

Frank Long

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Interviewer: Margaret Cook

Mrs Iris Long also participated



I was born on 18 December 1931 December and started in the industry in March 1949. My father was a miner and my two brothers - one older and one younger - were miners. My brothers are George and Graham.

Iris Long: Graham had a nasty accident in the mines and left the industry.

I started at Balgowan outside Oakey, still Rhonda Collieries. My Dad was a miner there. Then I went to Injune for 12 months. They closed down and then I came down here in 1960. I started at Bogside, then it closed down. I went to Haenke Mine then and did about 30 years.

Balgowan

In the early days were all pick and shovel - contract mining.

Iris Long: The two pits at Balgowan, one went each way. The houses went around the pits.

The families lived in a circle. A mining township.

Iris Long: My biggest memory of Balgowan - the women would be standing around having a little conversation and the men would be having an important meeting. We would watch and watch and if they threw their tea out, they were on strike. They were coming home then.

Interviewer: Was there a lot of strike activity up there?

Yes, 1949 was, a bad year.

Iris Long: The miners at Balgowan were called awful things. Balgowan. The Ipswich miners would say scab, scab.

In 1949 there was a big strike. I had only just started there a couple of months. We were off 7 weeks I think.

Iris Long: There was a good grocer there. He carried the whole town.

Interviewer: What was the issue?

Wages and conditions.

Interviewer: Were you an active member of the union?

No, only sort of, not a trouble maker, just a “go-alonger”

The unions were very important. They still are, but just don’t realise it.

Acland is only two miles away. That’s where the big mines are today. We used to live there. We rented a mining house. Rent is on the payslip for 15 shillings a week.

Iris Long: And we had 4 children then.

Interviewer: Was it good living in that community?

Both: Yes. It had a big hall and a nice community.

Iris Long: There were two Haenke mines at Balgowan. My father, Bill Moses, was a miner there. Willis Haenke used to come up to visit. I had a little crippled sister. He bought her a little container full of fancy things, laces and such. She used to make dolls clothes with them. He used to come personally to see us.

Interviewer: It was a company town wasn’t it?

Iris Long: Yes. Everybody knew everybody.

At Balgowan they had a dag on at the time. You could only fill 24 wagons. We used to finish at 10 o’clock sometimes!

So when they had the dag on, we could do it very quickly. They were only little wagons. At Christmas time you used to have to fill 6 wagons.

Injune

So I finished at Balgowan in 1959 as it was going to close down. We went to Injune for 12 months.

Iris Long: I hated Injune. I didn’t know anybody.

It closed down. It was pretty hard going. It was all contract.

Iris’ father worked at Bogside then. He got me a job and I’ve been down here ever since.

Bogside

So I started at Haenke in about 1960, at Bogside. I was there about 30 years. Bogside is up near Box Flat. There used to be two mines - Bogside 2 and 3 – they were both on contract.

I started at Bogside. We used to fill 40 ton in a day. My brother and

I worked as a team – 32 to 40 ton per day. We were the last on contract at Bogside. I was the last contract miner in Ipswich.

There were only a couple of us on contract at that time. We were filling more than the scraper loaders. Then they took us off contract and we went on to salary. On salary we had to work certain hours.

Iris Long: So then everyone got the same money

I have a payslip from 1958. It's pretty dirty– \$3 holiday pay, timber allowance (put up timber like big cross on the roof with two props underneath) and yardage.

Interviewer: What were wages like on contract?

We were getting 7 and 4 pence a ton. We had to buy our own explosives.

Interviewer: Was that reasonable money?

It was in those days.

When you were on contract, you would work only with a pair of trousers and a pair of shoes. One bloke used to work barefoot.

We would get an allowance each year. We would have to buy hats and belts, When I started I was almost 17 years old. I used to just wear shorts, no shirt. I had to put

my name up at 18 as it was illegal at 17.

Interviewer: You were supposed to surface work weren't you?

Yes, but I went straight down!

Interviewer: So what safety gear did you carry?

Carbide lamp. It used to go out. Someone would fire a shot and the light would go out.

Interviewer: Can you describe Bogside?

It was a bad one, on fire all the time. It melted all the armoured cables and closed down. It closed just before Box Flat blew up in 1972.

It was really hot – 120 to 130 degrees in some places. It was terrible and dangerous. It was a fairly flat mine and good coal – around 30 foot high. This was different to Balgowan – it was 2 foot 6, or 2 foot 9 high and we worked on our hands and knees; with explosives and pneumatic picks.

Haenke Mine

There was a new Haenke mine we opened it up.

I dug all the tunnels at Haenke and put the shafts down with Trevor Randolph and Trevor Randolph.

Interviewer: So what equipment were you using to dig the tunnels?

A joy miner, the first one there. Drove the shafts down as well.

Interviewer: Was it a totally different way of mining for you. What sort of training did you get to do that?

Well, a bloke trained me and I had to show all the other blokes how to drive then.

Iris Long: He says only one man showed him what to do and then he had to tell the others what to do. Now they have to go and study!

They were unbelievable these joy miners. You can't get in the pit now without a big exam. No formal qualifications, it was all learnt on the job.

Interviewer: So how many shafts did you dig?

We put in the main tunnel out there and two shafts. The first bloke that helped was Len Trevorror, then Fred Puschel and I. The tunnels are still out there, just off the road. The last one we put down was the main one.

Interviewer: So how do you build a shaft?

It was a 100 foot straight down – started from the bottom up. We had to shoot it all.

