

Oral history with 70 year old male, British Columbia (Transcription)

<unintelligible text> January 28, 1976 Interview No. 1802, Tape No. 1, Track No. 1 Begin
M29 A(2)

Mr. Reimer: You were saying before that you were born in Kimberley in 1906,
<unintelligible text>

<unintelligible text>: 1906, yes.

Mr. Reimer: I guess we're going to talk mostly about the Slocan, so maybe you could pick
up the story of your life just before you first came to the Slocan, and tell us some of the
things you were mentioning earlier.

<unintelligible text>: Before I came to the Slocan.

Mr. Reimer: Yes.

<unintelligible text>: Well, we made the move from Kimberley to the Slocan...from the East
Kootenay right through to Rossland. We lived in Rossland for three years -- from '15 to '18.
I was living in Rossland during the boom when the copper was so good during the First
World War. At that time the city of Rossland was really bigger than Trail and it was rivalling
Nelson as the metropolis of the Kootenays, as it were.

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In 1918 the copper prices fell and conditions in Rossland got pretty poor as far as employment was concerned, so my dad, he moved over to Silverton because, as I say, he

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was a miner as well as a logger. So we came into Silverton in August, 1918, got work at the Bosun, rented a home and we moved over in October. We stayed in Silverton from 1918 to 1920. The reason we moved out in 1920 was because the OB Union called a strike. They demanded 50 cents a day more for the miners and they wanted blankets supplied by the companies. Well, a lot of the companies felt that that was too much to ask so they just folded up and Silverton and Sandon was practically ghost towns for a couple of years or so -- there was no work particularly, you see. So Dad says: "Well, I'm a logger as well as a miner," so we went up to Summit Lake and there he got acquainted with Allshouse & Robinson that were running the....

Mr. Reimer: What was the name again?

<unintelligible text>: <unintelligible text>

Mr. Reimer: <unintelligible text>

<unintelligible text>: <unintelligible text>

Mr. Reimer: Right.

<unintelligible text>: He was German descent.

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Mr. Reimer: Before we talk about that could I just go back and ask a couple of questions on what we've covered so far? What do you remember about the Bosun mine?

<unintelligible text>: Well, not much. When I was a small kid I believe they had a steam plant down there that they used for supplying air to the mine, you see. A fellow by the name of <unintelligible text>, I believe, was the manager and Dad was hired as a mine foreman. That's all I can tell you, because I was just a kid living in Silverton.

Mr. Reimer: You don't remember how many were working there?

<unintelligible text>: I wouldn't. No, not at that time. I wouldn't be able to give you any information at all about that.

Mr. Reimer: Were the miners living near the mine, or were they living in Silverton?

<unintelligible text>: They were living in Silverton and New Denver. You see, there were miners in both....

Mr. Reimer: So they'd walk out in the morning would they?

<unintelligible text>: Yes. That's no distance -- about a mile and a half in each direction to.... Although, I believe they did have a cookhouse, didn't they? They had a cookhouse at the

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Bosun, and a crew there and a cook and so on, so I guess some of them stayed there. But I think it was the married men with families that stayed in the two towns, you see, because they couldn't afford to pay board in camp and then feed the family at home at the same time.

Mr. Reimer: You were mentioning about the influenza epidemic when you arrived in Silverton.

<unintelligible text>: Yes.

Mr. Reimer: Could you tell that story again?

<unintelligible text>: Well, we'll say...starting with it in Rossland, we started school in September, 1918. I think I went to school a week and the flu epidemic got so bad they closed the schools in Rossland, you see, so we were idle -- the children all out of school -- for the month of September and right into October. Then when we moved over to Silverton, why, the flu was still so bad that the schools...I guess all the British Columbia schools were closed at that time. So I never started school until January 1919, after having left school in September, 1918. So there was three months we didn't get any schooling.

As I say,<unintelligible text>, he was really a fine man and very conscientious in looking after his patients. Well, he nearly run the legs off himself all over town trying to look after

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all these patients.

Mr. Reimer: This was in Silverton.

<unintelligible text>: In Silverton. A lot of the miners, you know, and it had hit them pretty hard on account of the lung conditions they had anyhow. There was quite a few of them died. I can't remember the names of any of them because I'd just moved in at the time, you see, but I know that...I didn't go around and get acquainted with anybody particularly because everywhere I went I was told: "We've got flu here and you'd better not come in," or "If you've got flu at your house we don't want you in," or something of that kind, you see.

Mr. Reimer: People were frightened.

<unintelligible text>: Oh, yes. As I say, in Sandon that <unintelligible text>, he locked himself in his home and refused to come out and look after his patients at all.

Mr. Reimer: For fear that he would....

