

Ben Williams

Date of Interview: 2008

Interviewer: Margaret Cook

Assisted by Bevan Kathage



My name is Benjamin Onesimus Williams. A lot of people know me as “Nissy” Williams. My first job was over near the fertiliser picking stones. Bill Adams. That was the chap I started with. I used to pick up all the coal. They were working up around the castle at Blackstone. There were two tunnels there. They went straight underneath the castle. One was Happy Valley and the other was Blackleg. Further down there was Snake Gully – Binnies had all these mines. The one under the castle never had haulage.

The day I went up there, Arnie Binnie was in the office at Binnies. He said “you will have to go and get Herb Price as he is wanted on the phone”. They didn’t have phones like they do now. I rode my bike and when I got up there Dickie Barron (his father built all the gantries around the place for the mines) said “Herb’s inside. You’ll have to hop in the wagon and I’ll wheel you in”. When I got in there all you could see was fire. It was on fire. They

used to hose the men in those days to keep them cool.

Bevan Kathage: They did that at Aberdare Extended.

The coal around the castle was the Aberdare Seam and it used to catch on fire real quick. It was good coal. Marvellous coal. When they used to bring it down in the truck Bill Adams and I used to pick all the stone out. Then we put the coal down the chute into a rail truck. When the trucks were full you had to let them down the line and there were a few lines down and they would come in and pick them up.

I started when I was 15 and I was born in 1927. This was 1942.

Bevan Kathage: Nissy were these tunnels driven up hill so they could lower the coal out?

When they used to wheel you in they used to ride them out on the brake. They didn’t have haulage. Men in those

days were as hard as nails. In those days we all played soccer.

We wore sandshoes. No boots. There were a few chaps that never wore any boots – Rod Woolley was one. He had barefeet. Sidney Kitchen was another one. He had big cuts in his feet. Later on they made you wear steel toed boots. Sidney Kitchen was a hard man.

When I left there, when it finished, I went to Coronation which was on Bergins Hill. Originally there were three tunnels over there. The first tunnel they had a horse – it was the only way you could get it up, with a horse. They got a bit modern after that and they had a Model T Ford.

Where they had that one, the chute used to go up and they had a big gantry that went right up. The one that was right near the tunnel mouth the rope went up and right around and come back. They didn't have any tipping. We used to shovel it all by hand and clean it out by hand and get down and pick out the stone. We didn't stop for meal breaks in those days. The manager didn't believe in meal breaks. We ate on the run.

Interviewer: This was contract mining days?

Yes. One day they pulled 142 wagons. They only had two wagons with this Model T. Colly Hughes and myself, we used to pick the stone. He was older than me – four years older. We had to load the timber. There was no rope

rider. We used to load it and away it would go. There would be a flat bit. Sometimes they'd come off the rails and we used to have to race down. There was no light or anything. We used to have to get them back on the rails so they could go.

When I left there I went to Rothwell Haigh. Arnie wanted me over there. They had all coke ovens. That was years before I went there. They had a lot of coal on the surface in those days. For a long time they used to clean up all this coal. In those days they used to get all the rough coal and they used to stack the slack pack and put it all back in there again.

Bevan Kathage: What they used to do was fill it off the fork. They had a fork not a shovel and they would shovel with gaps of maybe half an inch and so the lump coal only would be on the fork and that is what was put on the wagon. The slack would be shovelled to one side because they couldn't sell it.

They only wanted the rough coal.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit about the coke ovens?

When I went over there they weren't working. Pop Woods, an old fellow, he was there when they were going. Before I went underground I used to help in the blacksmiths shop as we made our own rails in those days. Pop was retired but they got him back because there was a shortage of men as they were off at the war.

After I went down I did rope riding. A bit of all trades it was. You couldn't go underground. You had to be 16. Most of the young lads did rope riding. I did this at Rothwell Haigh. *(near the BP service station at Tivoli, in the bush on the left hand side as you go out to the highway)*

Binnie. He owned mines around Blackstone and Rosewood. *(Bevan Kathage: All the united pits at Rosewood were Binnie's).*

Back in those days families used to start the mines.