The first one they put down, they had already put down a 4 by 4, timbered all the way down, and this other bloke and I had to finish it off – to make it 12 by 12. The timber was ripped out as we went. It all got shovelled down to the bottom and they would pick it up at the bottom. An end-loader would take it away. We had to shovel it in all by hand.

It took about three or four months I think.

The other one over there, right under the power lines, you had to be careful how you shot it. It's right on the highway.

Interviewer: So what sort of shifts were you working?

Mostly day shift. In the finish I was doing dog watch. I didn't like that one.

Interviewer: That was hard on the family?

Yes, yes it was.

Iris Long: Our one son liked dog watch. He loved it. He could come home and have a couple of hours sleep and do what he wanted. He was young.

We used to do all the belts out there. We would put them in and the drive shafts - two other blokes and I. Huey Taylor was there then, he was a surveyor – and his brother, Ross.

I was there about 30 years, I retired in 1988. I was 57 years old. It was getting too dangerous. The miners would get buried and you would have to dig them out.

Iris Long: He started getting regular nightmares. I said “This is not good. If you can retire at 57, do it”.

Interviewer: So you saw quite a few accidents did you?

Yes, plenty.

Three of us were standing – we were putting roof bolts up. I was standing right beside them and they got buried and hurt. I never got a scratch. My mate, Trevor, he was buried pretty bad, and I stood over him. He said “don’t worry about me, get the other bloke out”. I got the other bloke out.

Interviewer: In the 60s, what equipment did you have underground?

At Rhonda we wore a shirt. I wasn’t on contract then. I had boots, helmet and a light. The carbide lights weren’t much good. They would go out real quick – if you did not clean them the night before.

We did a lot of tug-o-war at Haenke. (Trevor was the anchor man). We had a lot of trophies out there. We had competitions every weekend.

Iris Long: We beat all the blue orchids (air force).

We had competitions with everyone - mines versus mines. We went all over Queensland. My mate was the anchor.

Interviewer: So how many in an official tug-o-war team?

Eight. The only ones that beat us was Minden. They were the champions. All the trophies are out at the pit as far as I know. They bought us boots, shirts and the like.

Iris Long: It was a big social thing, all the wives went and the kids cheered. It was fantastic, a lot of fun.

Interviewer: Were there Haenke or Rhonda Xmas parties?

I didn’t drink, so I did not go.

Iris Long: Frank would come home because they did not really allow for non-drinkers.

They wouldn’t even buy you a soft drink.

Iris Long: All the men would get a carton of beer.

I would get nothing.

Interviewer: In the 1980s, it was quite different with mechanisation. What sort of volume of coal was coming out?

All machinery now and they get hundreds and hundreds of tons now.

Iris Long: A few men stayed back, sort of a skeleton crew stayed.

My lad was working there. He started as an apprentice fitter. He got paid out.

Interviewer: In the 1980s how many men were working down at Haenke Mine?

There used to be about 40 there then. It might have been more. They had three shifts - day shift, night shift and dog watch. There used to be 8 in a crew, so there would have been more than 40.

Iris Long: We used to have Miners dinners. The ladies auxiliary did it, once a year for all the coal miners. Money was put in each pay packet. Once the mines finished, they had all this money. We had free dinners every year – the grog was free and the food was free.

Interviewer: So where did you hold them?

In the Trades Hall in town.

Iris Long: They did it till only a few years ago. All the wives got to know each other. It was a luncheon.

Interviewer: What else did the auxiliary do?

Iris Long: Well, if there was a strike, you would ring up and find

out what you could do. I remember once I made apple slices. It was a case of what could you contribute. Even Flo (Bjelke Petersen) came once and when down the pit to speak to them men.

They had a big stay-in down at Box Flat once. We never did a stay-in.

Flo Bjelke-Petersen went down the mine, just next door at New Hope it was.

Interviewer: What were some of the managers like?

Wayne Wilson he was the Manager out there. He was a good bloke. John Matthews is another one. John Livermore is another one. I got on really well with Wayne Wilson.

Interviewer: Did Box Flat really shake the industry when the accident happened?

We heard Box Flat from here. It was a shocking bang. The whole town went into decline. A few mates who worked with me at Bogside were there. They did not get killed. They got blown out of the tunnel. They were injured, not too badly. They still have coal in them everywhere. (Iris Long – Frank still has coal in his legs).

Haenke Mine was full of gas, so we had a monitor all the time. We used to check it every few hours.

Interviewer: Who was the Deputy then?

There were a lot of them – about half a dozen. Freddy Puschel was the bloke I worked for.

We worked together for about 20 to 30 years.

We worked six days – for much less money than they earn now. In 1952 it was £12 a week.

Iris Long: We had a family and lived comfortably, so it was living wage.

Interviewer: What about the falls?

Iris Long: Before the machinery you would have “groans and moans”. After the machinery you could not hear them.

The machinery made too much noise and you could not hear the mine creaking and groaning. It was better before when there was timber. You got more warning then.

Interviewer: Was there steel ribbing when you were there?

When I started it was all timber, but I got to put in roof bolts. The bolts were on the miner. The miner could do everything. It could put in bolts as well. I took all of the miners down the pit

Iris Long: He could drive them with an inch each side.

There was not much room going down the pit.

Interviewer: Was Rhonda hot?

No, not too bad, around 80 or 90 degrees. Sometimes it would get hotter. The mine really was OK.

Interviewer: How wet was the mine and were you flooded in the '74 floods?

We were always pumping. Yes, in 1974 the floods were really bad, but it did not shut us down.

Iris Long: At home we had to evacuate. It came up our driveway, but not into the house. Both of the houses next door were flooded. It was an awful experience at the time, but you look back and it was not too bad.