about a week there and got my clothing and so forth and so on. I ended up in Texas, did my basic, went to school there, airplane mechanics, seven months. They loaded me up, sent me to Colorado, processed me. Ended up going to Camp New Jersey and didn't even much as get a fourteen day furlough. Never got as much as a three day pass, and shipped me overseas for two years. I spent all that time in the service, approximately close to three years, and never as much as had a three day pass. Got discharged in 1946, February the second.

Q: Okay. All right, and then that's when you came back and went to work.

A: Went to work.

Q: Did you ever marry?

A: I was married and I'm divorced.

Q: Any children?

A: Got one boy. His name is William Borgognoni, he lives in Carbondale. He's a licensed architect, he's got his own business, and he was offered a job over at Virden, take over Bill Burke's job. In a period of five years when he learned the trade as a mine manager, he told his uncle that he appreciated what he was trying to do for him, but he said, "No, thank you." He said, "I went to school to be an architect and that's what I like," and that's what he's doing right now.

Q: Good for him. Did you raise your son any differently than you were raised?

A: My son was better than I was. Let's be honest about it, I am one of the fortunate fellows. But I don't want to be tough, I'm not the smartest person in the world, but I made up my mind when he was growing up that I was going to do everything I could do to raise him to show nothing but respect and do what's right. I had one of the most well thought of boys, sons, in Kincaid, everybody thought the world of him. I have never seen my son smoke a cigarette, I've seen him take a few drinks. He never was in trouble, I never had to go get him nowhere. I always said he was better than I was. I was in more trouble than him when I was a kid, and I say I was very fortunate, in this day and age anyway.

Q: Would you consider it luck or did you do something different?

A: Well, me and his mother, we talked to him a lot. Seems like when my folks was raising me, they weren't educated in this country and they didn't have time, they were tired. They had to work hard and I didn't have to work like my dad did. I had it so much easier than them. Whenever my dad would come home, he said, "I can't get this, Dad, in school." I said, "Yes you can. I've got all the confidence in the world in you." I tried to use everything, you know, the best of my ability to pat him on the back. I have never hit my son in my life, so take it from there.  
(laughs)

Q: Who were you closer to as you grew up, your mother or your father?

A: I would say that really there was not closeness, really. I respected them both and I had to treat them both alike. I couldn't say, "Hey, mom, pa got mad at me and he's going to do this." You know what she'd say? "I'll give you some too." Because they stuck together. You didn't dare tell my dad that you was really mad at my mom and she did this and that, because he'd bop you one. He wouldn't fool with you. My dad hit me once or twice in his lifetime and I never forgot it. For instance, one time around Halloween time, I was fifteen years old. Called me to the end of the bar and said, "I want to talk to you." He had a hand on him that was that big. He pounded it into that bar and said, "Don't let the law come down there looking for you." It was around Halloween time, and he said, "If they get you and put you in jail, I'm coming up after you. I want you." He didn't have to say no more. He said, "You know I don't chew my tobacco twice." I said, "I know you don't." That was it.

Q: How did he discipline besides that, was it just the threat?

A: Talk. No, no threat. I was talking to Albert Post yesterday outside here. We was talking about how my dad kept one of the most well kept joints in Christian County. They'd get a little loud and he'd just go like that on the bar [knock on the bar] and everything would quiet down. There was no more noise. He was just that way, he just wouldn't tolerate no monkey business. I had a woman come and tell my mother, "My husband can come into your tavern any time he wants to because I know there's no trouble or no women in there." See, at one time, there was never no women in my dad's tavern, never.

Q: Didn't allow it?

A: No, it was just a man's tavern. That's all it was. And no profanity in there, nothing. So it was unbelievable.

Q: Did he give your brother and sister and you spankings or anything?

A: My brother cussed him one time when he was thirteen years old, out here in front of the tavern, and my father didn't say nothing. It made me kind of sore. I thought, "Well, if that had been me, he'd have really laid it on me." I said, "Here my brother does it and he gets by with it." So the day progressed on and that evening about five o'clock he came to me and said, "I want you to take care of the bar. I've got

something I've got to do in the back." So I said, "Yes." I heard him close the door, we lived in the back then, and he locked the door, I heard it click. I never heard so much commotion in all my life. He had my brother back there, and I mean he worked him over good. My brother never cussed him out no more, that was the end of it.

