

Interview with Neil Koller on 5th July 2006

Do you understand that I am conducting this interview for an academic research project as a representative of Newcastle University and am not conducting this research in conjunction with or for any other personal political body?

Yes.

Are you aware that the finding of this research project will be my own perspective supported by this interview and other academic research and all supporting evidence will be detailed in a thesis and will vary in its content?

Yes

Do you understand that all findings will be published in a thesis and I will not be receiving any payment from any source of this research?

Yes.

Have you given your informed consent to participate in this project?

Yes.

Okay, will you please give me a bit of your community background, so where you were brought up, where you were born, where you went to school, all that sort of stuff.

I was brought up in Warners Bay, went to Warners Bay Public and then to Warners Bay High.

What year were you born?

'62. I was born in '62. When I left school I worked as a sheet metalist to start with then I worked at AWI Wiring Industries, then I started in the coal industry.

Are you an only child?

No I've got two sisters and a brother, who I don't see a great deal of.

Are you eldest or in the middle?

I'm the youngest. I'm the youngest child.

You started with the sheet metal? Was that a trade?

No it wasn't; I was just basically a labourer. The firm was called Electraswitch. They actually made the electric boxes for coal mines.

I see.

Which I didn't know I was ever getting in the coal mines but yes they made the big power boxes that go in coal mines and stuff so that was a bit of a coincidence I suppose. My father used to work in the coalmines, he worked at Burwood, Burwood Collieries. It actually caught on fire and when it caught on fire he went over to Teralba; they transferred him over to Teralba for a while and it was a terrible fire; they got the fire out and then he went, I think, back to Burwood.

So how long was that period for? Like a period of weeks, or months?

Months. I think it was a few months, but I could be wrong on that. I should have actually.... (laughing) I didn't think of it. But I do know that Burwood caught on fire and they transferred the guys out to different pits, some went to Lambton, because they were all the same company – Teralba and Lambton – they were all BHP owned pits I think at the time, so they just transferred their blokes out to different pits and I think it was for a few months and then they went back. And then when Burwood shut they offered him another job over at Teralba but he retired then. He didn't want to go back there; he'd had enough of that place. He had it too easy at Burwood I think. Oh it was just a different style of pit. Burwood was a dry pit; it was good roof; it was a lot lighter work I think whereas Teralba was a different sort of work; a lot harder work. The roof conditions were a lot worse in Teralba than what they were in Burwood so I would say he was sort of 58 at that time and just didn't need it so he retired at 58.

Was Teralba your first pit?

No Lambton; I started at Lambton Collieries. I worked there for 7 years I think. I started in '85 or '86, one of those. I worked there until it shut. The place shut in '91 I think. When it shut I was basically laid off, then I went working for a contract miner and then I was working at.... The one at Wallsend. What did they call that? Think it was called Gretley, the pit at Wallsend. I was contract mining there with the contractors. Then I left there and went to another contract because the work ran out. So then I went to another contract miner called Wilson Mining and I was actually working in the drift at Stockton Borehole, which is joined to Pacific, which is Teralba. I was working in the drift there for about 12 months I suppose. Just shoveling out muck, a very boring job. We were actually concreting the drift. Where the drift finished at the bottom they wanted to concrete it so they could clean it out easier and we were actually cleaning all the muck and slop out of there and then we'd concrete it. That was an ongoing job for about 12 months and then I got laid off from that as well, then I went out and basically I was painting – a house painter. I was doing house painting, then I had a job as a truck driver – driving a truck. Yeah I know. Then I got a table-top truck, I was delivering steel and rio and stuff like that and that was when we decided to go to Lithgow because the money was hopeless driving a truck and that, then we said, well we'll go to Lithgow so I went down to a pit down at Lithgow called Blue Mountains Colliery, which is a very small pit; a very tiny pit. Went down there and I was working in that and moved our family down and everything and bought a house down there. And then I applied for a job in another pit called Springvale, which was basically a brand new pit and had only opened about two years beforehand, then I applied for a job there because it was a lot better money and I knew if I did end up liking the place I had a permanent job because it was a new pit and so I got there and worked there on shift work. They had rotating shifts all over the place and I was on that and I worked there for most probably two years I suppose. And then I applied for a job back home again, back down here at Chain Valley