Bevan Kathage: That was the difference between Ipswich and other coal mining areas, they were family concerns. McQueens, Cribbs, Walkers at Aberdare, Haenkes at Rhondda. Binnies. Before that there were the Davies and the Gullands.

Interviewer: Who were the Binnies?

Old Bill Binnie he had brothers. Jack Binnie and Archie Binnie. They all worked for Bill. Jack Binnie was one of the best men I've ever seen work. He'd go straight through falls. He didn't bother cleaning them. He'd drive straight through them. Jack and Dick Roach were two of the best I've seen. Later on we used to have to clean them up. There was enough width, 8 feet wide, to go though. Back in those days they were hauling wagons. Herb Prince, he went into Binnies. He supplied all the trucks.

Bevan Kathage: That was the last generation. Binnies closed in the mid 1960s. They were more than just coal miners and they owned more than just mines. There used to be an Ampol service station down at Bundamba on Brisbane Road. They used to own that. Just up from Dobes – that is an old mining name. Where Kennard's is – that used to be a Binnies service station.

Interviewer: So they were business men as well.

Old Bob's son worked for him too. Arnie was related to him. He was a nephew or something. Binnies was a big family. Llewys Thomas he came out from Wales. He built the Welsh church at Blackstone. That is the only Welsh church that is going in Australia. Thomas only had one daughter.

Blackstone is all Welsh people. That is why they all played soccer in those days.

I then went to Rhondda. In those days they had machine coal and you got three and something a ton for it. In the dips they used to get six or something but you had to do your own wheeling.

They had about 17 horses down each day at Rhondda. They had lads to do the horse wheeling. They would bring them up to your bord. They'd fire it and you'd add what they called a dag in those days. You would fill up a certain amount and that was it. It wasn't very good money in those days.

Bevan Kathage: Not when compared to what they get now but it was good compared to what other people were getting.

When you were getting three and something a ton compared to six. They had what they called specials in those days. They used to drive the dips in the side places so you could keep going ahead. Different chaps put in for it. They had scrutineers. *(Bevan Kathage: The dips were difficult for all sorts of reasons)*

That is why they paid you extra because a lot of chaps wouldn't take it on. Most dips you would be working in water all day. Sometimes it would be dripping on your back. You couldn't do much about it because the roof was just there and it came through.

Bevan Kathage: It was hard going because the wagons would come in alright but getting them out was a problem.

Interviewer: Which Mine was this?

Rhondda No. 1 where the shaft was. I went on specials a few times. Before that I worked on the machines (*coal cutters*). We used to load them on and load them off and cut along the floor. After that I went onto the power borers. We used to bore the place up. When the miners came in they used to shoot it all themselves in those days.

Some places it was fairly high. Down the lower section it was only a little over 5 feet and you couldn't stand up. You could only have certain horses to

wheel in there. Most of the dips were 8 to 9 feet high at the dip.

Bevan Kathage: They'd take stone – roof or floor – because they had to have enough height for all sorts of reasons.

When you were in the dips you had to bore it yourself. We didn't have power borers then. We used to bore it by hand. We would set the machine up and bore it by hand. If you had a missed shot you had to go home. But I'd better not tell you about that! When they had the dag on then that was it.

The dag was the quota. If you filled over the dag you went home. It was so everyone got equal share.

Bevan Kathage: It could vary from pit to pit but it was about 10 ton per man.

Some days your mate would be away and you'd be single. I think it was 12 dags we had to fill – 24 a team. The wheelers would come in and if there wasn't quite enough coal you'd tell them it tipped up! 17 horses they took down.

Scotty Campbell – his father – he was there then and Scotty took over after him. They did all the shoeing. Two chaps looked after the horses - Digger Bassett and Perse Toddin. They were real characters. Perse Toddin he was a funny man. He used to drink at the bottom hotel called the Racehorse. He used to ride his horse up the main road to the hotel. This day he hopped on his

horse and rode it through one door and out the other. Mrs Thompson, the lady that ran the hotel, didn't say anything to him. But the next day when he came in she got a mallet and gave him a whack on the head with it. Back in those days on a Friday afternoon there was standing room only at the hotels – the Racehorse and the top hotel, the Prince Alfred.