Q: Yes.

A: Now, my sister, my sister never was no trouble at all. My sister, till this day, she don't smoke, she don't drink. You'd have to meet here, she works up there at Frank Switzer's. She's one of the type of people on the up and up and unbelievable.

Q: Yes. How were you expected to act around your parents?

A: Well, you just didn't get out of line, and you didn't say, "No, I'm not going to do it," stuff like that. If they told you to get something, you'd say, well, if you couldn't get it right then, "Would it be all right if I get in a few minutes? I've got this here." It was either yes or no and that was it. You wasn't scared or anything. Even as a boy, I helped my mother in the house, I've done dishes, me and my sister used to help her clean house, all that sort of stuff. We knew she was tired, my mother was sick a lot, see. She had five major operations in her lifetime and had two nervous breakdowns. She even had a miscarriage, and stuff like that. If one of them days you had to live like we did then, you'd understand. You didn't have hot running water in the house. You had a copper boiler which I've seen my mother lift off one of those old Majestic stoves about two-thirds full of water by herself, just lift it right up on the stove. That was hard work for a woman. I mean stuff like that. Then of a nighttime, we didn't have electricity there when we was in Tovey. She had that, we called it the coal oil light, or kerosene light. She'd sew them socks and stuff by kerosene lights and stuff. All that kind of stuff. You didn't dare let your mother carry a bucket of coal in the house. You just didn't do it.

Q: How old was she when she passed away?

A: She passed away exactly eight years ago.

Q: Oh, so she lived . . .

A: My father was 79 when he died. Hadn't been sick a day in his life, got sick at two o'clock in the morning, sixteen hours later he died.

Q: What from?

A: My sister explained it to me. They had a medical name for it, it was water was coming in on him and his heart couldn't handle it.

Q: Oh.

A: I forget what they call that. My mother, she quit living when my dad died. That's just how much she thought of my dad. I happened to be sitting in there one day and she was talking to these people from Kincaid,

Italian people, she said, "I pray every day, I go to church up here every day, that the Lord comes and gets me. I want to be with my husband, I don't want to live." And she meant it. I seen her going to church every morning. She got sick like today, and two days later she was in the hospital and she went to sleep. She died in her sleep and that was the end of it.

Q: As a child, was there anyone else besides your parents that you felt comfortable around?

A: Oh yes, Mrs. Sassateli, she lived in Hewittville. She was like a second mother. One of the nicest women in the world. I'll never forget when she died how my sister cried. She said, "You know, Frank, that's our second mother." That's just how close she was. Of course, she was related to my dad, she was a cousin of my dad in Italy there and everything. Well, in this country too. But like to me, she was a distant cousin, about a third cousin, but that's how close we was to her.

Q: What other grandparents or relatives or anybody that you felt comfortable with?

A: I had one grandmother in this country and that was it. I was close to her. I was the only one of the kids that was close to her.

Q: Where did she live?

A: In Langley.

Q: By herself?

A: She was living there by herself at one time. When the weather in the wintertime got real bad, that's when I was six years old, and we moved there so my dad could travel, get to 58 in Hewittville a lot easier. See, in them days, we didn't have [Highway] 104. You had to go through the country.

Q: I see. Okay. How did your family spend Sunday's?

A: Well, my dad spent them uptown and my mother at home. That's just the way it was. He usually went uptown, that's when they had them places on Hump Street in Tovey there. I don't know if beer was back then or not. I don't think it was. They were more or less bootlegging there in the open in them days. They had that Viking Tavern right there on Front Street. They had a pool room there that you could always let you get a beer, we called it mule, but it was bootleg whiskey.

Q: Did your parents think it was wrong to work or play on Sunday's?

A: It didn't bother them seem like either way, whatever you wanted to do.

Q: Did your parents attend church then you say?

