

Beres Evans

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Interviewer: Margaret
Cook



I am a fifth generation mine worker. My history goes back to my great-grandfather birth's certificate signed by his father with a cross – occupation coal miner. That tells you how far I am steeped in tradition. They were Welsh miners, in Wales.

My grandfather came to NSW and was employed as the Surveyor and Assistant Underground Manager at South Clifton Colliery and he moved up here in 1923. He was Chief Surveyor at Aberdare Extended Collieries. He came on the condition of employment that his two sons were to be employed as apprentices. The deal was honoured for my father and he was apprenticed as an electrician and subsequently became a mine electrician. But they didn't honour the commitment for my uncle who was to become a surveyor. My grandfather was a strict person, straight up and down, a deal was a deal and they didn't honour it. So he went back to Newcastle. My father, Alf Evans, stayed on in Ipswich.

He boarded at Mrs Cullum's place in Ipswich with a gentleman, Tommy Lewis, who went on to become the Manager of Acland Colliery on the Darling Downs. Tommy Lewis was my father's best man. Dad stayed on at Aberdare until around 1946.

During the war years he was not allowed to leave his employment in a coal mine area. There was a necessity in Ipswich and Rosewood area for electrical inspections to be carried out by a qualified colliery electrician. My father undertook that work during the war. During the day he worked at Aberdare and at night he carried out emergency work at other mines if required.

That was my introduction to mining because my earliest recollection was my father coming home from work. I was about 8. He would take me with him to the mines at Rosewood or wherever there was a problem, not so much to work but to be the watchdog in the event of an accident. I can clearly recall one night I came from school and we had to go to Amberley colliery. I was a bit confused as we got in the car and headed

towards Brisbane. As it turned out Amberley Colliery was near the Ebbw Vale railway station. The problem that they had there was that the haulage set which pulled the coal out of the mine wasn't operating in a proper manner. The controller was faulty. As my father was fixing it, night came on and I started to get a bit tired. The haulage was mounted on a gantry about 20 feet from the ground. As I got tired my father made a bed for me in the wagon. Innovative as he was he then tied a rope around my hand and around himself so if I went to sleep and something went wrong I would wake up and sound the alarm.

So that was my introduction, not when I started.

That continued on until I started in the mines. I always wanted to go into the mines. I started in August 1953 as an apprentice electrician at Haigmoor Colliery. My mother wasn't keen on me joining the mines. My father adopted the attitude that it would go away or resolve itself. I was a boarder at Ipswich Grammar School in 1953, my senior year. I was more interested in football, athletics, school dances. Academic achievements weren't part of my goal in life. As senior exams started to roll towards me I thought I'd better get a job. I can't go to the mines.

My Great-Uncle was a sea captain and he said when he sailed men were made of steel and ships were made of wood and now it was the other way around. So if I couldn't go underground I was going to the fascination of the sea. So during the boarders' trip downtown on a Friday afternoon I hustled around and found an application form to join the navy. I

thought this was my out so I filled in the form and it asked for the address. My first mistake. It said "home address" so I put it instead of Ipswich Grammar School. So the letter went home and my mother opened it. To her dismay she found it was interview information regarding the application. Next thing I know my father is up at the Grammar School. "What is this about the navy?" because I hadn't mentioned it. I said if I can't go in the pits, I'll join the navy. My father said if I get you a job in the pits will you forget about the navy. It's a deal.

So he took me down to see Viv Walker, while I was on school holidays, who was a prominent mine owner at the time. He was a man way before his time and he had organised to have Abermain power station built next to his mine at Haigmoor. My father rang him up and he said bring him down. My father knew him, as Viv was an Under Manager prior to the war but he went to the war as a commissioned officer. So the connection was that my father had worked for him. So he got me in his little office at the back of the yard. He said "why do you want to work in the mine?" How good a worker are you?" Not too bad I guess. "If you are half as good as your father I'll give you the job". I walked out of his office with a job as an apprentice electrician at Haigmoor and as a boarder at Ipswich Grammar. So a decision had to be made – a fairly easy one for me – whether I stay at Grammar School studying Maths I, Maths II, Chemistry and Physics or head where I wanted to be - in the mines.