Mrs Thompson ran the Racehorse. The top hotel was owned by someone else. There weren't many other pubs. Blackstone and Silkstone doesn't have a pub.

It was the Racehorse or Prince Alfred or town where everyone congregated at the end of the week. You could tell some stories about those hotels. There were some funny men who drank there. Sidney Kitchen he drank there. As soon as he came home he'd be in the hotel. In those days Mrs Thompson let them book. He'd book it up during the week and when he got his pay on Friday he'd pay it and start the next one for the week. That's what he did.

The first job I had was as a telegram boy in Brisbane. I was there when the first lot of Americans arrived in the war. General MacArthur he came out. Lennons Hotel was the poshest hotel in Brisbane – he took it over. I was there for a while then I got a job with HO Dick in Silkstone delivering groceries. I had a delivery bike which had a little wheel at the front and a little basket. Then you had another basket on top

and I had a shirt full of eggs. When you got off you couldn't let the bike tip up because there was so much weight of it. But that is what I did when I was a lad. I took over from my mate who went to work in the mines. I went to see HO Dicks. He offered my mate the same wage he was paid in the mines to deliver for him because he was good for his business. He talked to all the women and told them yarns. He was a real character. That was before I thought of going into the mines.

After Rhondda No 1 I got a job at New Hope through my father-in-law Alec Gibb. I was secretary there for 25 years. It was the best part of 25 years when I finished. I started in my 30s when Rex Griffiths was Manager (*late 1950s*)

When I went there I worked in the top tunnel (*The Bluff. No 4*).

That was a tough mine. A lot of stone. Hoot Gibson was one of the Deputy's there. We used to play the box there.

Interviewer: What was the box?

First of all the gelly boxes that held the explosives. We used to cardboard box. We had three stones and shoot them in the box and play for tickets (*casket tickets*). This is before we went underground.

We were there playing one day. I think it was a Saturday morning. Anyway you'd pick sides, three a side and you'd play for the week. You'd add it up at

the end of the week and work out who was buying the ticket. Cec Duce, he was on the team opposite us. He got the three stones ready to shoot and one his last stone I said "Rex is coming". So he threw it away! That meant he lost. He was going crook and said he wasn't going to play anymore. It was funny! You made your own fun at the coal mine. But I reckon miners are a race all of their own. I reckon they're good.

Bevan Kathage: You enjoyed going to work.

I loved going to work. All the danger – you never worried about it. You couldn't afford to.

After that I had to wait my turn to get on the coal. When your turn came you knocked it back and stayed on day work or you went on the coal. When my turn came up I went on the coal for a while. Then they finished contract days and they brought in the machines. Joys were about the first.

Bevan Kathage: Well cutters and loaders. Then they got their first miner in 1967/68.

They worked the hydraulics with vegetable oil. It was funny when Rex was there. If you went on the machines with the hydraulic hose it meant the machine was out. Rex used to say keep pulling, oil is cheap. That is what he used to say to you.

When they finished with the cutters they brought in the Joys and that.

Bevan Kathage: The Norse and then we got the Joy in 1978.

The first lot they brought in the Joys chaps came and taught us all about the machines. We worked some steep grades there – 1 in 3. Even steeper than in no. 6 tunnel.

One of the best miner drivers I ever saw was Louie Jones. He had a brother too. He was a master. He could just about make the machine talk. There were drivers and drivers – same with cars. There was water running down the road and you had to bring the machine back and try and rough it up so he would be able to get the cars to move out.

Bevan Kathage: Or the cars would slip.

We used to get the burnt stone and throw it down. There were definitely better car drivers. Some of the dips we had you got to the stage that there was that much water there that the pumps wouldn't pump it. If you were on day or afternoon shift and there was a shift coming on you had to make sure that it was ready for the chaps coming on. It couldn't pump slosh.

Bevan Kathage: When the water goes down it isn't clean water and the face. It takes some of the fine dirt from the coal and it rips the floor out in some places.