A: My mother did, my father never did go back to church. I don't know why. He came to this country and just didn't go back there.

Q: Yes. Did she take the children with her?

A: No, we didn't go. My sister went for awhile, she got married in the church. That church was something else with my grandmother. When my grandmother found out that my mother got married and didn't get married in church, there was a lot of hell, see. So she came right down and got a hold of me, my grandmother did, she baptised me. That's just how she felt about it. I went to catechism for awhile, and I wanted to be like the rest of them, But when I was there we had a priest, his name was Father Hart. He didn't make it to church and we had Father Lake there. They came up and told this here little girl that her mother was down with a heart attack. She got up, she didn't run, I don't know why he accused her of running out of church. He said, "We don't run in this church," and he slapped her. And I mean slapped her. That scared me and I never did go back. That was the end of my church.

Q: Was grace ever said at the meals in your family?

A: No, never. My mother said her little prayers to herself. I used to hear my mother every night say her prayers. I could hear her from my bedroom. She was the religious one in our family.

Q: Who controlled the money in your family?

A: There was never anything about it. My mother needed money, when my dad had that tavern, she went to the cash register and took what she needed, he never questioned her. I never seen my father carry five dollars in his pocket. That's unbelievable.

Q: Yes, it is. Okay. Would you say that your relationship with your parents was typical of the other families in this area?

A: Oh, you see you had a mixture of foreign class of people and they didn't all operate the same. There were good and there were bad. They wanted us kids to respect everybody, older people and this and that, and them too, and that was the end of it. They didn't tell you the second time. In other words, flat, straight up, God only knows what would've happened if some fellows came in and said, "Hey, Pete, your son did so and so." "You sure?"

Q: Yes.

A: He'd come and ask you if you did it. "Tell me that you did this." Just like one time when I was a kid in Tovey and I brought a broken down scooter that you scooted with your foot. My mother said, "Where'd you get that?" "So and so gave it to me." Okay, there was no more said about it. Pretty soon, about fifteen minutes later, I seen my mother walking down the sidewalk. Of course, she went down to so and so's house and asked him, "Did you give my kid that scooter?" They told her, said, "Yes." Just as long as you don't steal it. You see?

Q: Yes. Values are a little . . .

A: They just didn't want you doing things to other people that you aren't supposed to be doing.

Q: Yes.

A: You wasn't going to be no saint. Like I told you, I had a boy who was a saint next to me. Really. Of course, I never got out and stole anything. That was a no-no. Yes, but after I got a little older, after I got home from the service and get to drinking a little bit and get in this brawls, but I give that all up. I quit smoking, I quit drinking. I haven't touched a drop of booze since, I guess, in the middle sixties. That's how long ago it's been.

Q: Yes. Well tell me, having lived in the Tovey-Bulpitt-Kincaid area all your life, or most of your life, a lot of people divide society into different social classes or groups.

A: Yes.

Q: In that time during the Depression, did you think of some people belonging to one group and some to another?

A: No. We all mingled, we all mingled together. Even the older people, I noticed that we had a lot of French people in Tovey too, and they got along so good, everybody there. For instance, I want to recite you something here. Just like when my dad had to dig that basement, he didn't say, "Hey you, John" or "you, Edward, how about you coming out and helping me." They found out my dad was going to build a basement. Here they come with their own spade and their own wheelbarrow, fourteen of them, and dug that. But you better provide them with plenty of wine and something to eat, or else. Really.

So anyway, I watched my mother when she started to get that dinner ready, here come the neighbor women. They got to helping her too. And hey, when the neighbors got to digging something, you seen the old man loading his spade and his wheelbarrow. The old lady didn't say, "Hey, where are you going?" There was no question about it. I'll never forget, I was there when they dug that well. I was there, and they didn't have no way of pumping air in that hole. I don't know how many of them Italian fellows was there digging that well by hand with a spade. They hit that, what they call that hard pan, that blue clay, and they couldn't cut through it. They'd have to hoist them up, soaking wet, couldn't get their bricks down there. But they came down and they helped the old man. They laid the brick in there. An eighteen foot well, I guess from the bedroom here to that wall. Maybe, I don't know, what would say, about three feet?