By Monday I had left school. A bus came past us at Macquarie Street where we lived to take the men to work and the

men sitting there said "what are you doing? Where are you going?" I have a job at Haigmoor and I got on the bus. I was met by the Manager Sandy McPherson who asked me what I was doing. "We don't want an apprentice electrician". This is going to be a short career, and I'd left school. Viv Walker drove in in his big yellow Hudson. In typical fashion he poked his head out the window and he said "It's all right Sandy. I employed him" So that was my introduction to interviews and employment.

So in 1953 I like to think that we were the start of the modern day mechanisation. By that I mean that in 1953 the only real mechanisation underground was the power borers that the men used to bore coal. That replaced the Newcastle stand that they had used from time immemorial. Our job was to keep the power borers working. This was the first mechanisation in its elementary form as it took the first hard manual task away from the miner and he could use more time to shovel coal and wheel coal rather than boring the holes.

I was fortunate then because I struck up a good rapport with the fellow managers and owner (Mr Walker). He owned mines at Bluff in Central Qld, Monto, Selene, Nimboйда in NSW and Rosewood Colliery, Smithfield Colliery and Neith Colliery in Rosewood and on the Ipswich field he had Haigmoor, New Hope Colliery and Woodend Colliery and Amberley Colliery and I was one of the people employed, to remove the last electrical equipment when they closed Amberley Colliery down in about 1951. The manager was Rex Griffiths who became Manager of New Hope Colliery

and was our neighbour in Macquarie Street.

Mechanisation started off. I was fortunate that I worked on all of those mines ever so shortly or ever so long. I travelled to the Bluff, to Seline, mainly in connection with introducing power borers underground.

The Bluff was a two day drive in the car. We put a couple of spare tyres in the back and Jock Bowie who was the Mine Electrician would accompany me. He was a broad Scotsman and I couldn't understand too much. But somehow we chatted away. First stop was Biloela and we would overnight there in a local hotel. The next day was up to Bluff, where we stayed there with the Managers in their homes. One Manager was MR Peattie, that was a prominent name down here. The Peatties owned Mountain View Colliery in Rosewood for a number of years. Or we stayed in the hotel. On one excursion I got the dubious honour of staying in the hotel by myself. I was about 18 at the time. The hotel was a gung- ho place on a Saturday night and I started to get concerned being a more reserved person than I turned out to be in later life. Rather than join their party I become more petrified and so I decided to put the wardrobe up against the door so I didn't get any unwanted intruders in the night. It was part of a life experience. What I am trying to say is that I was fortunate in those years as I travelled extensively around the Walker mines.

I nearly lost my wife over it. I was to be her Deb partner at a military ball. My ambition started to show up early in life and only the week before the ball management said they had haulage up at

Bluff to move and they asked me to go with Jock Bowie. It didn't cross my mind when I said yes that my future wife to be would have to find another partner. So she went to the ball, found another partner and I had to fight my way back into her reckoning again.

The best man one. Self praise is no recommendation. It was interesting the job we went up to do. It was to move haulage from the Windsor mine over to Cambria, owned by Walkers. He had two mines up there – Windsor and Cambria. The haulage set was a six step controller to the initiated young kid it was a mass of wires. I was sent on the task of moving it. I went home to my father, who was still an electrician and I said I have this terrible job. I have to move the electrical equipment. I don't know how it even works. He said I'll tell you what to do. Take some good files with you and you get some good detonator wire. When you take one wire off you put one twist on the wire and you file one end of the place where you took it from. Then take all the wires off until you have 16 or 20 wires off whatever you took off. Each will be wound up 20 times, there will be 20 nicks and when you go back you put one to one, two to two and three to three and it will work. It seemed logical to me so I diligently sat there filling away and twisting things up, no-one knew what I was doing as it was a mystery box to everyone else. So they duly shifted the haulage set over and I had the task of wiring it up. A lot of shyacking was going on with the men wondering how this kid was going to make it work. No-one else had. I was getting more nervous by the moment as I knew if it didn't work I did not have a clue. How would I get out of Bluff or any other place? So I kept my nerve,

wired it and proudly stood back and said stand back fellows I am turning the power on and like a true professional I hit the button, turned the controller and it worked. To the amazement of all and sundry!