Colliery. Got that job and I also at the same time applied at Teralba but I didn't get that job, or I didn't think I got that job but after working at Chain Valley, I was only there a week and I heard I got the job at Teralba so then I had the choice where do I go – do I stay here or do I go there? And Chain Valley was not a real big pit either and didn't do long wall mining, it was just extract mining, and I thought no, I'll go to Teralba. I've got more chance having a stable job there than here. I'd get laid off here quicker I reckon than Teralba, so I left there and went to Teralba, then started work there and worked there for two years. And then got laid off again.

Brilliant isn't it!

It's unreal!

So, originally when you started at Lambton, were you married?

No I was going out with Chris. Actually when I started at Lambton she'd just gone on a holiday to Europe, she was over there for 6 months. So I actually started at Lambton when she was overseas. I was working at AWI at that stage and then I went to Lambton.

(Can't hear, but the question relates to Chris and Neil being married)

Not then we weren't. When she came back we moved out together and then we bought this house and we thought instead of renting we'll just buy a place. If it doesn't work out we'll just sell it and split half-half and we thought that was a better idea than just renting, so we just went that way, needless to say we didn't split up and we're still here.

You said your father worked in the mine, was there any other history of mining in the family?

My brother actually worked at Teralba; I forgot about that.

A family affair.

Yeah he worked at Burwood too, my brother, and then when Burwood shut he got transferred to Teralba too. Honestly, because I was so young at that stage, I don't know how long he was at Teralba. I'm not sure at all what length of time he was there. He ended up hurting his back in the pit and left for that reason. So I don't know when he was there or how long he was there but he did work at Pacific. I think it was called Pacific then, not Teralba.

It became Teralba in 1998.

He was there before that. Yeah he would have been. So he was in the pits as well. When he left the pits with his bad back he basically didn't work again. So that's how I got my job at Lambton basically because, yeah that's what happened, I mis-said that. When Burwood shut, Dad got transferred to Lambton and then they were going to lay.... No, they said the guys at... He was one of the guys they said to you can either go to Teralba or you can take a voluntary retirement. And that's what Dad did, he took the voluntary retirement because he wasn't going to Teralba. He said no way. Yeah so he took the voluntary retirement but he said to me at that stage, he said I'll put an application in for

you because I think they are going to employ people soon. So my father had actually retired and I thought I've got no hope of getting into the mining industry now because that's how the mining industry was – a bit of a family affair – and I just said, well that's me finished because dad's retired now and that's it, I'm finished, but about three months later I got a phone call and that was when I got my job at Lambton. That was 85/86, yeah so that's how I got into the pits. It was basically through dad working in the pits and that was where it all started for me – the big rollercoaster ride.

So about how old were you when you started working in the mines?

Most probably about 26, yeah about 26 I'd say I started in the pits.

And the whole time that you were working, just at Teralba or everywhere that Belmont?

No when I first started in the mining industry I was living with a friend in at Newcastle. We had a unit in Nestor Parade, I think it was called, in Cooks Hill, up above NBN there and we rented a unit there and that's where I was living to start with and then when Chris came home from overseas I moved out and moved in with her. We actually rented a house for a very short time at Belmont North and that's when we decided well why pay rent, we may as well buy a house and pay it off and if we split up sell it, so we chose to go that way.

And do you still work in the coal mines?

No I don't, I bought my own business, which is Newcastle Line Marking and I set out and line mark car parks and fields and courts and stuff like that, or factory floors and things like that, because I got sick of getting laid off, so I said, well I'm buying my own jobs. I've had that for about 9 years now.

Okay so you bought that after you got laid off at Teralba?