Q: Five feet?

A: Three feet circumference, that well. But they did, that's the way they operated. That was good.

Q: You just said the Italians came around and helped, what about the Lithuanians and some of the other people?

A: Well, down there in Tovey they never had any.

Q: Yes. So it was mostly Italian.

A: They were all here, and we had a guy that was a Frenchman lived there next to us, and hell, he was this big around. He couldn't do nothing anyway. He was ready to come over, but that's the way it was.

Q: How did the Italians in Tovey feel about the Lithuanians in Bulpitt?

A: They got along with them real good. They worked together down in these mines. This guy was your buddy, that guy was your buddy.

Q: Did the Italians speak their native language down there or did they speak . . .

A: Oh, yes. They spoke it at home, they spoke it everywhere. In fact, they even went too far with their speaking, because they just got from the old country, a lot of them, and they couldn't speak this English. One fellow in particular, Mr. Sassateli, in them days they had these silent movies. My dad had to follow him everywhere he went. He'd lay a five dollar bill down and he wouldn't even know if he had change coming. You know what I mean, he was just the next thing, well, he was actually an illiterate as far as English, the American way of life.

Q: Yes.

A: But they used him, like I say, used him for an interpreter. Even these superintendents when they had somebody they had to tell or the mine managers had something to tell the guys down in the mine, if there was a bunch of Italians, my dad was there, he would actually translate the message. He'd convey it the best way he could, see, to them and everything, my father was good at it. As far as them guys down there, he was good to them. He was a lot of help to them.

Q: I know that most of the people in Langleyville stayed Progressive. There were very few that stayed with the UMW during the mine wars. What was the percentage in Tovey?

A: Well, the biggest percentage of them were Progressives.

Q: Were there very many strike breakers that went ahead and worked?

A: Just a few, there was a few.

Q: How were they treated?

A: The biggest part of them had to move, practically all of them had to move out of town. Had to move in a thing there that was . . . like Taylorville or somewhere like that where they wouldn't be bothered a lot, you know.

Q: What was Taylorville, weren't there also Progressives living there?

A: Yes, but there was more or less the strike breakers that would move up there, because they had a good law enforcement in Taylorville. That was the sheriff's office, you know, and everything. Sheriff Weinike was the sheriff. I'll never forget Sheriff Weinike. I was a boy, just barely, vaguely remember. But anyway, when they had this great big parade through, these thugs rode through here, it was about close to four o'clock when the kids were coming out of school. These guys all had these guns out, and they were just . . . well actually all hell was going to break loose. I'll never forget, my father ran to the post office and got ahold of Charlie Reccino who was a postmaster. He was a government man and a well respected man in the sheriff's office and everything. He said, "For God's sake Charlie, get ahold of somebody. Get somebody down." He said, "The kids are coming home from school. They're going to kill somebody or a whole bunch here." So he got ahold of Sheriff Weinike and Weinike came down, and if it hadn't have been for that, there's no telling what would have happened. The sheriff told them guys that was parading here to get going, and he told the Progressives, "You go on home where you belong or I'll have you all arrested." And it broke it up, see.

Q: What do you think would've happened to the students?

A: If they had started shooting at one another, these kids have got . . .

Q: Get in the way.

A: . . . no cover down in the street and in the way, it might've killed two or three of them. For what? For nothing.

Q: Yes. Do you remember, the Kincaid high school students went on strike at one time in the 1930s. That would've been 1932 though, I don't know if you'd been old enough to remember.

A: I wasn't old enough to remember. I lived in Tovey then.

Q: All right. What about the people in Bulpitt, mostly the Lithuanians, did they go with Progressives too?

A: The biggest part of them stayed Progressive. I'd say about 85 percent of them stayed Progressive. Then like I said, along about 1936, 1937, you could just see them migrating, just drifting back. You couldn't blame them really. The mistake they made is that they didn't go back in say about 1933 and get their regular jobs back instead of letting somebody else come along and take it away, you know, take their place. Really there was no way they could win that war. It was a loss and that's all there was to it, and it cost a lot of lives. People were getting in trouble over nothing. Just like when they bombed that house in Tovey there, next to us there, two doors from us there. The man was a Peabody thug and he come charging out there, blaming everybody for bombing his house. He was blaming innocent people. That's just the way I saw a lot of the things that had happened.