Interviewer: How old were you?

About 18 or 19. I was still an apprentice. Because I worked so much with my father from the age of 8 I had a good basic knowledge of what to do, the safety aspects. I wasn't a raw kid and I had a senior education which was unheard of in an apprentice. You usually left school at scholarship (*Junior*).

The senior boys all went on to become doctors or dentists and I was going to become the Admiral of the navy.

I had joined Haighmoor in 1953 as an apprentice. I wasn't too keen on this schooling aspect. So my father went along to the Headmaster of the Technical College – Mr Arter – to convince them that as I had had a senior education. I should be allowed to sit for my first year apprenticeship examination that year after attending only the minimum time of last term at college – 10 weeks. The flaw in the argument was that even though the electrical side was simple there was a subject called trade drawing. As you can imagine Grammar School boys did not do trade drawing as we were being trained for other things. My father was not going to be perturbed by this. So he found Mr Johnstone, the teacher of trade drawing and had him come to our house three nights a week to teach me trade drawing. So I did a crash course – one year in 10 weeks. I went on to pass my first year apprenticeship in 10 weeks. I was then in the peculiar

position that when I came out of my time, my fifth year college examinations I still had time to serve. It did not expire until August 1958 but I sat by last exam in November 1957.

I had it in my head before we were married in 1958 that the way to get ahead was to get my Colliery electricians certificate as this nearly doubled my salary. This was roughly about £28 a fortnight. The mining electricians' course was a two year course and you studied under Mr Napier (a mine electrician) and the challenge was that very few people after two years or at any time passed on their first attempt. I decided to study for the certificate in 1958. We were married in the April so our early married life consisted of not reading bed time stories but studying the *Electrical Mines Act* with Lynn asking me the questions and me answering them. Lynn probably knew more of the Act than I did. My analytical ability reasoned with me that the reason people failed the exam was because they didn't understand the Act. The electricity part was fairly easy, particularly with the senior education. That part was no problem. There was no course at College that taught the Act, that was self taught. So I was advancing pretty well. Lynn couldn't trick me up.

So when it came time to nominate for the mine electricians exam being all of 23 years old, who had no fear, I nominated. The first response was that you haven't got your fitter mechanic ticket. I would get that in September as I had done my time. Jock Bowie had been sacked for smoking underground, which meant we had no mine electrician. There was another apprentice, John Stafford, whose father Jack Stafford was the Chief

Engineer. Jack Stafford also had a mining electrician's certificate so he signed the inspection book but John and I effectively did the work. The plan was that John was to become colliery electrician but he failed the exam in his first attempt. This was the norm as sometimes they sat two or three times. I knew the Act word perfectly. When they found out I had nominated Jack Stafford approached me. "It would be good experience, having a go." This fired me up as I still had my competitive juices from playing football representing Ipswich in the Trades and Labour Cup. I went home and said they don't think I can do it. That was the worst thing they could have done so I set to and sat for the examination.

One of the examiners was Jim Newborough. He was the Chief Electrical Inspector of Mines. He was renowned as very tough, aggressive person who demanded that the Act was adhered to in its entirety. He was taking the industry from being backwards into the modern era. All the oldies complained it was stupid as we still smoke underground but we still have to do all this. Excuse the language but Jim was known as "shrouded nuts" because we couldn't have an open nut underground we had to have it shrouded. So we used a tube spanner to undo it. This was defined as a special tool.