Yes I was working for about 12 months. I actually said it wrong with that truck driver's job. I actually took that job on after I lost my job at Teralba, so I was working on and off at different jobs, after Teralba, for about 12 months, and then the opportunity came up to buy this business, Newcastle Line Marking, and that was when we bit the bullet and said, we'll try that. That was an experience, I'll tell you. We didn't even know what a line marking machine was, never heard of it.

Why would you?

Yes so that was an experience. The first three years was hell because we had no idea what we were doing. We just bought a business that we knew nothing about and had to make it work.

You must have done okay, because you've still got it!

Yeah well we sorted it out, we're pretty happy with ourselves actually, because like I said, we knew nothing about it, absolutely nothing. We borrowed the money to buy the

business so we had to make it work. It was either make it work or you've just blown that amount of money.

Okay that's the end of my 20 questions bit. So would you like me to ask you a couple of questions to get your mind flowing about Teralba?

Yeah that would be good.

Can you remember your first day at Teralba? No? Can you remember your first day mining?

Actually I can remember Teralba. They took us down and took us out to an old back road and put us on the domino, which is a front end loader and were teaching us to drive one of those. That was basically our first day at Teralba.

So there were a few people who started together?

Yeah there were a couple of people. Don't ask me their names because I've forgotten. Peter Faull was one. Yeah he actually started with me. So he's most probably told you all the same stuff.

Nobody ever tells me the same stuff!

But I'm positive he started at the same time as me – Peter Faull. I'm trying to think of the other guys. Another guy called [REDACTED] who started; I don't remember his last name. But there was a group of us – there was a group of 4 or 6 blokes that they took and they were "Oh this is what you've got to do" and that.

Were they experienced miners as well?

I think most of them were but I think there were a couple that weren't. I think they were new people. But to the guys like myself and that, that were experienced, it was just all boring and we didn't want nothing to do with it. So it was, "Yeah right-o, you know, we've been coal miners for the last eight years or six years or something now, and you're telling me this is it?" So we weren't really that interested in it anyway. But I think they had nowhere to put us at the time, so they were just trying to give us something to do. But yeah that was the first day I think at Teralba.

So what did they do with you after you did this training? Did you have to move through shifts or did you get some shifts?

No, no you go straight to the junior shift, which is dogwatch. Once they did that they just basically put you into a panel. You do as you're told.

And did you stay on dog watch the whole time you were there?

No I actually moved through to afternoon shift. Yeah I was on afternoon shift. Because I hated dogwatch; I always hated dog watch and I took the opportunity to go through to afternoon shift when it came up, and I moved through to afternoon shift. But I'm trying to think – afternoon shift, what did I do on arvo? I think afternoon shift was more of you

set the panels up for the next shift. The shift that I went to.... Sorry it wasn't afternoon shift, it was swing shift. I got that wrong; it was swing shift. Swing shift was between afternoon shift and dog watch and what that shift did was set the panels up so we'd have to go in and load all the miners up and make sure they had all their gear so the next shift – dogwatch – would come in and go for it. So when I moved through to that, that was what I was doing. On that shift you were out there doing rail work; putting rails down or belt moves; you'd do all sorts of different stuff. When I was on dog watch I was in a panel, so you're on the side of a miner, so you were bolting. You were roof bolting or driving the miner or that sort of stuff in the panel.

So you don't work in a panel when you're on swing shift?

Swing shift you didn't work in a panel. Swing shift was what you'd call the service shift. It was the shift that made sure everything was there for the other shifts. So you'd make sure there was enough gear in the panels so that dog watch basically... Dogwatch, day work; afternoon shift – would have enough gear. Then swing shift would come around again and they'd have to load it all up again, so all those three shifts would have enough gear again. So that's how swing shift ran. So I would have just kept going through the shifts if I could have got to day work but that never happened, because it's the old story that the last on is the first off, which is what happened to me my whole career. I'd get a job and then lost, except for the one at Lithgow, I quit!

What do you remember as being the most frightening thing that ever happened to you or you've heard about at Teralba?

