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ANDY BORREGO

Tape #1044

Interviewer: Donna Carbone 1983

There was a livery stable was there where that big hotel is - that big apartment house. Oh, the Norm Apartments - that was a livery stable? Yeah, Jim Webber's Livery Stable.

What mine did you work at, Andy, when you first started?  
When I first started to work in the mine, I worked in the Standard. In 1931, I started.

And then in the corner there, across from the store, there was a drug store right there on the corner. We had quite a few stores then? And the union store was right next to that little bank on the corner.

Now when you say "union store" - was it owned by the union?  
Yeah, it was owned by the union. This Nellie Green that died the other day, Peanuts, Marino - she was workin' there at that store.

And then there was a little shoe shop right there where that little bank was - Joe Brown's shoe shop. And then Bermonts was right there. And then there was the French Store that burned down. And Charlie Scole. And Joe Bonnell, he run the butcher shop. And right there where they tore down that place across from the bank - that was a blacksmith shop. A lot of businesses, compared to what we've got now - we don't have many businesses. Yeah. And then right behind there where that motel is was a hotel. Tommy Oats Hotel.

Then right there where the Dairy King is - he had a pool hall. And then there was another store there where Al Young is now. And there was a cheese factory right there where that liquor store is now. They had a longhorn cheese factory there for years. And Dow's Drug Store down there on the corner. And a barber shop - Tony Meyers' Barber Shop.

In 1916 the school went down - sunk in the mine there; it went down four feet. The grade school? The one and only - that was it - that big one that burned down. It sunk down so they took all the kids out of school. I forget where the first grade was. The second grade was next to Anspach Jewelry where that little beauty shop is now - right there was second grade. The third grade was right there where Anspach was. The fourth grade was where the bank is - that was fourth grade.

The union - when they had that big strike - they told us all to stay in the house. Because they gave all the union men guns. They went and got a wagonful of guns and ammunition from Denver and they gave each union man a 30-30 or a 32 Special and shells, ammunition. And then they told us to stay in the house. And we stayed in the house. And another kid and I

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sneaked out of the house and they put us in the basement of that church. And I seen everybody going up the street with a gun in their hand. That was in 1913, I think. They put us in that basement for sneakin' out - we wanted to see what was goin' on.

I never seen that but they said there was a light up there on top - at that lake - they used to put a search light out at that mine as you go into Louisville to the left there - they had that light and he shot it out twice - this one guy.

And then in 1927, that massacre at the Columbine, I was there. I was workin' there when they went out on strike at the Columbine. And then the night before that happened, we was going to the camp there and they had some guards at the gate. And there was a fellow by the name of Adam Bell, he was a leader and Beranek, he was with him. And anyway, they pushed that gate open and went on through. And there was a guy comin' out of the bathroom when we went straight through. There was a guy comin' out of the bathroom; he was a little bit late. And then the two women jumped him. They told them that night. They told them down there when they flung that gate open - they hit the guy in the face - they said this is the last time you're comin' through here. So the next morning, they went through again. Well, no, they didn't, I don't know how - I got there kinda late - they was already down there - when they killed.

We went to Frederick - my sister and her husband had come over to the house - then we went with them to Frederick. We slept over there. We were supposed to go, my brother-in-law and I Jerry Davis and Johnny Robles - so my brother-in-law was sick - he got drunk the night before - he couldn't come, so Johnny Robles and I and Jerry Davis came and we got there, we left the car there, and right after that, they started shootin'. They was passin' out doughnuts and coffee. I was standin' on the side and all of a sudden, they started shootin'. They started hittin' on the dirt you could see the dust and I heard the poppin'. Jerry Davis got hit right here - right in the forehead. And Johnny Robles got hit right here - he didn't die but Jerry did.

Rufus Griffith's wife, she went down with a shot. And \_\_\_\_\_, he went down. And a guy they called Rabbit; he got killed. I think there was six killed. They opened a machine gun on them. And Beranek, she didn't get shot, I don't think, but they beat her up. I seen her when she put the flag over Adam Bell; they beat him up and then she threw the flag over him.