Jim turns up in early February at the mine in Haigmoor and went to the office and asked to see Beris. Jock McPherson, the clerk, was Sandy's brother and Charlie's brother who was Mine Manager at Haigmoor. He was asked why he wanted to see me. I just want to see him. Jim was such a person that no-one crossed him as they weren't sure

what the report was next time. He came to the workshop and he said you passed and you have the highest recorded pass up to this stage but you are not to tell anyone. How did John go I asked? He just shook his head and wouldn't say. I was asked what he wanted but I was cheeky and said something half smart. So I kept the secret except from Lynn. Eventually the official notice was in the Qld Mining Journal and both John and I had passed.

Haigmoor now had a problem as they had two qualified mine electricians and they only needed one. The debate took place which I was not privy to. But I heard from Ivor Rassmussen who later became my very best friend who was Under Manager at Haigmoor, an ex-Grammar boy. He was appointed Under Manager at 21, and had to be one of the youngest ever appointed as you couldn't become a mine manager until you were 21. They were deciding who. It gets down to Jack Stafford and Sandy McPherson decided to give John the job, naturally the father going with the son. Charlie McPherson and Ivor thought I should get the job. There was deadlock. The compromise was this we would be both be paid the mine electricians salary but John would sign the book. We were both called up and told the situation and I thought I could hear it all coming. Beris how would you feel if we paid you the salary but John signed the book. It didn't take me long to realise I would get the pay without the responsibility so I took it.

Six months after coming out of my time I was granted the Colliery Electricians certificate and I stayed at Haigmoor until October 1960. By then true mechanisation – cutters, loaders and

shuttle cars – were making there way onto the field. My father was the Colliery electrician at Southern Cross. They had been chosen as one of the suppliers for the giant, soon-to-be-built Swanbank power station, along with Box Flat. They were going to go through a programme of mechanisation. My father was somewhat daunted by the thought, as he was man of 55, somewhat daunted by the new gadgetry. I can imagine my father going through the trauma of looking at this new concoction and wondering how he going to keep it going. His solution was to ask me to work at Southern Cross with him. He only had about 5 years to go. I could see the sense of this. Stay at Haigmoor as second fiddle to John all my life or move and get Dad's job when he moved on. The only disadvantage was that we were going from starting at 10 to 8am at Haigmoor which was a strict Union mine, to Southern Cross which worked pit time. So pit time meant that when everyone gets to work they put the clock on to 8 o'clock so they are still working union time and working to 4 o'clock. So the hard fought for union 8 hours isn't being violated. It is pit time.

“I'll pick you up in the morning. You be waiting in Minnis Street at 6am. We will get there by ten past 6 and the men go underground at twenty past 6”. I understood pit time as I had seen it in other mines in the area.

So my father and I installed all the electricity for the mechanisation of Southern Cross No 10 which was the first mechanised in the group. We had an AB60 coal cutter, a 14BU coal cutter and 10SC shuttle car. They were exciting times. In November 1960 our first son was born and I started to look around the

mine in the next year and thought to myself not only is Dad due to retire so is Tommy Ray (Mine Manager Mine No 6.), Charlie McEwan (Mine Manager at Southern Cross No 9) and Bill McGuire (Mine Manager at Southern Cross No 10). How many people have mine managers tickets in this company? The answer is zero. My attention was drawn to becoming a mine manager not just the mine electrician. I'll find someone else to do Dad's job. So in 1961 I enrolled at night school to do my mining diploma which was a four year course at the Technical College.

The advantage of doing a diploma was that at the end of your diploma you didn't have to sit for the first class mine managers certificate which was a daunting and difficult examination as you had to sit for 3 consecutive days doing 6 three hour papers – two each day so you couldn't swot in between. The failure rate was high. So if you wanted to stick at for 4 years, taking the easy way, you could be granted a first class mine managers diploma certificate.