At Teralba? Nothing really. Nothing really at Teralba.

At Lambton? What happened?

Yeah.

What happened?

At Lambton I was on a shuttle car and we were taking coal out from the face and the whole intersection was just dribbling. There was coal that was falling off the roof and that, and there was coal and stuff sort of dribbling off the roof which meant there was a lot of weight coming on that intersection, and I told the deputy, I said that intersection's getting very heavy; it's going to fall in basically, and this other guy who was on the other shuttle car went in and told the.....

(interruption)

There we go, we're away again. Can you tell me... Okay we'll start again now. What you were telling me about the early days at

Yeah they said to go back in to get more coal out and that. But what happened was all the weight came in to where we were actually working and it basically got to the stage where the shuttle cars were scraping on the roof, which had dropped that much, and really looking back now, if I had have had experience I wouldn't have been in there because in the coal mine if you don't feel that it's a safe area you don't have to go there, and there's no way I would have went there, it's just that I was inexperienced and

everyone else was there still doing it, so I stayed in there and did it; thought nothing of it really. I just thought that's what coal mining was. But really we shouldn't have been in there.

Explain to me how it worked for pillar extraction – how it should have worked?

The pillar extraction, what they do is they'll cut a Just for safe's sake, your block of coal... because they form pillars – that's what a pillar is, it's a block of coal – and say that block of coal is 20 meters wide, what they'll do then is they'll cut down the middle of that block which will lead to narrow blocks, and then when they get to the bottom of the middle of that block, they'll cut in sideways, which will join into the other roadway on the other side, which will take all the coal out, and as they're reversing back and cutting sideways, they put timber props up but as they're doing that, the more they go back the more they take out, the bigger the hollow area becomes, and eventually it could stand up. In some pits they have acres standing up and eventually it will come down; eventually it just gets too much weight and it's got to come down, and that's what pillar extraction is; it's where they actually cut the whole block of coal out until there's nothing there. We used to do that quite regularly, and it's a safe practice; a lot of miners got buried. I was never in... well actually I was in one area... I was in one panel where a miner got buried but the miner driver actually got out of the miner and ran, but the miner did get buried. He got out quick enough. Well they actually did say you're supposed to stay in the miner because they've got a steel canopy over them. In the early days they never did, but the days I worked in the mining industry they had a steel canopy over them, but some of them used to take them off because the roof was that low it was better to have it off which they weren't supposed to but they did. But that's what pillar extraction is. Basically it's just working backwards. Instead of driving forwards you're actually driving in sideways and then you're pulling backwards as you're doing it and you're taking every bit of coal out.

And how does that compare to long wall mining?

I didn't have a lot of experience on long wall mining. I avoided it. I had very little experience on long wall mining. I did go to the long wall a couple of times at Teralba but it was more sort of overtime shifts or if someone was off and I got put in there, but I avoided long wall mining like the plague. I just didn't want anything to do with it.

Why?

I just didn't like it. It's very dusty and dirty and long wall mining is totally different to pillar extraction or conventional mining. I don't know a lot about long wall mining; I know very little about it. All I know is they've got big chocks that hold the roof up. They've got a conveyor belt thing with a big miner thing that just chews the whole lot of it out, like they'll set up the chocks and it might be 250 meters long and they're actually cutting the coal 250 meters long, and as they cut it the long wall moves forward – the chocks and everything move forward – and it falls in behind them. So the chocks basically are your roof. It's most probably safer than the other mining but I just never got into it; it was too dirty and dusty. I'd prefer to keep away from it if I could, so I really didn't have a lot of experience or a lot to do with the actual long wall mining. We used to take the chocks in and stuff like that when they were moving it but that was about all I had with experience with long wall mining; it wasn't too much. I was more