The only way we would get it out was that we used to go in with the machine and cut it down and we would load the

dry coal and get it in the back of the car. We'd let it sit there and tell the driver not to bring it forward yet and we would try and load the water. That is how we used to try and get rid of it. Sometimes the drivers would bring it forward and that was the finish – we had to start again. They would try and get rid of it for the blokes coming on.

Bevan Kathage: We had to get rid of the slop or slurry at the face so you could get in to put your timber up.

Interviewer: So it had to come out?

Only that if the water was coming back down the road you wouldn't get the cars out.

Interviewer: It was an ongoing problem? Every shift you had to take some out?

No it was only certain ones. They used to drive it to the side places and you had to start the dips off again. You had to get ready so they could drive the side places off again. After we started to take pillars out of there – right up near the fall. Sandy MacPherson he was the Superintendent back then. Billy Martin he was one of the Deputies and Rex Griffith was the Manager at the time. We started up along the fall. We took about three pillars out but we couldn't get it to fall. We had to get axes out and start chopping it down. You have to have the fall coming with you haven't you Bevan?

Bevan Kathage: It keeps the weight off. As it is sitting down it is crunching all the timber support as well as breaking up the roof and ribs behind it. So what you want is for the pillars to fall and take the weight off.

That is how it went. Sometimes you had too much timber and it wouldn't come. The only way you could relieve it was to go in there and start chopping it out. I never forget one time when Scotty McMurdo said "I'll fix it". He got a rope around a car and tried to pull it out but it wouldn't work that way. We got the fall started again. When it fell you could see the props starting to bend and could hear the noise coming. We were all standing this day watching it. Hoot was the Deputy at the time and he said "I always wanted to see a good fall". I said "well you're going to be in your finest hour". Anyhow we were all there. Hoot was at the front and we were at the back. When we heard it we turned our lights off and moved away a bit, next moment he looked around and he was the only one there! I'll never forget that. When it did come the dust!! You couldn't see your hand in front of you. You had your light there. I'll never forget that. I think Tommy McClurg nearly jumped over next to the coal cutters. Forget about the road! It makes an awful noise! The dust!!

Interviewer: It would take a while to clear too wouldn't it?

Bevan Kathage: Especially the air doesn't follow a normal course. It short circuits. It is like a dead spot. It stays there.

One time we had brattis up like a doorway. We ended up putting belting up. The belt was three foot width and we ended up putting strips down so the air would go on the bords.

That is about my career. I remember I should have said that we had to widen the tunnels when they brought the machines in. In those days they were only 10 or 12 feet wide and only a certain height. No. 1.

We had to widen it out and make sure it was ready for the next shift. I did it too at New Hope. Sammy Clark and myself. Ronnie Bower. We had a little Dutch fellow who was riding the rope. Alan Edwards he was the Deputy. Rex used to say “now Benny make sure it is right for the next day and the men coming on”. We had to drop a certain amount and retimber it all to make it a certain width. We had to put the belting in when they brought the big cars in.

Bevan Kathage: The hydro-car. In No. 5, this is before 1973 they had the belt and the rail track all in the one heading. What Nissy is saying this used to be 10 or 12 feet wide but this had to be 16 or 18 feet wide to get the miner— the carcass of the miner not the shovel or head – or shuttle car down beside the belt without taking the belt out. The belt would have been about 500 yards?

The first one we put in was about 800.

Bevan Kathage: You didn't want all the work of taking the belt out, putting the miner in and putting the belt all back.

Back in those days we used to ride the belts. We were pretty good. You're not supposed to ride the belts. If you rode the belts you got out faster than the scout car. One time Hoot was showing a new guy how to do it and he missed the spot where you get off and went from one belt to the next. “Gosh” said the guy “he didn't even have to get off!”

Bevan Kathage: The real secret about riding the belt was how to get on and how to get off. The rest doesn't matter.

Merv Newlands was a bit of character. He was a big strong fellow and he loved shovelling. Roy Richards was there and we were all having dinner. Roy brought out his tucker and said “the wife has given me lammies again”. He brought them out and he was going to give them to Tommy Jones but Tommy never turned up. I said to Roy “Tom isn't here today”. Merv was in our crew. We used to split the crew so half of us could go and have lunch. He said “I was going to play a trick on Spike”. We were sitting there, half of us with our lights out when we had lunch. He said “I'm sick of lammies”. Merv said I wouldn't mind one and he had his light out and he was trying to break them. Roy had made them with sponge rubber and he said it was hard for the icing to stick on it! He put all the coating on it. Merv is eating it and he

says “I can’t even chew it!” He found out it was only sponge rubber.

