

Mining
No Date Given

Unidentified Male #1 (UM1): They said the old Sellwood Mine behind the hospital there.

Interviewer (I): And what was the name of that mine

UM: Sellwood Mine.

I: Sellwood, okay.

UM1: That's right behind the brownstone shops. You can go from Cliffshot Mine into Old Sellwood Mine and there is something to see in that old Sellwood Mine. Of course that's underwater now too you know.

I: Could you have been there?

UM1: Yeah I've been there. I used to work, before I went mining I was working up in there, you know trapping. We'd get through our work, what we had to do, we'd tell the boss we're going up to the Sellwood after. And he said you can but be careful, and just to explore you know. We had narrow wooden rails only about 14 inches apart, and little cars about the size of this here. Buckets they used to shovel in there.

I: The dimensions of those little cars, can you give me in like feet and inches what those dimensions would be?

UM1: Well, I don't know. They...

I: Maybe like 3 feet by 2?

UM1: About maybe 3 feet by 2 feet them cars. Then them guys, when they go with them cars they had to push them all the way out to a razor. That was something.

I: What else did you see in the Sellwood Mine?

UM1: When you gone in the opening there, you would swear that you was in the cemetery. There was stalagmites you know. Ice, oh jeez, some of them were as high as this room. They were so thick you could hardly squeeze through them. Water dripping down all the time, it was something pretty. That room was about the size of this room,

I: And the dimensions of this room would be about how big?

UM1: I'd say about the size of this room, about 20...about 30 by 10? Something like that. Then the huge timbers holding that place up, you know the back, the cover overhead. Big square timbers, about 16 inch square, about...some of them were 20 feet long. One after another, set at an angle to hold the back way up. We often wondered how they ever go them up there. What

method did they get, because they had to go in at an angle. I'll tell you it was something. Then there was right where they, were there was, where the stalagmites were. There was one room set aside and there was a horse barn in there, or cow barn, mule barn! They had mules there too you know. You could still smell the mule in there. Outside the mule barn there was a big big pile of boots, rubber boots and shoes. The tops were split on every one of them, I said what the heck was the idea? He said the guy broke his leg he said, they cut the boot off of him and threw the boot and you send the man up. He said there was a guy getting hurt every week.

I: Do you have any guess on how many boots you saw laying there?

UM1: Oh, I'd say, it must have been a good dozen or so in that spot. Maybe more.

BREAK IN TAPE

I: You mentioned the strike of 1946. I understand that was a pretty volatile time and I wonder what you would be willing to share with me about that.

Unidentified Male #2 (UM2): Well in the 1946 strike, I think it could have been settled before it was. But there was enough men that wanted to keep on working and there was more men that wanted to strike. And I was one of the ones that wanted to strike for the simple reason, for a better standard of living. Now I didn't get _____ involved in picket. I put my time on the picket line. But I didn't want no rough stuff at all, but there was a lot of rough stuff. What I did, I went back out in the woods and started cutting logs for a logger. Five days, and sometimes I wouldn't go back until by then Tuesday. We stayed right in the camp out there. Then I'd hit the picket line and then it happened that one day when it was, there was a party from west Ishpeming we're talking about, came through with that truck and armored truck and threw a crowd. There was women, kids, and men and of course there was tomatoes, eggs, and everything flying. When he came through that crowd it was luck that somebody didn't get killed. They followed him right to his home. I had to be nosey enough to go up there too, and they wanted to dump his truck over. And boy I was dead against that for the simple reason of, the truck was on a hill and the house was down there and there was little kids looking out of the window down there. If that truck ever went down you'd hit into that house so it would have been a terrible, terrible thing to happen. That's the time that that person came out with a gun too. Things like that now, I still know the guy, see the guy once in a while. We say hi to each other. I just was very happy nothing happened that time.

BREAK IN TAPE

I: How long would you guess, after the contract was signed and everybody went back to work, how long would you guess it was before peopled started feeling comfortable with each other again?

UM2: Well I don't think it took too long for the majority of them men, but there was still some that just hated their guts you know. I think still today some of them do. My neighbor over there, what they call half a haircut he told me, "come on we'll be getting pensions tomorrow morning." And I said no, no I'm not gonna go to work. Let's, he went in the barbershop the barbershops are

all unionized you know. They went in there and told the barber, you cutting that man Scab's hair cut, or you're giving him a haircut He said yeah is he a scab? Yeah, pushed him out of the chair with half a haircut. He left town afterwards.