on the old mining. It was just what I'd sort of learnt and sort of stuck with it I think; it most probably didn't help me get another job because you had to be jack of all trades and do everything anyway. Towards the end of it you basically did have to do everything, but at the end they were looking for experienced long wall miners more so than other things. So in a sense, it most probably didn't help me to get it because I sort of wasn't interested in that part of it. It most probably didn't help me but I didn't want to travel again either. Once I lost my job at Teralba I just said, "No I'm not chasing it anymore; I've had enough; sick to death of chasing it." Because at that stage too, it was either try again at Lithgow or basically Muswellbrook/Singleton, and I just didn't want to do it anymore; I'd just had enough. I said there's nothing around here; they're all shutting around here. And I said, I'm out of the industry if I can, which now I wouldn't go back in again anyway, even though I loved the coal mining industry, it was a great job. I loved it, it was good. But now having this business that I've got, having it for nine years, I wouldn't go back in there, not unless they give me a day work job, on pit top, for a heap of money!

So what made it so enjoyable? What part of it was the enjoyable part?

The blokes you worked with. Everyone was sort of.... It's just the same as any job, there's always guys there that are idiots and there's always guys that you don't get on with but most of the blokes...you got on with most of them and it worked. I don't know what it was but from the day I went down the pit – my first job in the pit... my dad actually took me down to Burwood when I was very young just to show me the pit and I sort of wanted to work in a coalmine from that day. I got no fear out of the fact of going down there or anything, I just liked it; I don't know why. Yeah I just enjoyed it. The work didn't bother me. I enjoyed the work; I enjoyed the blokes I worked with. I don't know what it was but I just enjoyed it – it was good; it was a good job!

What are some of the funniest events that you were involved in or heard about? Say Teralba first, and then your other pits, if you can't think of any at Teralba?

Funniest things. No I didn't really get into too much funny things that I can remember. About the only funny thing I can think of is when we were coming – it wasn't Teralba again, sorry, it was Lambton. The pit was shut and we were bringing all the gear out, we were unbolting belt systems and putting them onto flat tops and taking them out, basically bringing all the gear out of the pit before they closed it up. And this guy... the deputy was down in one of the – in where the crib room was and that – and this guy got a fire extinguisher out and as the deputy was walking out he just blasted him. That was pretty funny but the deputy didn't think so I'll tell you! He wasn't happy at all!

That actually brings me up to the next question. In your experience, or from what you were told, how would you describe coal miners' relationships with their employers and their bosses?

Most of them were good. My relationships with under managers and deputies and managers and stuff, I didn't have a problem at all with them. I felt they were pretty fair. They were always fair to me. That's most probably one of the big things that I did find in the coalmining industry that they were fair. Like I said, if you didn't want to do something you really didn't have to do it, especially if it was a safety – more so safety –

factor when I'm saying that. Yeah the deputies and under managers that I always sort of worked under and worked with I thought they were good; thought they were fine.

How influential was the union in that kind of thing?