When we came up Peter Hand was there. He didn’t take lunch. He said he wasn’t hungry. He was sitting there and Roy said “I have a lammy in my billy. I wonder if anyone wants it rather than me take it home”. Peter says “I’ll have it”. The guy sitting beside him said I’ll have half and he was trying to split it but it wouldn’t split!

When the bathroom was up the top, before they put the new one in, Lenny Hughes was a great one to get the hose with the cold water and start hosing you. Billy White was a big fellow, as strong as an ox. Anyway Lenny got the hose and started to hose him. He said “listen Lenny if you don’t stop I’ll put that hose around your neck and choke you” He took no notice. Lenny kept doing it. He put the hose around his neck and he was that wild. I think he suffered a bit from colds and things. We managed to get it off him.

Another time Billy Martin was there. Old Jack Flynn was working when we were in the top bathroom. Martin had a big carpet snake wrapped around his arm. Billy Verrill was in the bathroom and he hated snakes. Martin came up and said look at that Bill and the snake was looking him straight in the eye. I said to Jack “you’d better get away from the door because Billy will take you door and all”.

There was this meeting with Mrs Walker. Her husband had died. There was Bullock Kerr, Mrs Walker, Yeowart, Dicky Beaumont. The four. Old Bill Christie was there. Martin was chasing Billy down the road with the snake. Billy starts falling over and I said Mrs Walker is watching you. We did some funny things in them days.

Interviewer: What is the tree story?

We used to play the tree every morning and night when we came up.

Bevan Kathage: The tree. The old bathroom was up near No. 4 tunnel. They were working in no. 5 tunnel and the tree was midway between. About 300 yards or so.

It was a big ironbark that we used to throw stones into it. At one stage we had it full of stones. We put a hole in the bottom and got them all out. I’m not sure about this but I think Colin Sparks won a big prize in the casket. He kept it himself.

Bevan Kathage: There were 13 Sparkes in the mines at one stage.

They were all related. In those days when we wanted more men at New Hope all the men got their sons working there.

We used to enjoy going to work and playing the tree after work.

Bevan Kathage: Not too many just played coming up Nissy!

We used to have the best send offs. All the miners that retired got a send off. We used to have good nights. All the managers used to come to the send offs. They were big send offs. We had a big one at West End. We could have crabs, prawns, anything we liked. Jack Sebonovsky was a fellow who could drink things dry. He was nearly bombed before he got there. He was sitting on a chair when they brought round the prawns and he had gone to sleep with his mouth open. So someone put a prawn in his mouth and all you could see was the tail sticking out. I said get it out he'll choke. They got it out and he went back drinking. He was a tough man.

Jack is still around. His brother is still working in the mines. He's 63. Brian Taylor he used to work the dogwatch and shift houses during the day.

Tayls he was a tough man. Send offs! We had some good ones. They'd drink all night. We'd start at 6 o'clock at night and I'd go down in the morning to clean the place out and some would still be drinking.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about being Secretary of the Union?

I was Secretary at New Hope. When you were Secretary you had to do the books. You had to pay so much to the union, sickness and death. I think there were 130 miners on the books. Every three months you had to get the books audited as you had to be sure they were

right. You had to take all the money down to the union every week when we did the books.

I had to talk to the men. We used to meet round the tree to start with. We had the Chairman and the committee (*another five or six*)

Then we had to talk to the superintendent and management. We got to the stage that the electrical trades and the fitters came in with it too. How many were there over all? 250?

Bevan Kathage: When I started there it was 160 and it went to about 250 all up. That was New Hope only. Southern Cross, Jeebropilly and Haigmore were more. All of New Hope was in one union branch even though there were 5 or 6 tunnels. They were all in one. Other pits were different.

Southern Cross ended up coming across to New Hope. In those days we trained all the managers at New Hope.