Q: Why don't we stop here for a minute. (tape is turned off momentarily)  
One of the last things I want to ask you here is about the mechanization of the mines and how things like the continuous miner replaced workers. What do you know about that?

A: It did take the place of some workers but it also added some workers.

Q: Skilled workers?

A: Skilled workers. It added a buggy runner, a couple of them, and it also added a rope bolter. He had to come in there, and they had the two men on it just like the conventional machines they had, the loading machines and that. The only thing, they did away with the cars that they loaded coal in and the track layers. They eliminated the shooters, and they took the place of them kind of guys.

Q: Were the men for or against the mechanization?

A: Well, you heard some beefing here and there and pretty soon they got kind of happy about it because they got so they didn't have to work as hard as they used to. It got so the work was easier for them.

Q: Yes. What was the Progressive's view about mechanization? Did they have a different feeling than the UMW?

A: During that Progressive time that wasn't even in the conversation of any kind at any time. Because the only thing they ever heard then was that, the first machine to come in was that cutting machine. Then pretty soon they come in with one of this drill jeeps and stuff like that, see. That's another thing that coal mold, well, I call it coal mold, but it's a miner, it eliminated the drillers, see. It took quite a few jobs away, but it also things were a lot safer with that coal mold there, and you had your roof bolts there, and you were not to go past the roof bolts. When you got to the roof bolts, end of the roof bolts, you stopped, you backed your machines out. A roof bolter goes in and he lays another set of plates in there, then you go in there.

Q: Would you say that the people that were against mechanization, were they of a certain group agewise?

A: They knew they was going to cut the working force, see, and that's why they were against it. Which you couldn't blame them. They didn't care how hard they had to work as long as they had a job. And you couldn't blame them.

Q: Yes.

A: Like maybe you're a good candidate for a college, I'm not. That's the way it was down in the mines. This guy was a good candidate for a machine.

Q: What made him a good candidate?

A: He had some smarts and you could tell he was an operator once you got him on a machine and let him run it. It didn't take people very long to see whether he was going to make an operator or not.

Q: Did having a better education help?

A: Oh yes, it helped quite a bit. Any time you got an education down in that mine, you've got better sense, you can think better, you can see better. Your foresight's a whole lot better.

Q: Yes. Did people think that having a better education helped cut down on accidents?

A: Absolutely, how they helped cut down accidents, they could see these things, they would go in and demand that something be done about it. The one thing that I give the younger generation in this coal mining business was they had the guts whenever they seen something, that they got out, they said something and they done something about it. Where the older generation, they were always afraid of their jobs. The younger generation really, actually was one of the greatest help the coal mining business there was. They come up with so many smarter things, so many better things, and it was actually, truthfully, it was one of the biggest help in the coal mining industries that there ever was.

Q: Yes. Okay.

A: Yes, they could do things better.

Q: Was the younger generation more for the changes that were taking place in the mine?

A: They was like anybody else, if it was in their favor, yes. But they were mostly on this safety. They were always looking out on this, they wanted everything so that they would be safe and everything. They wanted to work under safe conditions, which was right, really right. Anytime you got hurt down in that coal mine today, it's through your own carelessness. Not all the time, but the biggest part of the time. They're told not to do this and not to do that. There are people that actually went and sat to eat dinner under some of the worst top that you ever seen. All they had to do was get up and move. They were the one's that didn't have no smarts. See, that's what I'm talking about.

Q: Did people ever smoke down in the mine when you were there?

A: I never did go down and work down there.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: But I imagine they're like anybody else, they'll sneak a cigarette and that. Some of them got caught at it, and we've had guys get fired down there for carrying down tobacco. That was it. To me, I feel like this, if it's the law, it's the law. And of course like they say, it's hazardous. But you've got guys down there with a cutting torch, so what the hell would it hurt to let them smoke?