Oh the union got weaker and weaker as the years went on I thought. What happened, in my eyes, which we started it really. I can't blame anyone. When Lambton shut, that's when the union joined up with the contract mining, which I think at the time was called UMS and we basically – because we were out of work – and they said join up with us we'll get you part-time work which will most probably lead to a permanent job. That was the worst move that you could ever do. Not in the union's eyes they thought it was the best move they'd ever done, but it was the worst move from the bloke's side of things because the unions from then on absolutely have no power with conditions in coalmines. In my eyes, I'm saying that, because if a pit wanted to lay a bloke off the union didn't care because they went and joined up into their union, which gave the union more money because they were the contract miners. So if a coalmine said I'm laying 50 or 60 blokes off, all of a sudden, from the days of fight, fight... let's fight this and go on strike and we're not going to let that happen, none of that happened. They all just went, oh well you've got to do it; that's the way it is now, and then as soon as you got laid off you joined up with UMS, join up the union, I'll get you casual work and that's in my eyes... We actually were the first ones to do it because that's when it all started at Lambton, but I reckon that was the big downfall with the unions. The unions don't think so because they're making a mossa out of it but it was the downfall for our conditions. Your conditions went out the door then. So I believe that at the time I started at the pits until I sort of finished I had a good run and it was towards the end of my run, that's when all the conditions and things changed. I signed off on – what do they call them – where the hell they start you in a coalmine now – you'll sign a contract and say, right this is what you're earning and this is what you're getting and that's that. It might be good. It might be good money or it might not. Most of them were on good money but it just changes. It's just a changed way, the way the coal mining... Like my father lost so much time getting conditions. Like they lost months and months and months of work time to get all these good conditions that the coalminers got, and then we just sort of gave them all away, which my father reckons bonuses is what caused the main problem. He said that as soon as the bonus came in that's when all the problems started because in the old days you had certain blokes doing certain jobs, which you can't really do that now anyway because things have changed, but it started off that way where certain blokes had certain jobs but then what happens, say the fitter or the leco or something, he'd drive a shuttle car while you'd go and have a... instead of having a half hour for lunch you'd have an hour. So he was on the shuttle car, which he shouldn't have been on because he wasn't allowed to, those sorts of things... that's what lost all the conditions, a lot of conditions in coalmining. That's why they handed out... towards the end when I was still sort of in there, the days where electricians and fitters weren't allowed to drive a machine were completely turned. Basically, if they were employing someone, they wanted an electrician or a fitter, because they wanted them to drive the machinery and if the machinery broke they wanted them to fix it, which you can understand a company doing that. If I owned a company I'd do the same thing. You don't want someone just sitting in a corner doing nothing, waiting for something to break down. That's how it used to be! I don't know what it's like now; I haven't worked in the industry for nine years. But I was in there when everything was starting to change and towards the end of it, the changes weren't good for a lot of what all the old blokes had fought for. They'd

basically given all of them away. All the time they fought and the conditions they got just went out the door. I don't know what it's like now.

Coalmining is a physically demanding job. What kept you going through each shift?

Well I didn't reckon it was that physically demanding to be honest with you. I'd been in a lot of other jobs before I went into the coal industry and I didn't think it was that bad. There's a lot of whingers in there that thought it was, but that's why I think I thought it was such a good job. But I'm a sort of a physical bloke anyway. I like that sort of thing. I don't like to sit still and keep still, I'd prefer to be moving and doing something so it didn't feel anymore different to a standard job out the back there or anything like that. To me, was basically the same. And to get on machinery and drive it and all that, that was enjoyable to me; that wasn't a job. Yeah, there was plenty of physical work involved in it; you're dead right there, but I don't know, it just didn't seem any worse than any other job I had. There was work that had to be done – I think that way – if it's got to be done, it's got to be done. You're employed to do it so you do it. Yeah that side of it wasn't anything out of the ordinary. It was just a job, that side of it.

Did you make lasting friendships in your job?

Yes I did. I wouldn't say I see people all the time or anything, but there's people that are a friend – like your father – for instance. I don't see him very often but he's still a friend you know. But there's other people with the same sort of thing that there is – I wouldn't say there's people there that I'm close friends with or anything like that, but people that I worked with, yeah I still keep in contact with some of them, certainly not many. But if I run into them and say hello or whatever, you know, there's no drama there.

When you were working at Teralba did you spend any time with people outside of work? With friends, or was it just a work friendship?

Do you mean the people from Teralba? Did I spend... No, no, or very little. It was basically... go to work; I was friends with them at work and basically once I left work that was it, I had my own life doing other things. That's basically the sort of person I am; I'm that sort of person with anything. So yeah I didn't sort of mingle with the people at work in a close circle or anything very often or anything like that; it's just not something that I do. I'm not into that scene.

If someone came up to you and told you that they wanted to become a coalminer, would you encourage them to be one?

Yes if they wanted to be, yes I would. Because of the experience that I had down there, I enjoyed it; I thought it was good. Even though I say now I wouldn't go back down the coalmine, the whole time I was there I liked it; I enjoyed it and if I had have got another job in the coalmines soon after I lost my job again at Teralba, I would have been in the coalmines; it's just that it wasn't going to happen so I had to go down a different road but if there were sort of pits all over the place like there used to be and if you could get another job, I'd still be in there now. I'd be still in the pits now for sure.