Bevan Kathage: That was a good idea actually.

They learned from the grass roots of the mine. We could tell the young blokes what it was all about. Some would listen, some wouldn't. One fellow he was getting on to one of the Sparkes, who had trouble with his nerves. I said you have to cut it out. He keeps coming and complaining. If you don't stop I'll take it further. You had to fit in. We didn't have too much trouble at New Hope.

Bevan Kathage: We had our spats, there's no two ways about it. Nothing serious.

We had a pretty good thing going at New Hope. I reckon myself, that it was the best mine I ever worked in. If you got into certain mines – some were better than others – you were lucky.

Bevan Kathage: Their fortunes varied too. Mines weren't always good. Over years they will change.

You had hand boring and firing and wheeling by yourself to mechanisation. I think I finished 21 years ago. I'll be 81 this year. I've seen some unbelievable men in that time. What they could do was unbelievable. What about the time we lost the Joy miner in Rob Roy? We got it out.

Bevan Kathage: The miner had been at the face and it had fallen on the miner so they mined around the back and pinned the roof took the stone of the machine and drove it out.

We had to drive through the pillar. Insurance was going to pay so much for recovery. They were going to bring a special team up from NSW. We decided to try ourselves. Big steel rods they ended up driving through. We had wheelbarrows and kept wheeling it out. You couldn't rush anything. They tried to pull it but that wouldn't work. Sydney Gray he was the Deputy at the time. He did a pretty good job. Donny Binnie – there was a few of us that worked on it. Merv was pretty pleased when we got it out. I think it was going

to cost a lot of money bringing these experts up from NSW. I think the insurance company was pretty happy.

You have to pay so much to start with but if you can do it within 10% of the value of the machine then the insurance doesn't have to pay out the full balance of the machine which would have cost plus \$1 million.

I was 59 when I retired. They asked me to take early retirement so they could keep some of the younger fellows on. I think there were 13 of us retired at one time. Some are still living, some not. I am lucky to be alive. My lungs are ok although I used to work in coal dust.

We used to go for an x-ray every 12 months. They were the days. We used to go on the bus. The bus used to go at 2 o'clock. Anyone not on it was left. I worked at Rhondda at the time. We used to always have them when the cricket was on. So some would go to the cricket and some would stay drinking all day. When the x-ray place was at the top of Brisbane the hotel was nearly opposite. As soon as we had the x-ray we went to the hotel. There was Colly Kitchen and Wally Herron. They used to save copper wire and they would burn it and cash it and put it on the bar and drink it. Wally Herron, they used to call him the Prince – he was a character. John Clark was there- about 6 of us. Colly and his friends were on the other side of the bar. When it was Wally's turn to shout he told the barmaid to get it off Colly. When the

barmaid went to take it, Colly hit her on the hand. Wally was mad because he didn't get a free drink.

Most times we didn't get the bus we came back on the train. Wally Jackson lived at Ebbw Vale and we wouldn't let him out. We took him through to Booval. Didn't he go crook when he had to get the next one back.

Bevan Kathage: How did you get to work?

On the bushbike. I moved here in 1974 after the flood. I lived in Hamilton Street. We used to ride push bikes through the bush.

Interviewer: Did most people ride bikes?

BW: Yes in those days people didn't have cars. I used to ride from Hamilton Street to Rhondda. It used to take 20 minutes to let the men in at Rhondda. It used to take 20 minutes. I would leave home when the miners' train went through Blackstone a little after 7. That would go right around to Rhondda. I could beat them there through the little bush tracks. I'd fly down there. What we used to do when we had a meeting we would go ahead and pull a tree over and watch the people on their bikes fall over. What we used to do!

I'll never forget this day a young guy had a new bike and he ended up smashing it. Charlie Wannell, he was another fellow, when the meeting was on, we pulled a gum tree down, put his

bike on it and let it go. He was a funny man – a real character. How am I going to get my bike down?

Noel Sanders he had his motorbike and then he had a car. He was a speedster through the bush tracks. He'd run Willis Haenke off the track one day and he nearly finished up in the bush. Willis came in and said I don't want any man to go down the pit until I found out who was the man who ran me off the road. He found out who he was and he wanted him sacked on the spot. John Clark who was the Chairman of the time said if you sack him we'll all go home.