Q: Yes.

A: The got a cutting torch. You've got your bits on your miner hitting that rock. It's throwing sparks, let's face it.

Q: Okay. I've enjoyed talking to you. We've had an interesting conversation. Anything else you'd like to add? Any reflections on your life?

A: No. Well, I worked there and I thought I had 24 years, but they figured me out I had 23 years out of it, and I retired in 1986. I'm kind of glad I'm out of it. Course, I worked on the midnight shift and I didn't like it. I'm going to have to find something like a hobby or something because I'm not used to this sitting around. I'm going to have to find something to do. I've got my boy down at Carbondale and one day maybe this week or next week I'm going to jump in my car and go down and cut his grass maybe. Just do something. That's about it.

Q: You were going to tell me about Ray Tombazzi.

A: Yes. We was talking about this mine trouble. Ray Tombazzi was one of the tough Progressives, him and Eddie Newman. They had another guy by the name of Roger Tietran in Tovey, and we had one of the real toughest men in the country, in the United States right here in Bulpitt, John Gibson, who eventually ended up in Washington, D.C. in this union business. They wouldn't back down for nothing. They tried to run Tombazzi out of Kincaid one time when he was riding around the square. He told the guy that was driving the car, said, "Go around the square again." When he got around the square, he said, "What do you want to do?" He said, "Them two guys told me to get out of town." He got out of the car, he pulled out two 38's, stuck them under their noses, "Now, which one of you two guys wants to run me out of town?" Neither one of them opened their mouths. "Now both of you guys get out of town," and they took off on high. That's the kind of stuff that went on.

One time Eddie Newman stopped my dad up there on Renee's corner [a drugstore-lunchroom in Taylorville] because Eddie Newman and my dad were the best of friends. My dad had an old 1928 Chevy. He said, "Pete, would you do me a favor?" My dad said, "Well, sure Eddie, you know I'll do you a favor, whatever you want. What do you want from me?" He said, "I want you to take me and them two Swampy's I got sitting there on the curb out in the country," he said, "I'm going to beat hell out of them." My dad started laughing. He said, "I can't do that." He said, "I'll do anything else. You want some money, I'll give you some money." He said, "No, Pete," he said, "I wanted you to take me out in the country, I'm going to whip these two guys." That's the kind of stuff that went on.

Q: Yes. Pretty tough guys.

A: Real tough. I wouldn't have done it, and I've never backed down from nobody in my life, but I wouldn't do it.

Q: Yes. What about W. C. Argust, did you ever hear of him?

A: I've heard of him. I've heard of him. I'll tell you a funny story. I don't know the man's name no more, but he was Peabody and he was tough. And I mean one of the toughest Peabody thugs that ever walked. Him and Ray Tombazzi got into it. They was actually sitting, I don't know where, across the alley or something, firing at one another with pistols. Tombazzi was a PG and this other guy, he was just a little short stocky guy. I mean he had nothing but guts. They're firing at one another. So along somewhere in the 1950s they was playing poker one day. There they were, they were playing poker together and some guy brought up, he said, "You wouldn't think that these two guys one time were shooting at each other." They both got mad, said, "You would have to bring that up, wouldn't you?" and everybody at the table laughed about it. They turned around and ended up friends again, there you are.

Q: Yes. I heard about Tombazzi was good about that. After the mine wars were over, he went back to friendships with some of the guys that stayed in the UMW. But a lot of people didn't. A lot of families stayed seperate.

A: Oh no. A lot of people didn't forget.

Q: Yes. Especially between families.

A: Yes, there was a lot of that. I seen a father, and a son have those problems. The son finally moves out of the house. He ended up marrying one of the local girls here and I've run around with him all my life. He died here three or four years ago.

Q: Did the son stay with the Progressives or did the father?

A: No, the son moved in with the UMW of A. He went back to work, which he done the best thing in 1933.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: He did the right, smart thing. But the rest of the family didn't go back and they were all sore at him and they run him off.

Q: Okay.

A: Okay.

End of Side Two, Tape One