So what was it you liked about it?

The mine?

Yes about mining.

I just liked the work. I liked the people I worked with. Yeah it was just a good job; I enjoyed the job; it suited me. So if someone asked me, "Oh I'm going to get a job in a coalmine – do you think I should or not?" I'd say, "Go for it!" But I'm like that with everything. You only make your own opportunities, but I'd definitely say go for it because it is a good job. It's not everyone's cup of tea but you soon learn if you like it or not. You only go down there a couple of times and you'll know if you like it or not.

Were there many people who only went down a couple of times and didn't come back?

There was a couple. I don't recall too many but I did hear of blokes say, oh such and such only came down twice and didn't come back, you know, he just couldn't handle it. But most of the guys I spoke to enjoyed it; they liked it. Everyone that sort of worked there thought it was a good job. There were guys – more so at Lambton than anywhere – that had just done it for that many years they didn't really know how good they had it, and they whinged a fair bit but most of the people that I worked around knew they were on a pretty good wicket. But you were; you were on good money for what you were actually doing. Yeah it was dangerous work; you were down underground and that but it was still no different to the job going at the BHP or going to the Australian Wire Industry or going somewhere like that. They've still got all their dangers and whatever else too and they weren't on half the money we were on and that's the sort it was; the money was talking; you were on good money for really the work that you were doing. And I knew that because I'd been in so many other jobs but guys that had only ever been in the coal industry didn't realise it and they all thought they were hard done by – some of them. I'd have said that was more the older blokes in Lambton.

So what did you think of Teralba while you were there?

What did I think of Teralba? Well I could understand why my father didn't like it but it's just a totally different... a lot harder work at Teralba than what he was used to at Burwood because at Burwood, what I found with working different pits, it's sort of most probably funny, but the lower the roof... Of course you don't want it lower than how high you are, but the lower roof the easier the work; that's what I found, which is if you're working in say a 6 foot or a 7 foot seam, it's easy to do everything, whereas if you're working in an 8 foot or a 10 foot or a 12 foot seam, everything's up that high and everything's longer and bigger and heavier and it's a lot harder and I think that's what got my father – and I think that's what he didn't like about Teralba – more so with the work, what he'd been used to with the shorter props and that and the littler props. When he went over there everything was so big and heavy and it was just a lot harder work. But you got used to it, but I was a lot younger than him. See that's the thing now. When I was working in the coal industry I was young and in my prime, and it didn't bother me but for the older blokes Teralba would be hard work; it would still be hard work I reckon because – getting back to what you said before – it is pretty physical, even though I sort of didn't think it was, it was most probably because I was so young. But it is pretty

physical stuff; physical work. You know, as machinery gets better, that takes a lot of the man on sort of stuff away from it, which is good in a sense. Now I'm lost where I was at.

That's alright, we were just talking about... I asked you what your impressions of Teralba were.

Oh Teralba, yeah. Well the short time I was there I thought it was okay. I have a pretty wide range of different things I'd done at Teralba for the short time that I was there. I was in the panel and driving the miner and driving shuttle cars and bolting roofs and doing belt moves and putting rails down, and basically doing everything. So yes sort of the time I was there everything was alright and it was pretty good; I didn't mind it; it wasn't bad. Some blokes thought... When I was on dog watch I sort of got into a panel and I was in a panel with your father, and we were driving shuttle cars and we sort of stayed on that while we could, which was alright. Actually there was one funny time at Teralba. I was unloading my coal onto the belt and I fell asleep and the belt stopped, and the coal just piled up everywhere. Used to do that a fair bit – fall asleep. On dogwatch, driving the shuttle cars, you'd be unloading it and you'd hear the rrrrrr... of the belt going and you'd just sit there and you'd just fall asleep.

You wouldn't have been popular?