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Did things start changing then, Andy, did it get better?  
What was the strike over? Was it over the conditions in the mine? The conditions in the mines and the wages. There at the mine, the superintendent, he sold cars. And if you didn't buy the make of car he sold, why he'd fire you. And then if you bought the kind of car he sold, why he put you in the best places and you could make all kinds of money. When he fired me - I got fired there twice. We got fired - a fellow named Gene from Fort Lupton - we got fired because we lived there and didn't trade at the company store. They called us in and asked why we didn't trade at the company store and I said that I'd been tradin' in Lafayette - there was a little store right there between that hotel and that little bank - the union store used to be there and then it burned down and they put in another one and it burned down. Well, that was a cheap little store - I traded there all the time. When a can of milk was 5¢ there, a can of milk at the Columbine was 8¢. So they fired both of us - Gene was tradin' in Fort Lupton. Then I bought a Chevy car and the superintendent over there sold Stars. And he said, "Why didn't you buy a Star?" I said, "Cause I don't like Stars, I like Chevy". He says, "Just like that, eh?" I says, "Yeh". So then he fired me.

What kind of work did you do down in the mine, Andy? Well, all the time, I was a motorman. I drove for years; I was drivin'. I never did load the coal. Then I was a cager for a long time. Then I worked on the machine; helping on the machine. That was good money but that was a lot of work. The only reason I didn't like that was because at that time, I was young and it had to be night shift and you'd lose out on everything. You'd lose out on the dances and everything. We was makin' \$235. a two weeks. I was making more than twice of what I was makin' for company work but just as I was comin' out of the mines just as everything was over. They had a beautiful dance hall in Columbine. Right at the mine? Yeah. They had a big skating rink and a nice icecream parlor and a nice theater. Right up there at the mine? Yes. And they had a nice big pool hall; they called it the Casino. And there was gambling all the time in the back of it. And a lot of bootlegging.

When I got fired at the Columbine, I got a job at the Standard. Both times. I worked there a while and I liked that camp up there. Then after a while they'd forget about it at the Columbine and I'd go back there and get on again.

Well, at that time, there was no union. The union came here in 1927 but it was the IWW, it wasn't the United Mine Workers. And they was asking for 22 demands. And Josephine Roach after the strike went on about six months, she said that they would recognize some of the demands but under the United Mine Workers, not under the IWW. Cause the IWW was radical. So then they did. The UMW had been here before them. In '22,

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we was out on strike and we won that strike. And I don't know why there was no union from there on. See, that's when they started paying a dollar an hour. And all of a sudden, there was no union or nothin'. So there was no union from '22 to '27. So they pretty much had it their own way, then. Yeah. We was gettin' \$6.27 a day - we was gettin' \$8.00 a day and then they cut it down to \$6.27. That was the Rocky Mountain Fuel. And when I was workin' at the Columbine, we was gettin' \$6.27 - \$7.27 - no \$7.26 that's what we was gettin'.

And then the superintendent and some guys up there got a petition around - the superintendent was with them - they got a petition around for you to sign to cut your own wages. Then I wouldn't sign it - I said I would sign to better my wages but not to cut. So they put you on a list for that too. But then in the meantime, the majority did sign. The superintendent was right with them and they figured if they didn't sign, he might fire them, so they signed. And then when they signed, they cut it down to \$6.27. People cut their own throat - there was no union or nothin'.