I went to night college and who should I meet up with Gwyn Jones. He was known more in those days as a vocalist, elocutionist in the Eisteddfod. His father was one of the share holders in Rhondda Colliery. Gwyn had decided he should get some experience too so he left the railway and went to Rhondda as a storeman and then decided to go to college so that when he inherited his father's portion of the mine he could have meaningful discussions with the managers. We turned up and in the first year we heard about a second class mine managers certificate. This consisted of 4 papers over two days each of 3 hours which you sat for. Gwyn and I got hold

of one of the papers and we were quite amazed at the simplicity of the examination. Surveying was virtually sine, cos and tan that we did at the Grammar School. That was not hard I have done that. Mining Practice I and Mining Practice II was next. That didn't seem hard. The terrible machinery paper was electricity. Mechanical engineering seemed ok. So I thought I'll have ago. I nominated along with Gwyn. This was normally a two year course and we duly passed. One year into college with zero experience as a miner. So we got them in kind but not in practice as we didn't have the experience. In those days you had to have worked 3 years in an underground coal mining environment. I had worked underground but not continuously. But I had my second class ticket.

So we went back to college and had a look the first class examination. There was a new subject called Legislation. I knew the electrical side so I just had to do the rest – a bit of a swat. There was nothing technical. Coal preparation was the other paper but this was the sink and float tests and the sorts of things that young Grammar School boys did in senior physics. I don't see a problem I just have to learn the Act. Nothing to lose. We nominated. Duly turn up and everyone was a gawk at the cheeky young fellows sitting for the exams. When the results came out where we had passed to the amazement of everyone.

We didn't have our tickets as we didn't have the experience. So we started the grind of how we were to the required three years experience. So I sat down and wrote a letter with references outlining my experience explaining that I had worked in the mines and moved

winches and shifted scraper loaders. We disconnected it so the miners could move it. In those days we all hoed in and helped. There was no demarcation and it was hard work and the more hands the better and no one said you can't do it. So I went to Haigmoor and saw Charlie McPherson and showed him what I had done and said I wanted to submit it to the board to see if I could get a reprieve from the three years. So he added to it and added a nice reference. I sent it off to the Board of Examiners.

To my amazement they came back and said they would grant two years experience for the previous time I had spent in the mine. The only dilemma is I have to do 1 year or 240 shifts to get my ticket. I didn't want to go underground as that would half my salary. I still wanted to do my diploma as I thought it would be of benefit in later life and I was half way through it and there was no point ditching it when I wasn't having trouble with the academic side.

So I approached Mr Derek Cribb the owner of Southern Cross mines. Derek at all times was most supportive of my endeavours to obtain a mine manager's certificate as he knew he was going to run out of mine managers. But he was a hard task master and a great poker player. He played every Tuesday night so you didn't go near him on a Wednesday morning in case he hadn't had a very good night. But he kept his cards close to his chest. I went to him and said I needed to do 240 shifts. Derek was a mean old bugger so I probably used the excuse that I will stay as the electrician working with Dad at Southern Cross No 10 but if there is nothing to do during the day I'll join the union and help the men – drive the loader. I'll be a

shift man. You'll have another man on the crew. His eyes lit up. That was appealing – another man working at no extra cost. I had been granted day release so that I could study for my diploma. So Derek was paid a day's salary for me to go to college by the government as there was a scarcity of mining engineers coming through. So he was already only paying me 4 days a week and now he could get an extra worker as a timberman or whatever was going. So Derek had to think about it but I could see his eyes were alight and I was learning the art of reading people's faces. He said alright but you'll have to see the union.

I'll do that so down I go to the union office to see Digger Murphy who was the President of the Qld Colliery Employees Union. I knew Digger fairly well as he was on the coal at Woodend Colliery when I was there in the 1950s as an apprentice electrician. He had played football for Booval Swifts and I was a keen Swifts player in my day and he was a Swifts follower so we knew one another. I always remember that Bluey Miller who was also President of the Miners Union but was defeated by Frank Corbett. When he was defeated he had to return to the mine. He didn't want to return to Collinsville where he had come from so he was employed at Woodend. So at Woodend we had Bluey Miller riding the rope on Les Hall's haulage set and Digger in the dip on the coal and me as an apprentice electrician. So you had a Past President and aspiring President who wanted to chinwag and a young electrician who loved the thrill of riding the rope. So I would often be down below and Bluey would say run a couple for me. So I would jump on the rope and run a couple of rakes and they

would chat. Digger would go back on the coal and Bluey would get back on the rope. Digger and I had a good relationship.

