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Interview with Joe Martinez of Lafayette, May 18, 1977
Interviewer: Son, Rick Martinez

How many years have you been working in the mine? I've been working in the coal mines for 31 years. I started in 1944 during the war. I was frozen in the but I went to the superintendent and the superintendent released me from the and I got into the coal mines and I worked with the Clayton Coal Company ever since until 1975. Okay, you're retired now, right? Yeah, I retired and I'm glad of it because it was very dangerous and very hard work in that coal mine. I was just lucky that I got safely.

How did you just go through the mine every day? What was your daily routine? Well, I started timberman the first, when I was beginning. But after that, I started another job that I could handle and finally I went to a cutting machine and I worked on the cutter machine for two and three years. Sometimes I work part time but from that, I escaped for a better job, a better paying job so I went to the continuous miner and I worked on the continuous miner on the entries. (?) But then for me to the pillars. That's dangerous.

Did you like your job? I liked my job because I had a steady job. That's the only thing I like because there's no other job that was a better paying job than the coal mines then than any other place.

How much did you get paid by the hour when you first started? When I first started, we only got paid \$18.25. A day? A day, when I got started then it jumped up to \$32.00 and from there \$35.00 and at the last, I was working for \$47.25 for eight hours.

Any special incidents that happened to you like somebody being killed or something? Yeah, I was around where the timberman got caught between the boom of the joist and cut his hands off. And I was on first aid and I stopped the bleeding, stopped him from bleeding and they all panicked because of seeing the blood squirting out, sometimes it squirts up to three and four feet away and you know how it is when you see somebody injured and things like that, but I didn't panic. I had to do my duty and I hold his blood by putting some blocks of wood and bind his arm. It was pretty dangerous, all right. Is that what you had to do, put blocks on his arm? Yeah, to stop the main veins and twist your block until you get it very tight so it wouldn't bleed no more, so it stopped the bleeding.

Anything happen to you in the mines, bad? Well, it happened quite a few times. I got buried once. I got buried on the back entry where I had no way out. I didn't get buried where the coal would come on me, but the entry was closed. There was no way for me to get out. They had to dig me out. What about any any cuts and stuff, really bad? Oh, yeah, when I was timberin', we had a cave-in and a broken bar and one of the legs of the broken bar swung out of the place where it was holdin' the bar and one big rock, I guess, hit the leg and hit me in the back and they took me down to the hospital for one day. But the next day, I feel like to go to work again and try it again, and so, I did it again.

Are there any other incidents that happened to you? Well, that time that I got caught on my foot and nail, toenail - it was because he was coming down a hill and he was coming pretty fast with a joy loader and the blade of the joy was hittin' the bumps and I was hangin' the cable in the joy and it was going down the hill and it was going too fast and I tried to put the cable on the joy and the blade caught the end of my foot and the steel cut my toenail completely off. That's one accident I had.

You told me a story about a man really gettin' crippled. Well, yes I was on entry that was diggin' for air. That was the hardrock. We already had finished the entry down hill and we quit that because we were going to work from the other side. We tried to pull that joy out of there. We tried to pull it out with cable but when we got up to the top so the joy was pulling up by itself. When Kontosky(?) was down at the bottom, he was a pump man and was trying to pump the water. When they took the cables off the joy because it was already workin' by itself, it starts spinning. When it starts spinning and sliding back again, so trying to hold the joy from going back when it had no cables to hold it and it starts sliding back and Kontosky(?) was right in the bottom and that went in high speed sliding them rails and Kontosky(?) was right on the bottom and he tried to get away from it but there's no way that he could get away because the boom was too high and the sides was too close from one side to the other and he tried to go through between the cats and the joy but that wasn't enough because he got caught and went under the joy and the only thing we know is that he was dead, he was all broken up, legs and arms and ribs and, name it, he was all to pieces. But they picked him up and finally, he's still breathin'. When we took him out, he was still alive. Today, he hasn't walked yet - well, he's walkin', but he can't do no work at all. Is he crippled? Crippled forever, yeah.

Do you notice any changes from the beginning when you started until now? Oh, man, yes. There's a lot of changes since I started. Sometimes when we started, we had to load by hand. We had to shoot over places and load it by hand in the cars. And, boy oh boy, that was a lot of work. And we had one entry and just keep going to work. And the cutting machine comes uncaught and we put it in the cars and we load it by hand. After that, they make a lot of changes. They brought some shakers, some units and them shakers had some pan liners and we put them pan liners and they shake the coal coke out. And we shovel right in the pan liners. And the eight hours you put in and you work until quittin' time. What about now? No, well, since after that, they brought the joys. Brand new joys and that was a lot of difference; we didn't have to shovel no more. Just shovel around so the joy could pick it up. Then what a big change. Course, from there, they cut the places and shoot it and we go with the joy and pick it up. But that's the same with entries and the same with pillars, you use the joys, same thing as with the pillars and then the chain comes up and all them places, you know, all the dangerous places, they corrected. So if people were gettin' hurt in one way, why they corrected that so people don't get hurt, you know, where the men don't get hurt. So they keep it as safe as it could be.

Because you cannot let nobody get hurt. That's the main thing, because the insurance is very particular about that. You have to be awful careful. And then after that, they didn't put no more joys on the entries any more because they figure a better way to correct them things so people were getting hurt on account of the joys so they change it to continuous miners. With continuous miners they don't have to shoot. You don't have to do nothing. They just cut, cut, cut and just continue and just go on and on and on. No shooting and no nothing. All you gotta be doing is just watch when the buggies come in and out. Just be careful. You can be in their way because they cannot see you. You have to watch yourself. That's what it is. A big change.

Okay, thank you for your cooperation.