<unintelligible text>: Get the flu, yes. In fact, old <unintelligible text> he sort of locked himself up in his room at the Reco Hotel and he wouldn't go out anywhere; he was afraid to get the flu too. He was afraid of what would happen if he ever got it.

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There was quite a few died of the flu. As I say, I was only a boy then; I wasn't acquainted with any of the grownups particularly.

But I can remember when we moved to Silverton -- this is something I never mentioned before -- my dad used to go over to the boat on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, when they came up the lake, and get the Nelson News. The purser would come off the boat and sell the Nelson News, you see. The first thing he did when he got the paper home, he'd open it up and look at the obituary column, and the casualties from the flu in the Kootenays were higher than the casualties from the war, particularly in Rossland and Trail, as I say. The Italians seemed to have...they say a lot of them died of fright. They were frightened of the Spanish flu, you see. When we'd read over the list from Rossland we'd spot people that we knew that were still healthy and going strong when we left a couple of weeks before.

I can remember one boy I played around with before we left...we saw them taking him into the Allen Hotel in Rossland, which had been converted into an emergency hospital, as we were leaving town. About three days later we looked over the obituary column and here was his name in the paper -- he'd died of the flu. The kid was only about 13 years of age. It just shows you what a severe epidemic it was, you know.

Mr. Harris: Do you think miners would be particularly susceptible?

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<unintelligible text>: Oh, yes. You see, they'd spent years underground where they don't get the fresh air and all the outside, and then their lungs would be affected by the dust and one thing and another. The flu would hit them particularly hard, especially if they happened

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to have a certain amount of dust in their chest from mining anyhow, you know. So the miners were more susceptible, actually, than, we'll say, loggers or outdoor workers.

You work in the mine where you're 4,000 feet underground -- you've got the smell of the old timber, and there is powder smoke from the last round that was blasted by the shift before -- the air isn't very good in there.

I used to work underground. I'd put in maybe eight months or a year and then I'd figure I was getting bad colds and they wouldn't clear up very quick, so I'd say: "Well, it's time to get out." So I'd quit and go outside and find a job somewhere else. After a while when employment got pretty scarce I'd be rustling for a job and go back in the mine again. But I never stayed in longer than a year any time I worked in the mine.

Mr. Harris: Was there a lot of silicosis among the miners?

<unintelligible text>: Well, this isn't a silicosis area, the base metals in here. The Molly Hughes (?), they've got a high degree of silic over there. There is silicosis there. And up at the McAllister, there is silicosis up at that mine. But you take the majority of mines around here, it isn't a silicosis area.

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You take up in Sheep Creek there, where my dad finished his mining career, the Queen mine up there, it has 85 per cent silica in the rock. That finished him off pretty fast.

I know, I was talking to a mining inspector when I was working up in the Carnegie in 1956 and he told me they were still getting people applying for silicosis pensions that had

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worked on Sheep Creek before it closed down, as far back as 1945. I know men in their 20s who have got it.

You have an idea of how silicosis builds up, do you? The triangular particles and so on builds up in the system. As my dad said: "You get a chest full of rocks." (Laughter.) As I say, I haven't got any at all because it was compulsory to go in every six months for a silicosis exam, you see. I'd get my exam and I was always clear and I intended to stay that way as best I could.

Mr. Reimer: Were the miners generally afraid of silicosis? Did they know the hazard?

<unintelligible text>: Well, it's funny, the psychology of the miner: he figures, well, the other guy is the fellow that will get it. It won't bother me; I'll get by. That was their attitude. They'd say: "Poor old <unintelligible text> he's pretty near gone, but, boy, I'll watch myself, it won't get me." Then the first thing you know he had it. I know that's the way Dad was. He used to have his....

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Another thing -- this is a black eye on the companies up in there -- they'd never tell the men what their silicosis tests brought out. So a man would go in and get his silicosis examination under the supervision of the company and they'd never tell him whether he had No. 1, No. 2 or No. 3 silicosis. That's what happened to my dad.

(Tape stops.)

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Mr. Reimer: You were just saying about....

<unintelligible text>: The companies and the silicosis.

Mr. Reimer: The companies didn't release their silicosis figures.

<unintelligible text>: That's right. In fact, what happened to my dad was he kept feeling a little worse and a little worse. He'd say to the superintendent: "I don't feel so good today. I don't know, maybe I'd better pull out." He'd say: "Oh, you're not a young man any more. You're just getting into your 60s, you don't expect to feel as young as you did 20 years ago, or as well as you did then." So Dad listened to it for a while, then when he thought he was getting so bad he'd have to do something he went in to this <unintelligible text> in Nelson.

<unintelligible text>: "Well, <unintelligible text> what are you doing now?" "Oh," Dad says, "I'm still on the crusher at the