You couldn't sack any bloke. If the manager couldn't handle it would come to the committee and you'd have to talk to the men and say if you don't pull your weight we won't stick by you. You had to be fair that way.

Interviewer: If you did something dangerous that must be dismissible?

Bevan Kathage: Well. I tell the story of catching a bloke asleep beside the belt in no 7 tunnel. I got Merv Pocock who was on the committee to go and talk to him. I said Merv it is a real problem and as far as I am concerned he has to give a donation to a charity and you blokes can stay on and it is all taken care of. That is sort of the way it worked. People who were caught doing the wrong thing had to be shown they were doing the wrong thing but you didn't want the rest of the blokes to be penalised by dismissing him.

The thing was in coal mines if you had a good committee and if you dealings with the Manager and you could talk things out, you could sort things out. We had a good understanding. You had to be fair. You knew a lot of times that if you went to the manager and you didn't think you had a good case you could say we can't go and talk about that. I knew a couple of times when they brought in the bonus scheme some of the young fellas didn't want to work and if you don't pull your weight we can't keep you at the pit. When mechanisation came in, fitters and electricians came back in. They had pretty easy jobs some of them. Each morning they had an electrician and fitter at the pit in case a machine broke down. Time was a factor wasn't it Bevan?

Bevan Kathage: You only had so many hours and you had to produce as many tons as you could.

In those days we had three or four meal breaks with the crew and they used to pay us time and a half to have a meal break. Then you could produce more coal for them. A lot of mines didn't do that. At New Hope they did.

Bevan Kathage: But to do that you need the fitter or electrician to be in the crew and helping to drive a car, not sitting back in the camp in case something happened.

They were supposed to be down at the miner all the time. As soon as anything went wrong with the hydraulics (the

vegetable oil ones that they used to put in it) you had to clean it out. Some of the hoses would be unbelievable because it would be all stacked with coal.

When you get a bonus scheme, the chaps in the office all get the same bonus scheme – all the staff, fitters, electricians everyone.

Bevan Kathage: The only bloke that didn't get it was the Manager.

When we took the pillars we got a pillar allowance, even the chaps in the office. Everyone got that. Danger money.

Interviewer: Were these all negotiated?

Bevan Kathage: There was a rate struck by the coal industry tribunal. It was a published rate. Industry wide. How it was applied at each pit was up to the pit to work out how it was administered. New Hope paid Deputies rates. Mines could be different.

When Mancini (*union rep*) was in, through the unions we had to go and meet him and try and get things straightened out. We went down to protest one time and we finished up going to a hotel and we had to go and meet someone. That was Wally Herron. We used to march around the streets in Brisbane – that is what we used to do in those days.

Many a time I marched we would go to one hotel and march to the next one, where the union was meeting. They'd

start marching and some of us would get left in the first hotel.

I loved working in the mines. You had good mates. I played soccer too. Most of the miners were soccer players. They were hard as nails. Possum Kitchen he played for Rangers when I was playing. In those days you could attack the goal keeper and they would put you in the net, ball and all. This day we were playing Rangers down at Bundamba and Possum came at me. I stopped him and he said "I'll get you next time Niss". He'd run all day and he as a heavy drinker. When you work hard a lot of it goes out of your body.

We had four soccer teams in Ipswich – Blackstone, Rangers, St Helens and Bush Rats and 8 teams in Brisbane. It was a 12 team competitions. Other teams came and bought our best players. A lot of our miners competed in the 1956 games. Colly Kitchen, Chooky Vogel – there were quite a few. Every year we played in a competition between NSW and Qld. We used to go down there and play. They'd go down in buses. We had some marvellous teams – Cliffy Sanders, Chooky Vogler, Colly Kitchen. We had 6 or 7 Australian players. I hurt my knee and I couldn't play in the second game. They were good games.

When we played at Blackstone we would get a crowd between 5000 and 6000. Everyone went to the soccer. It was only 1 and 3 to get in. There were some awful barrackers. Mrs Hughes

from Blackstone used to yell "get stuck in there". It was real Donnybrook when you played them. They used to bet on it too. As soon as it was over you'd be in the hotel drinking. You used to drink with the fellows you played with. It was all good fun.

