

seen my husband have to borrow from his next pay check—what they call scrip—to buy just medicine and things like that. And we didn't live extravagant either. We paid over 260 some odd dollars for furniture from the coal company. We paid it all back but \$20. And when he went and got another job, he bought a truck down there for the furniture. And they took the whole thing away from us. They wouldn't let us pay the \$20.

Because he was a troublemaker . . . ?

No, because he quit that job there where the breather was on that boiler. That's the kind of troublemaker he was, you're mighty right he was. He wanted to live.

We lived in this coal mine camp, this next one, and there was a pump out in the middle between four houses. The four families of us shared that one pump. In the wintertime, that thing would get covered up with ice a foot thick. Us women had to keep a tub of water on our coal stove hot. The men would have to get up at three in the morning to get out there and melt the ice off the pump before they went to work. Just for the simple want of a shed built over a water pump. It might deflate the company's bank account.

Aaron Barkham

"I'm too young to retire and too old to work in the coal mines. When a man gets to be up around thirty-five, forty years old, been in a mine ten or twelve years, they want somebody younger. When they get the chance, they'll replace him."

He is from West Virginia. His father, a miner all his life, died in a coal camp. "Silicosis wasn't even heard of. He died of hardened arteries. Dad belonged to the Oddfellows, and they paid Mother about \$11 a month. We had a cow and a hog. When things got tight, we let loose of that. We had a hardscrabble farm, worn-out ground, not worth much. From the time I was four years old, that's all I knowed, hard times."*

PEOPLE WORKED fifteen hours a day, loaded a four-ton car, they got a dollar out of it. If the company could, it'd take that. (Laughs.) I think

* "Several hundred autopsies have confirmed that many miners die of heart failure when coal dust clamps the small arteries in their lungs in a stiff unyielding cast which eventually puts a critical load on their hearts." Robert G. Sherrill, *The Nation*, April 28, 1969, p. 533.

they made about \$2 a day, most of 'em. We had boarders from the coal camp, others weren't that lucky. My oldest brother, he was fifteen, he went to work as a breaker boy at the tippie.

Years before, he and my other brother, who was twelve, got the idea of sellin' moonshine. We'd pay a dollar a gallon and sell it for twenty-five cents a pint. So that worked all right. We sold sometimes three gallons a day. During Prohibition, and after, people that got the relief checks was the ones that bought the whiskey. We'd get it in half-gallon jars and put it in pint bottles.

That's where a playful little boy comes in. A little boy—I was about six, seven—could get ahold of somethin' and carry it right along the road where a man could get arrested. 1931 was when that started and come to about 1936. That was 'bout the only family income. The only obstacle I had, I had with my own second cousin. He was a deputy sheriff. He was big and fat, and I could get around him. He chased me miles through the thickets.

Nine revenuers were split up into three bunches. Work in the woods, lookin' for stills. They'd put down a marker. It was my job to switch the markers. And they'd get all confused. Everybody bootlegged. It kind of got to be a legitimate business. You had to be foxier than the foxes, that's all.

That second cousin, he was on the political side of the fence. So when WPA come in, we didn't get any relief from the local politicians. My mother was a Republican. I think it was her pride that wouldn't change our politics. Not much use complainin' about somethin' like that. We had enough to eat from the bootleg. About four out of five was unemployed in the county till 'bout 1938.

I never did get a whole year of school—maybe five or six months. I started workin' when I was thirteen. In a sawmill at ten cents an hour. I worked for the guy that had all the timber monopoly for the company. I worked for the bulldozers. I finally got twenty-five cents an hour, but he raised the board to seventy-five cents a day. Get up at four o'clock in the mornin', we clumb on a big truck and was hauled about fifteen miles. We started about a quarter to five and worked till we couldn't see. Then we'd quit. It was nearer sixteen hours than it was eight hours. I know we'd get into bed and turn over one time, and they'd be yellin' for breakfast.

It got bad in '29. The Crash caught us with one \$20 gold piece. All mines shut down—stores, everything. One day they was workin', the next day the mines shut down. Three or four months later, they opened up. Run two, three days a week, mostly one. They didn't have the privilege of calling their souls their own. Most people by that time was in debt so far to the company itself, they couldn't live.

Some of them been in debt from '29 till today, and never got out. Some

of them didn't even try. It seem like whenever they went back to work, they owed so much. The company got their foot on 'em even now.