“So you are going to change sides”. So I put the proposition to him that I wanted to join the Union and I would pay the dues and said I wanted to work with the men and stay an electrician. I wasn’t going to displace anyone which was always the concern in those days that everyone had to have a job. I sold him on the idea that I would make life easier for his men. So I joined the Union and over the next two years I kept a log book and I would annoy everyone underground. I kept this blessed book and I would write date, hours, driving car, another day maybe 8 hours working with the timbermen. On a Saturday I worked fulltime with the men to get extra time to get the magical time up.

I was getting close to getting my time up and one of the Mine Managers, Colin Smith, wasn’t enjoying life as a Manager and they were looking at moving him to Southern Cross No 9 which was about to be mechanised to join Southern Cross No 10. He was to teach the men up there coming off hand mining the ropes of mechanisation. This meant there was to be a vacancy at Southern Cross. Colin was transferred. I went from being a mining electrician in December 1964 to being Mining Manager in January 1965.

Interviewer: How old were you?

I was born in 1935 so I had to be the grand old age of 29.

Interviewer: That would have been very young for a mine manager?

Extremely.

Interviewer: Did the men have a problem with it?

I think I had a lot of gall now that I think about it. Tremendous gall to go underground bearing in mind I had worked with these men and they knew my strengths and weaknesses. Mining by any form of imagination is not an easy task and the manager has to make decisions. He can’t refer them on. In those days you couldn’t get on the internet, the roof is falling and the decision is instantaneous.

I became the Mine Manager much to my father’s delight as I had been somewhat of a disappointment as a student. He was proud of my sporting ability but I think he would have been a lot happier if he had seen me do some study as well. So he took great pleasure when the travellers came around in those days and he would say you had better go and see the manager – my son. I rewarded him somewhat in life.

Interviewer: So how long were you at Southern Cross?

I stayed at Southern Cross No. 10 until 1967 when one of my mentors Tommy Rae retired as Superintendent of Southern Cross. That meant he was the senior manager of the group so if one of the mine managers had a problem he was the senior man, the one you went to. He was virtually the boss. The owners were six ladies – Andy Wright’s daughters.

Interviewer: From Tivoli?

Yes. Derek Cribb was married to one Andy’s daughters. None of them had any

mining experience. You had Loftus Foote, Fred Hooper and Derek Cribb, Ipswich identities who would rather go to hell than underground. It was pretty risky and you never saw them down there.

Interviewer: Were they shareholders?

Yes the six girls owned the mine but it was run by Fred, Loftus and Derek, with Tommy as the Superintendent. Tom retired in 1967 and at that time we were in the throws of putting in additional equipment into Southern Cross to increase production for Swanbank Power Station. Up until then Bob McQueen had convinced Derek, Loftus and Fred that the best way of mining was conventional units which involved a loader, shuttle car and cutter and firing the coal with explosives. I could never see the logic of using explosives where the continuous miner would cut and load the coal and it could be taken to the surface. If you eliminated the coal cutter and the shot firers and it was a lot simpler. Derek thought if the miner broke down the whole mine stopped. What he didn't realise was that Bob wasn't telling them the whole truth and he didn't want his opposition to become as efficient as he was.

Interviewer: They took the advice of the opposition. McQuinn owned Box Flat?

Yes. Once again being the young Turk I argued the case. We are going to buy another conventional unit. That is the best Bob told us that. Let's go and have a look at one of these continuous miners I said. I went to Sydney with Derek. All of a sudden he could see what I was talking about and it made sense. I think you are right. Derek's words were

always – I'll have to talk to the others – Loftus and Fred. He was not wanting to make the decision which was a big one in those days, probably a couple of million dollars in today's terms. It was about \$115,000. Family company finding this sort of money was a big thing.

Then we got home he said "organise a meeting at your place one Saturday morning and we'll talk about it". They duly arrived and sat on our back patio to make this momentous decision. Catherine our three old had dressed up her pit cat and carried it around all the men. They backed me and they bought a continuous miner.