There were cricket teams too. Strollers had a wonderful cricket team. In those days they had a beer ration. Mrs Thompson used to sell the beer to Strollers. They had their cricket pitch where Bundamba High School is now. There was a bit of a gully there. Spuddy Allen and a few fellows used to cook corn meat and potatoes. They'd be drinking all day.

Interviewer: Can you tell them about the miners hearing the horses running around the track?

No 6 Aberdare was straight under the racecourse. No 8 was on the other side of the road. They finished up having a big creep on that place. They were supposed to take the pillars. They were working seams above one another. It didn't work out that way and they had a big crunch on. That finished that pit.

Bevan Kathage: It went right down and the horses would go out of sight as they went down the dip and came up the other side. Aberdare No 8 is the pit that went around and went up as far as Scared Heart in Booval. It was flooded in 1974 and never recovered.

There are a lot of shafts around. Aberdare Extended that was the

deepest shaft around. 600 feet that was. My mate worked there. The guy from the grocery shop, he rode the ropes there. There were quite a few men killed there. They had a double cage there. I will never forget when we talk about going into shafts. When you hopped in the cage, it held about six. Tommy McClurg was there this day and you are looking straight out and the driver is there. Tommy gave him the thumbs. He lifted the brake and down she went. You can imagine what is like in free fall in the dark. He got reported for that and nearly got suspended. The thing is when you let it go the rope could have broken. What they did at Rhondda is that every Friday a couple of chaps would get on top of the cage and they would let it down and belt it all around to make sure the timber was all still good. Things used to grip.

They had a double cage at Extended. 600 feet. The ones at Rhondda about three puffs and she was up. They pulled lot of wagons up there. Those chaps were good. They'd whiz them on and off. They used to wheel all the coal out. At Rhondda they'd bring it down one side and out the other. If you were going to knock off they had to wait till they had so many men before they'd take you up. I won't forgot Charlie Wong he hopped in the cage one day and when they took it from the floor right up he nearly jumped off because he thought he was going around the wheel.

The bathroom was up the top and we changed from pit lights (carbide lights) to others. Wally was in the thunder box, the old toilets. I saw him go in and I picked up a rock and one of the knots was out of the weatherboards and it went straight through. Out he came with his pants down around his knees. Who the hell threw that! He would collect soap in the bathroom. You were allowed a certain amount of soap and you'd just throw it on the floor. He must have had a billy the same as me as I came home one day with a billy full of soap. All the copper wire they would save for Brisbane. I decided to play a trick on Wally one day. We used to sit around before we started waiting to get on the cage. I had this copper wire saved up. I had a bit of string and I chucked it over. Wally came past and walked over it once and then he walked back again. He went to pick it up and I pulled it away. Williams he said fancy making a fool of me like that. You had to be able to take it.

You dished it and if you couldn't take it.

Bevan Kathage: You'd get more.

I know one fellow was working there and one fellow kept picking on him and I said you'd better lay off him because his nerves are bad. He finished up hanging himself. He had retired.

Terrible it was. This chap used to come round to my place and complain. I told them to stop because he couldn't

handle it. It was terrible to think chaps would do that. You had to try and stop it. When you are secretary you had to front the managers and manage the men.

That is why I say miners were a race of their own. You would do anything for a mate.

Bevan Kathage: That is why I said to you that once you were on the rake all was forgotten. Whatever happened on the pit top was left behind.

It was a big rake we had a New Hope. How big Bevan?

Bevan Kathage: Four shifts, about 50 blokes.

Dicky Sparkes used to get on it. He was a real good worker. I said one day watch Dicky we'd get a yawn going. We'd yawn and he'd have a dozen yawns. We used to start him yawning. Lenny Hughes was a tall man.

Do you know all the mines around Ipswich? Geoff Jackwitz at North Ipswich (Boxhead they called him) he has studied all the mines. There were between 2000 and 3000 miners in Ipswich.

Bevan Kathage: That was in the days of hand mining. Mechanisation reduced it even further.