When the Crash come, they got about ten cents an hour—that is, if they begged the supervisor for a job. They had to load a seven-ton car for fifty cents. If they found three pieces of slate as big as your hand, they took that car, and you didn't get paid. That's what they called the dock. A man couldn't predict what's gonna fall on that car, goin' through maybe a couple of miles of tunnel, and everything fallin' anyhow.

One time they hauled a mule out. They fired the guy that got that mule killed. They told him a mule's worth more'n a man. They had to pay \$50 for a mule, but a man could be got for nothin'. He never had worked another day since. Blackballed for costin' 'em that money.

I remember one time, the Red Cross shipped in about four ton of flour in twenty-four pound bags. Unloaded it in the company warehouse. It was a Red Cross gift. But the company said they have to work a day to get a sack of flour. That started it. Pretty much like walkin' the inferno.

An old woman, about sixty years, she come down from Canyon Creek. One time she was makin' a speech near a railroad track. She was standin' on a box. The strikebreakers shot her off with a shot gun. So she come down to Logan County where we was and made speeches and helped get them organized. But they had a time.

The county sheriff had a hundred strikebreakers. They were called deputies. The company paid him ten cents a ton on all the coal carried down the river, to keep the union out. He was beaten in the election by T. Hatfield of the feudin' Hatfields. He was for the union. They had pretty much a full-scale war out there for about three years.

They brought the army in. The county was under martial law, stayed till about '31. What strikes me is the soldiers along the company road, dispersin' people. When people'd gather together, they couldn't talk. Two guys could, but three couldn't.

About that time, a bunch of strikebreakers come in with shotguns and axe handles. Tried to break up union meetings. The UMW deteriorated and went back to almost no existence. It didn't particularly get full strength till about 1949. And it don't much today in West Virginia. So most people ganged up and formed the Ku Kluck Klan.

The Ku Klux was the real controllin' factor in the community. They was the law. It was in power to about 1932. My dad and my older brother belonged to it. My dad was one of the leaders till he died. The company called in the army to get the Ku Klux out, but it didn't work. The union and the Ku Klux was about the same thing.

The superintendent of the mine got the big idea of makin' it rougher than it was. They hauled him off in a meat wagon, and about ten more of the company officials. Had the mine shut down. They didn't kill 'em, but they didn't come back. They whipped one of the foremen and got him out

of the county. They gave him twelve hours to get out, get his family out.

The UMW had a field representative, he was a lawyer. They tarred and feathered 'im for tryin' to edge in with the company. He come around, got mad, tryin' to tell us we were wrong, when we called a wildcat. He was takin' the side of the company. I used the stick to help tar 'im. And it wasn't the first time.

The Ku Klux was formed on behalf of people that wanted a decent living, both black and white. Half the coal camp was colored. It wasn't anti-colored. The black people had the same responsibilities as the white. Their lawn was just as green as the white man's. They got the same rate of pay. There was two colored who belonged to it. I remember those two niggers comin' around my father and askin' questions about it. They joined. The pastor of our community church was a colored man. He was Ku Klux. It was the only protection the workin' man had.

Sure, the company tried to play the one agin' the other. But it didn't work. The colored and the whites lived side by side. It was somethin' like a checkerboard. There'd be a white family and a colored family. No sir, there was no racial problem. Yeah, they had a certain feelin' about the colored. They sure did. They had a certain feelin' about the white, too. Anyone come into the community had unsatisfactory dealin's, if it was colored or white, he didn't stay.

I remember one family moved in from across us. They had a bunch of women. I remember where I saw out the window, it didn't look right. The Ku Klux warned 'em once. Gave 'em twenty-four hours. They didn't take the warning. The next night they whipped Hughie (that was the man), his wife and his niece, his uncle and his aunt, and whipped six more that was acrowdin' around. They whipped 'em with switches and run 'em out, all of 'em. They was white; they wasn't niggers.

One time a Negro slapped a white boy. They didn't give him no warnin'. They whipped 'im and run 'im out of town. If a white man'd slapped a colored kid, they'd a done the same thing. They didn't go in for beatin' up niggers because they was niggers. What they done was kept the community decent to live in. What they did object to was obscenity and drinkin'.

What about bootlegging?

Oh, they objected to raisin' a fuss in town. What you do private, that's your business. You're talkin' about mountain people now. This ain't the Deep South.