When Tommy retired in 1967 I was appointed Superintendent.

Interviewer: You were not 40 yet.

I was 31. People say you have done everything. I started very young and I am now 70. They bought the miner and my negotiating skills were in place and I decided I wanted 2 new shuttle cars. Derek, Fred and everyone in the field including our Chief Engineer Noel Kitching thought we should buy 10SC Shuttle Cars. I had a different view as I liked this new car that had been developed by Noyes Brothers which was known as a hydro car. It was a hydraulically driven vehicle so when it took off it was smooth. An electric car was either on or off. If you hit the thing it was gone and if there was trouble and you stopped it would spin the wheels. The new cars appealed to my sense of adventure. So Noel Kitching had had one at Bonnie Dundee before he came to work for me and it was a disaster. It had to be hauled out, it failed its tests – an

absolute disaster. Noyes Brothers knew they had me in so they invited me to Sydney and offered to pay the airfares for Derek and me to see these hydro cars. Before I left Noel Kitching said if you buy one of those cars I'm out, I'm finished. Because he had gone through hell as the oil used to boil as well.

We went down and the car was sitting in a hole and I considered it to be bogged. You wouldn't be able to get it out if it was a conventional 10SC car. Think you can drive it out? No way. Have a go. Being use to machinery I jumped aboard in my suit and started it up and it just crawled out. I was won as I had spent many, many hours digging shuttle cars out of holes. When I came out I observed one thing – I didn't like the back. I want the back swooped up like a duck. When we come off level the tail drags on the shuttle car. If we swoop it up we will keep clear. You can't do it they said The chains are different. In the end Charlie Deamer, the Chief Engineer of Noyes Brothers was keen to make the sale and he said give it to him. I'll fix it. That is how the swooped up end of a shuttle car came into existence in the coal industry because of the experiences we were having with steep seams.

Then the hard one came as I had to ring Kitcho and tell him we were going to buy it. I had to sell him the deal and as he saw it I was in Sydney enjoying myself and he was working. He came to Sydney and we put the car back in a hole and got it out, he didn't say I agree with you but we bought the cars. I used Noel's experienced to our advantage and turned on Noyes and I said I am not prepared to pay for these things. They have a bad name, they are a heap of junk, how do I know I won't put it in

and it would fail and I'll be the laughing stock of Ipswich. They knew I wanted it and they wanted the sale. I said give us the cars for three months on trial and if they work we'll pay, if not you have them back. I guess he's got us. It is a deal. They arrived in January 1967 and they went to work and they were nothing but a huge success. Things went along swimmingly.

I looked at the mine and realised I couldn't go any further as it was a family owned company. I decided to leave. So I saw a job in the paper for the Qld Manager for a mining machinery company, Fox Manufacturing. To my wife's amazement I applied. You can't sell anything. In June 1967 I left Southern Cross Collieries.

In 1979 Bundaberg Sugar North Flinders Mines and Metro Mats had bought Box Flat Colliery to join up with Westfalen which they bought in 1977. They wanted a mine manager/ businessmen to grown the operation. I was known by Otto Kathage who was a Director of Westfalen. They approached me to see if I was interested and I said not really. I am on a Sydney salary, Sydney conditions. I told them the salary and conditions and they nearly died. They accepted the conditions and I said put it in writing. There was some negotiation about salary and a suitable package was agreed.

I joined them in July 1979 as General Manager of Westfalen Collieries – Westfalen No 3. Box Flat, Extended Collieries as well as extensive interest in the Wandoan Basin through a company known as Rio Grande through a joint venture with MIM and Thiess Brothers on a third each basis. It is now one of the

big coal fields. I started in 1979, we proceeded to build up the export trade for the Ipswich area. We formed the Ipswich Coal Exporters Group, which I chaired. John Walker was Secretary for many years from its formation. We went about successfully mining the Box Flat area.