TAPE CUTS OUT

I: Now are these, on the tonnage production expectations per shift, was every, was there a tonnage goal set for each shift and incentives that were given if that tonnage was met and sanctions given if the tonnage was not met?

Unidentified Male #3 (UM3): Then there was a little bit of pride in people's work. There was time when I think there was a need for a certain number of cars per shift, and if I'm not mistaken some of the records for, I can't remember now what the record was, but if somebody would break a record and then the next shift was already looking for how good things could get and if they could better that by one car. It was a time where you knew there was a lot of work available if there was a chance to break somebodies record by one car or tie it, you took the opportunities. And even the ones, the motor crew themselves were pretty much competitive to what other shifts do because they almost felt that the motor crew, they were just as good as the next guy too if not a little bit better. I'd say one of the things about working underground, there was a little bit of competition in there that was quite good because people had some pride in their work too. There was a certain, in order to get, I don't remember off hand if there was a figure, but there was a time when, I forget now the name of it, 2,500 tons a shift or something like that. If you get 3,000 tons you really had a good day you see. The skid was limited to, there was 14 ton skids. And if you repeat that more, the maximum number of skids there, trips that that skids could make, it used to take us maybe 2.5 minutes to go from the 12th level to the dump up on the surface. Your maximum tonnage, per shift, was controlled by that factor, the number of trips that the skids could make in there. One time, I think it was the last day of year that _____ we came within 4 or 5 skids I believe it was, the maximum that we had. We broke the record and it was never broken after that because the only thing that kept it was, the last couple of skids there was because we blew a fuse on the crusher inside on the 7th level so the crusher shut down. It meant the last few skids, but the super was kind of concerned that something might happen when you push it to the limit like that. I forget now, it was 300 and some skids anyway, that never really was exceed after that.

I: And that happened on one of your shifts?

UM3: Yeah, one of my shifts. I was really proud of that fact, otherwise I wouldn't have mentioned that.

TAPE CUTS OUT

I: Can you tell me how smoky it was and other effects that you felt from blasting?

Unidentified Male #4 (UM4): Well I think the biggest thing with myself was knowing that I'm going to get that powder headache from handling that dynamite, from handling the dyglycerin in

there, gave me an awful headache sometime. My old cousin Josh used to say “eat a stick of powder first and then you’d be alright from then on!” [Laughter]. Well sure!

I: Did you ever ask him what it tasted like?

UM4: No I never... I can imagine what it tasted like anyway wiping it off my brow. I knew pretty much what it was like. Then charging the back hole, it would run out of the hole and down your neck. Oh we got some awful headaches sometimes.

SKIP IN TAPE

UM4: The underground tour used to, we ran into what we call a water course. Ran in the ground, imagine that deep down there, a couple thousand feet. Water was trapped from the beginning of time. I remember one cross cut we were driving, I think it was 64, it might have been 65. We were down a few hundred feet, and we’d hit these water courses every now and then, a bunch of water would come out. They’d dry up of course, this one particular day, we cut and blasted. We drilled out our cut and walked out to the switch on the mainland, that’s a few hundred feet. We’d sit down and eat our lunch. This was electric blasting, we’d let it go and then we sat down and have our lunch. 15 minutes later, here it comes floating down the ledge lagging at both. Oh my gosh there was a big quarry over there, big water. What did I say it was, water?

I: Water courses?

UM4: Yeah a big water courses, that much water would fill the ditch and the lag in the holes were floating. I could crawl up in there, I didn’t really go up there, but I bet that was maybe a mile. A lot of water trapped.

I: Did you have a real strong sense, when you were underground, of how long that rock had been there and all of that?

UM4: Yes, I thought about that a lot of the times. Just like I told you about those water courses. Just think the time that the water had been in the earth. There was a time there was a lot of the water, I suppose got trapped, you know when the Earth was forming and cooling. I thought about that a lot of the times. Sometime after a blast, and we’d clean out the cut and, first time a man ever walked there! This is true, nobody else walked there. The good lord maybe.

END OF RECORDING