I think your father said... I think he was around in the corner waiting for me and I think he fell asleep waiting for me and we were there for ages and then the under manager came around looking for us wondering what we were doing. Oh hang on, I've just buried the boot end! Yeah that happened at Teralba. But no it was alright. But the time I was at Teralba I enjoyed it. I mean look at all the pits I've worked at; they've all been different and I've enjoyed all of them. They've all had their good and their bad things, and the job and go was good on overtime; that was one of the really good things about working in a coalmine – the job and go. You'd go in and you got stuck... you'd work your guts out but you always got out early and got good pay for it so that was a good system.

That you worked hard?

Oh you used to work flat out; everyone would be running; you'd be working flat out, but it was still a good system. But every pit that I've worked in basically let you do that, even the ones down Lithgow were the same; there just must have been a bit of a thing that coalminers got into and let them do it, because no other industry ever let them do anything like that; even people that I know in the BHP and that years ago, nobody was allowed to do overtime and leave early. They could do overtime and finish it and sleep, but they couldn't leave the site, where the coal mine industry... The under managers turned a blind eye... Every mine that I worked in they'd let you do that. They'd just say, right this is the amount of work you've got to do; when it's done you can go, so that was a good system; that was a real good system actually!

While you were at Teralba, the fact that you'd come from outside, were you aware of the politics?

Outside of where?

The fact that you'd come from outside Teralba, you'd never been originally from Teralba or originally from Borehole....

Oh right, I came from a different pit you mean?

Yeah. Were you aware of the politics or was it done by the time you got there?

What politics?

The amalgamation.

I'm trying to think what the amalgamation was – what was the amalgamation?

When Borehole shut and the Borehole men came over to Teralba?

Oh yes I was aware of that because I actually – when I was working in Lambton – we went to the meeting up at, I think it was at Cessnock Showground, I think that meeting was, and we were at that meeting and yeah I knew that went on, I knew that happened... Yeah they weren't real happy at all about that; not at all. There were guys just walking out at the meeting and just going and taking off and everything, so I was aware of that, yes.

And what made them leave the meeting?

Well the guys from... I think the guys from Stockton Borehole got seniority on the blokes from Teralba. And the guys from Teralba weren't happy about that because it was their pit, and that's why the blokes... basically all the guys from Teralba left the meeting. When they said at the meeting, Stockton Borehole have got seniority over the guys at Teralba, all the guys from Teralba went and just left the meeting, said this is a load of rot. But by the time I got there that had sort of blown over. There were still blokes that didn't like it, but a lot of it had blown over by the time I'd got there. But your father was one of those. He had to go back to dogwatch, although I think he was on dogwatch anyway; he liked dogwatch, but can you imagine being on day work and having to go to dog watch because these guys come over and they're senior to you? I think that was the most wrong thing that they'd ever done. I'm afraid the guys from the Stockton Borehole should have been the junior blokes. I don't know how they worked that one out but they did. So yeah I was aware of that; I'd forgotten about it but I was aware of it.

Yes so that's okay. It's just one of the things that happened in the period I'm studying so it keeps coming up. I just wasn't sure whether or not.... I was aware that you were there later, whether or not it had blown over.

Oh there still was a bit of... there were a few people that still weren't happy about it but it didn't affect me in any way because I had nothing to do with it, like starting the job and that when I did, it didn't affect me one bit, but I can understand why the guys were dirty; I wouldn't have liked it! That would be like saying, oh yeah Teralba's shutting and they're coming over to Lambton, but they're going to be senior to you; you're going back onto dogwatch or whatever and they're coming through onto day work; you'd be ropable, so I can understand why they were cranky.

That's pretty much everything; is there anything else you want to tell me I should know about Teralba?

You've actually jogged my memory fairly good!

Have I?

I was sitting here this afternoon, going I don't think I'm going to remember anything! The coalmining industry's been in the back of my head; I haven't done it for nine years I reckon. I don't remember what I used to do! But no that's about all I can sort of say what happened with me. I don't think there's too much else pretty much. Okay?

Excellent. Thank you very much.