The problem we had was that the Board did not fully understand what they owned and it was difficult for them to come to grips with what they bought. So we had a fairly free hand. We were fortunate that we drove up from the lagoon seam through the stone drive and reopened the Bluff seam which was the seam in which the accident occurred in 1972. We came back and started to mine it and at the time of completion it was the deepest underground coal mine in Australia and we had introduced some of the most innovative equipment into the mine in the form of a flexible conveyor train which replaced the shuttle cars. This was a conveyor which moved along the roof of the mine and could go around a 90° turn.

Interviewer: Was this new to West Moreton?

New to Australia. If I remember rightly it was only the second one ever worked in the world on coal. We put together a proposal to the Federal Government to get a National Energy Research and Demonstration Council grant and an Industrial Research and Development grant to trial this new method. These were granted in 1985 in the order of \$1.364 million. We have to be thankful to Bill Hayden who supported the proposal and mining in Ipswich. We had radio-controlled continuous miners. It was the start of modern day

mechanisation. The men stood back from the face. We eliminated roof to floor supports. The roof was held up by W straps and chemical anchored roof bolts. We had machine mounted rigs on the miner. For the first time you could get the miner to work continuously so we didn't want to be stopping to drop strings to guide us so we had a laser underground which shone onto the face and this was our guidance system. It was all very thrilling and we created a lot of records. We increased our productivity by about 35%. The men were every supportive and we had great relationships.

We then came up with the idea of putting in an Easer Miner which was a single-entry development miner that I had seen in Germany. Once again we went to the Federal Government via Bill Hayden seeking funds to put this in the mine as we had been highly successful in demonstrating we could increase productivity with the FCT and we wanted their backing. We wrote our submission and we were advised that they were supportive. Then Joh Bjelke Petersen decided he didn't want Ipswich coal mines anymore. I lobbied hard to keep Box Flat open as an experimental mine to trial the single entry development miner as it had never been trialled by anyone.

Interviewer: Still?

Yes still. I believe it to be good idea. You had to have a fair belief in yourself to do it. They closed the mines and I moved on to Bundaberg Sugar. I became a Director in 1987 and worked there until I retired in 2005. I received an OAM in January 2008 for service to the coal and sugar industries, particularly

through the design and manufacture of innovative equipment, and to the community of Ipswich

Interviewer: Was it a sad day when the mines closed?

Yes it was. It was a shocking thing. Particularly Box Flat. I get annoyed when I think about it. We were mining at such depths and you hear stories about Westfalen which annoy me immensely that it was not mined properly and that is why Collingwood Park caved in but no-one asked me, although I was in charge. They don't correlate that I was also in charge of Box Flat, the deepest mine in Australia. I had our engineers and managers go to South Africa to be schooled in the art of pillar design as South Africa had a huge accident many years ago which killed a lot of men and they examined pillar design. That design was the one we implemented at Westfalen and Box Flat.

I guess I was very much involved in all aspects of the industry. I was a member of the Australian Coal Association, Director and Chairman of ACIRL before we privatised and sold it. I have always had a great bent towards research.

Interviewer: The technology you introduced, did others copy it in West Moreton?

The Flexible Conveyor Train? No. It was demanding. You had to take it to heart and each man was given a booklet which described accurately how it all worked. We had lasers positioned so you had to bring to it skill not just thick headed underground mining skill. It was expensive.

Interviewer: Did the men like it? Even though it was hard?

Technically it was hard but they embraced it. It was well written up in journals as the Box Flat Express - the Flexible Conveyor Train. It was tried in various mines but no one achieved the same success. The men embraced it because they were made a part of it. We designed a book for them. It would fit in their pocket and it covered all aspects – project outline, how it worked. We introduced a prop free environment which had never been done in Ipswich before. It showed great faith in us as Engineers. They embraced it. We talked about the feeder car, braker car (which we designed here at Swanbank engineer). We explained the mining sequence. We turned it into a process. Because we had no props we had to get air in to the working place. We designed plastic expandable props which were extendable and temporary to let the air in. The men were completely informed there were no secrets.