Johnny Lewis and Mr. Snow and then Mr. Bolton and them old-timers, they was blacklisted because they were strong union members. My dad was too; they were all blacklisted. They'd tell them, "Don't sign". People would sign anyway. That's when they built that bullpen here, you know, in that big strike. Remember, there was a big high fence around the Simpson Camp. So the people couldn't get in or out of the camp. One time there was a guy got out and got drunk and they caught him over here and they beat him up and knocked him down and beat him up and beat in his face. Just for leaving the camp? Well, he was a scab. So when they were scabbing, they stayed right in the camp? Yeah. And the Columbine did too. If they were scabbing, they stayed pretty close to the camp there. They would go to Denver or Fort Lupton or someplace. But around here at Lafayette and Louisville and Frederick, they didn't go around much. There were quite a bit of young union men in Lafayette and Frederick and Louisville.

And then they were paying guys \$10.00 a head for every man they'd bring in to work in the camp. Some of those guys worked four or five days a week and then jumped in the car and go to Walsenburg and bring in four or five; that would be forty - fifty dollars. We'd tell them, "Stay out and help us win the strike and get better conditions and better ourselves a little bit". "We don't believe in unions, we don't believe in unions", they said. Them's the guys that now are getting the black lung and a miners' pension and now they believe in unions.

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In 1928, they told us the strike was over and we could go get a job anywhere. Frank Bagdonas was the first union man to go back to work. And I was the second guy to go to work after the strike. There was only 13 of us - only 13 union men working there when the United Mine Workers took over. They told us we either join the United Mine Workers or get out of camp. We didn't know what the heck to do and Charlie Metz said that we were lost and we'd better join the United Mine Workers or we were going to be out all together. And so we did. So I called him, "Do you mean to tell me, you Scab SOB - ". So he went and told the superintendent and that superintendent was a new one - he wasn't there when the strike started, so he said, "You call another man "scab" here and you'll go right down the hill." He says, "I'll get rid of you in a hurry".

After the strike - some of those coal cars were square and some of them had a dip cut in the back, so they'd load the car from the back through that dip - through that hole. There was a guy cussin' about the cars that didn't have that dip - he was cussin' and raisin' hell - And I said, "That's what you deserve, the minute we went on strike, you went and got a gun. We were trying to better conditions and look what you've done - you had to go scabbin' right away". And then he went and told the superintendent. And he told me, "That's the second time you've called a man 'scab' here and I've got a damn good notion to get rid of you right now". I said, "I didn't call him a scab". He said, "You did too". So I just kept my mouth shut from then on because he would have fired me.

So, in other words, they reaped the benefits too. They didn't go out on strike and suffer but when the union came in, they joined up and - . Yeah. See, like a lot of these guys that said, "Oh, I don't believe in unions", they were getting their pension and they knew all about the unions. But that's the way it is. But this younger generation, they have more schooling. A lot of people just couldn't go out and get a job at Rocky Flats. I went to the fifth grade. I had to go out and work. There were nine in our family. I would be working the threshing machines in the summer time. We started working in the mines, me and my brother to help the folks out. I started real young.

When I went to look for a job, the superintendent knew me real good - when I was a kid, I used to go down there all the time. He says, "What do you want?" I says, "I want a job". I just didn't dream that he would give me a job. He says, "What do you want to do?" "Anything, I says, "I don't know nothin'". He says, "Okay, how old are you?" I said, "Eighteen, I was fifteen". He says, "How old are you; I know you're a damn liar". I says "Fifteen". He says, "I know you're a damn liar" - but he put down eighteen. So, I worked about 17 years, off and on, for the Rocky

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Mountain Fuel and I always put that age so I was eligible for the pension way before. But I didn't take it. He gave me an oil can and I had to fill up another can and I had to put oil in every car that came by so they'd run easier. Five dollars a day. Man, that was big money for me. We used to run buck rakes for the farmers at a dollar day. And then some farmers, they were nice and they'd give you butter or milk. There wasn't no construction like there is now. And you worked about nine hours.

People seemed to be closer then, though, didn't they? A little bit more neighborly. Oh, yeah, lots more. Your grandpa used to live right there? My Grandpa Lastoka, yes. And Joe and Mrs. and that other one that died. Helen. And then that little boy that lived up there on Geneseo. Laddie. They were just little kids.