People'd get their temper rubbed off quick. In organizin' the union, we didn't go through the Labor Relations Board. We went through what we called "mule train." We'd figure how many people were workin' at that certain mine, and we'd just tell 'em to organize it or we'd close 'em. We'd give 'em three days. Sometimes they'd stand at the mouth of the mine with

a club. There was seventeen thousand in the whole district. I have knowd every one of them to come out on account of one man bein' called out. And join the UMW.

At a UMW meeting, they'd iron it out themselves. I had to pull out a .38 once to get out of a union meetin'. Our chairman of the local was thick with the superintendent of the mine, and I made mention of it in the meeting. Some guys didn't like it: they followed him close. We was in a school building. I was up next to the blackboard, and the door was on the other end of the room. So they blocked the door. My wife's half-brother was sittin' about half way back. So he pulled out his gun and throwd it to me. I told 'em I'm goin' out and anybody stops me, I'm gonna shoot. They followed me outside, there was about fifty. They blocked the gate. So I told 'em I'm gonna shoot the first six gets in my way.

The next day I went back to work. I took my gun with me. They cooled off. It took 'em a week, they cooled off.

In my life, I've found people won't take anything. If things get real bad again, I'm afraid there'd be some millionaires made paupers because they'd take their money. They'd take it the rough way. The people are gonna take care of their families, if they'd have to shoot somebody else. And you can't blame 'em for that. You think I wouldn't take what you got if you had a million dollars and I had to protect my family? I sure would. I'd take your money one way or the other. Some people don't have courage enough to fight for what they have comin'. Until 1934, more than half the people of Logan County were scabbin'. Gives you an idea how they don't know. . . .

Explosions? Had one back in '35, killed a few men. They had one in Bartley, killed 136 men. In Macbeth the same year—when was that?—a fire and explosion killed eighteen and twenty men. Then in 1947, they had an explosion that killed a couple of men.

They sent me for a job in Virginia. Shaft was fifteen hundred feet deep. I went down and looked it over and went up and didn't go. Gas and dust. That was 1965. Supposed to have been the most safest mine in the world. They had an explosion about four months after that. Killed two men, injured nine more. . . .

POSTSCRIPT: *Suddenly, a light laugh: "I remember the first radio come to Mingo County, next to Logan. Wayne Starbuck, a cousin to me, brought that in in 1934. That was a boon. It was a little job, got more squeals and squeaks than anything else. Everybody came from miles around to look at it. We didn't have any electricity. So he hooked up two car batteries. We got 'Grand Old Opry' on it."*

Edward Santander

A director of adult education at a small Midwestern college. "I never had the slightest intention of being anything other than a schoolteacher. My whole life is bound up in this. The Depression played a role: if I could just add my two cents worth to making life better. . . ."

MY FIRST REAL MEMORIES come about '31. It was simply a gut issue then: eating or not eating, living or not living. My father was a coal miner, outside a small town in Illinois. My dad, my grandfather and my uncle worked in this same mine. He had taken a cut in wages, but we were still doing pretty well. We were sitting in a '27 Hudson, when I saw a line of men waiting near the I.C. tracks. I asked him what was the trouble. They were waiting to get something to eat.

When the mine temporarily closed down in the early Thirties, my dad had to hunt work elsewhere. He went around the state, he'd paint barns, anything.

I went to an old, country-style schoolhouse, a red-stripe. One building that had eight rows in it, one for each grade. Seven rows were quiet, while the eighth row recited. The woman teacher got the munificent sum of \$30 a month. She played the organ, an old pump organ with pedals, she taught every subject, and all eight grades. This was 1929, '30, '31. . . . At the back corner was a great pot-bellied stove that kept the place warm. It has about an acre of ground, a playground with no equipment. Out there were the toilets, three-holers, and in the winter—You remember Chic Sale?* You had moons, crescents or stars on the doors. You'd be surprised at the number of people in rural areas that didn't have much in this way, as late as the Thirties.

One of the greatest contributions of the WPA was the standardized outdoor toilet, with modern plumbing. (Laughs.) They built thousands of them around here. You can still see some of 'em standing. PWA built new schools and the City Hall in this town. I remember NYA. I learned a good deal of carpentry in this.

Roosevelt was idolized in that area. The county had been solidly Republican from the Civil War on. And then was Democratic till the end of Truman's time. F.D.R. was held in awe by most people, but occasionally you'd run across someone who said: "Well, he has syphillis, and it's gone to his brain." The newspaper in the area hated Roosevelt, just hated him. (Laughs.)

* A "rube" vaudevillian, best known for "The Specialist," a routine based on out-house humor.