

Transcription of Interview with Rudy Hoffman, Springhill.

[Rudy Hoffman. b.1906. live Elm Street, Springhill. wife is dead. married 1937. died 1968.]
 came to Springhill 1914. father born in Czechoslovakia. father was a coal miner in the old country.
 went to school right away. didn't have any English. "I'm telling you, it was awful hard." "It was kind of awkward at first, you know." Tells the story from when he used to "live by the pond, there," and he saw a man going to burn a pile of clothes, and he was trying to make him understand that he would like to have it--warm clothes. He gave him all the clothes. Very, very poor.
 Had two sisters and three brothers.

his father was a miner proper. he was at the coal face. To be a miner you've got to have miner's papers.
 moved to Minto--just got started in school, then had to move. Not there very long. Then moved out west, Beverley, Alberta, about four miles from Edmonton. Coal mine there. Out west until 1917. Then moved to Kingsville, Ontario--going on shares and raising tobacco. Around 1923. From there --his dad was working on shares--farmer would give you rent on the house, and then half and half for seed, horse, big garden, etc. You helped him and he helped you. Still living with his family.

From Ontario he went to Grindstone, Pennsylvania. about 60 miles from Pittsburgh. coke ovens. working in a mine--put you right at the coal face there.

his father took him down the mine in Minto--he was only 9 years old.
 you had to climb down the shaft--"Boy, I'm telling you, I was scared."

manner of working in Minto. oil-lamps like a coffee-pot, the first lamps we had. just one day working with his father.

"You know what children are like--if they don't like you, they'll pick on you. We just stayed by ourselves, like, you know."

his family cam over with another family--Peter Bustik [?] of Minto. Also from Czechoslovakia.

Q: Did the people who were new to Springhill hang out together?...A. Yes, they did. ...They were playing the string instruments, you know... [playing for the dances at the last of it.] Immigrants would have their own dances, festivities.

good money in Pennsylvania. steel, two-ton boxes.

came back to Springhill in 1926. came back first to Windsor, then back to Springhill.

'I had to work a whole year before I got my miners' papers.'

'Somebody gets his lamp plugged, well, they'd stand 100% behind him.' --wildcat strikes in Springhill.

Q. I know during the war here there was a strike about stopping the lamps of immigrant miners...A. Well, I tell you, they were accusing somebody--I guess the found matches or something.

Q. And they thought he was some kind of saboteur? A. Well, that's what they thought, but I never thought that myself--some devilry in the mine, you know....A person would be foolish to do that when you're working in the mine....

[Hoffman expresses the view that there was nothing the immigrants could do about this "foolishness"--you just take it as it come.]

..."Canadian citizen--well, he was a Canadian citizen and, well, he brought that up in the union, some of the miners that worked in the mine had their sons overseas in the war, well, that didn't look right, you know, sons in the war fighting and crucifying the father--well, that didn't look right to me, you know, to nobody....Yeah, well, he told them they were going to search the cans, you know? and he told them right in the hall, miners' hall, if you're going to search mine, I might as well go to the prison camp, you know. A dirty hand going in my lunch can--I don't want that... So that stopped that. Frank Cimara. [Polish, Hoffman thinks.]

His mother belonged to the Church of England; Hoffman followed his wife into the Baptist Church.

Q. When you were a boy in Springhill and Minto, did you play sports at all? A. Sports? My goodness sake, we had to work, we had no time for sports. When we was in Minto,

when we had the washing to do, we had to go like from here to Miller Corner, that far, with a sled, ...and we'd be lined up from here to Main Street there, and the water would be froze...oh, boy, I'm telling you. And in summertime we had them yokes, you know--hooked in the bucket. But that was a good pump. I don't know what would have happened in the case of a fire....

...Us kids, we had...mother made what they called a oven--she baked her bread outside, she got the bricks and the clay, built like an igloo, stuck a chimney up, us kids would carry nice big piles of wood for her. And she'd time herself so that oven was full of wood, burn it out, she'd have her bread all ready, she'd put eight loafs in and then she'd close the sheet iron for a door, and that would make lovely bread. She had to bake twice a week, eight loaves at a time....

Q.Tell me a bit about your mother. Was she happy to be here? A.Yes, she was a hard-working woman. She loved flowers, always puttering around in her garden. And she liked fancy work like,you know.

[This is the very emotional moment for Rudy. 521].

[Rudy quit work when he was finally "broken up" in the mine. Had his pelvic bone fractured and his hip and leg, two places. after the diaster he became a janitor at a church.

Q.Did you like mining? A.Well, I kind of miss the mine....Well I tell you, you had to know how to dig coal, you know, to be a miner. You just couldn't go there and dig. Shovelling--anybody could do that, but to be a miner, you had to look at your place and every day the coal was different. And you had to take one look, and if you weren't smart enough to catch on, you'd work your heart out. There was a wrong way and a right way....Sometimes you sheared in, sometime you had to go over top, sometime you had to go underneath, and that's the way you had to work it....When you had your own place, you had a place like driving a level, you had just two men, and you'd have your opposite shift. Like three-shifted--day shift, afternoon shift, and eleven o'clock shift. And if you had good opposite shift, they'd have things ready for you so that when you come, you go right at the coal face. Sometime when you had a bad opposite shift, they'd clean all the coal out and left you--you couldn't get at the coal face, you had a long chuck first and you had to lay the track and timber your place and then go to your coal. And they wondered why you're not producing so much as they are. Well, that's not right, you know. But if they worked hand in hand, and have the place in shape for each other, they make a good team.

Q.Was that generally the way it worked? A.Not always, no. Some of them would brag of 16 ton--well, what's the matter with these fellows? Well, listen, we've got to come here and lay our tracks and timber what you left--and then go at the coal.

...
[mostly worked in No.2]

[bumpy districts around 5400 and 6500.]

[Rudy was day shift at the time of the disaster.]

...I was going to tell you about the No.2 mine, I really believe right to this day that if they were to work the mine checkerboard, I think they could still be [mining].
... The top level should have been fifty feet ahead of the bottom level and so on...