

**MIKE DMITRICH**  
Oral History Interview

Statewide Oral History Project, Abandoned Mine Reclamation Program  
Utah Division of Oil, Gas and Mining

March 16, 2015

*This is Lee Bennett and I'm here today at the home of Mike Dmitrich in Mesquite, Nevada. Also present are Mike's wife, Bo, and videographer Jim Mattingly; Jim will be recording the interview.*

LB: To get things started, give me your name, where you were born and when you were born, and where you are now living.

MD: Mike Dmitrich. I was born in Murray, Utah but at the time my family lived in Highland Boy,<sup>1</sup> which is now the Bingham Canyon copper pit.

LB: What was your birthday?

MD: My birthday was October 23, 1936, which makes me 78 years old today.

LB: Where did you grow up?

MD: Well, I went to the second grade in Midvale, Utah, then my family moved to Consumers<sup>2</sup> so I went to school in Spring Glen until the fifth grade. I spent one year in Salt Lake grade school, sixth grade, then I moved to Price. I've lived in Carbon County ever since [until his retirement].

LB: Your family was in the mining industry?

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<sup>1</sup> The family lived at the Highland Boy on 12 Apr 1940, where Dan Dmitrich worked as a miner; the family reported their residence in 1935 was the same place (US Census 1940, Enumeration District 18-48, Highland Boy, Salt Lake County, Utah, viewed at Ancestry.com).

<sup>2</sup> Consumers was a company-owned town established by the Consumers Mutual Coal Company in the 1920s. The original name of the town was Gibson, after A.E. Gibson, Vice President of the Consumers company. The town was renamed Consumers and the Consumers company was relabeled Blue Blaze Company (Ronald G. Watt, [A History of Carbon County](#), Utah State Historical Society & Carbon County Commission, 1997, pg 120). Dorothea Lange, well-known for her Depression era photographs, visited Consumers in March 1936 and made many images of the area (see Carbon-UTGenweb.com). The community was located in Gordon Creek Canyon, a few miles west of Price, UT.

MD: My whole family was coal miners. My dad was actually killed in the Kaiser Steel coal mine.<sup>3</sup> My grandpa got killed in the Bingham copper mine just before I was born. When my dad got killed, I was working on the opposite shift at Kaiser at the time. My father-in-law was a State mine inspector, and I have eight uncles and six of them worked in the mining industry; some started when they were 14 years old.

LB: Did you want to go down that same path?

MD: Well, I wasn't planning on it. I went to school on a football scholarship. I had a bad shoulder; I went [to college] injured then I really injured it in a spring football game. My mother worked at JC Penney and there was no money involved at all, and I thought, "Well, I'll work in the mine a year and then go back to school." I went to work at Kaiser Steel Corporation at Sunnyside, Utah. I got to working and to thinking, "I can't have a better life than this." I worked underground for two years, then my father got killed [1957] and I quit the mining business and went into banking. I was cashing checks for all those guys I worked with in the mine, and their checks were a lot bigger than mine, so I went back. It was about the time that the OSM came into effect [1977] and I told the mine superintendent of Plateau Mining in Wattis, Utah, "I think you ought to have someone really track this because it's going to impact the mining industry a lot." I was in the Legislature at the time, and we talked about it a little bit, so he says, "Apparently you have someone in mind?" and I said, "Yeah, me." So he hired me as a kind of government affairs representative and I worked there for something like 30 years.

LB: That was for whom, again?

MD: I started with Plateau Mining Company at Wattis, Utah, which was owned by United Nuclear.<sup>4</sup> Then it became Getty, and then it became Texaco, and then it became a large mining company out of Denver, AMOCO. Then it went to Cyprus-Amax Mining Company; they ended up closing Plateau and going to Castle Gate coal mine. We had a couple of real bad accidents up there. We had a mine fire and then a little mine explosion. They, Cyprus-Amax Mining Company, shut that mine down, and that just ended all of our careers. So then I went to consulting for Consolidation Coal out of Pittsburgh; they owned the Emery mine. I worked for them for five years as a consultant. When I retired from the Legislature,<sup>5</sup> I retired from everything.

LB: So let's go back and talk a little bit more about how you became an elected official. Why did you choose to do that and what was your first office? How did you campaign?

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<sup>3</sup> Dan Dmitrich died on 4 Dec 1957 in Sunnyside Mine No. 4 near the community of Dragerton, UT (Utah Certificate of Death No. 57-04-0147).

<sup>4</sup> In 1967 Plateau Mining, a subsidiary of Getty Oil Company, purchased the Wattis Mine and became a registered business in Utah. They sold the operation to United Nuclear in 1971 (Ronald G. Watt, [A History of Carbon County](#), Utah State Historical Society & Carbon County Commission, 1997, pg 127; UT Division of Corporations and Commercial Code; UtahRails.net).

<sup>5</sup> On 6 Mar 2008, Senate Minority Leader Dmitrich announced that he would not seek re-election ("Dmitrich joins Hickman, McGee in retirement from Legislature," *The Deseret News* 6 Mar 2008).

MD: It's an interesting story how I got involved in politics. We had a local sheriff who was a very close friend of mine by the name of Al Passic. There was a movement, like in any small community, to get rid of the sheriff. He asked me if I would become a delegate for the county [Democratic] convention to support him. In those days for 80% of the vote you could kick them out. So I became a delegate and supported him. In the meantime, Representative Williams who had the seat in the House at that time, retired. Senator Omar Bunnell came to me and said, "I see you're kind of getting active in politics. Would you like to run for the House? Williams is quitting; why don't you run for the House?" I said, "I don't know a thing about it. I've never been to the Capitol." He said, "Well, I can help you." I said, "First of all, I'd better ask the bank if they'll let me do it" and he said, "I've already done that." So he had everything wired up and he showed me how to campaign. I had a real tough opponent in the primary [election], a Stake President. I thought, "Well, my political career is going to be short lived." Anyway, I beat him and went on to win. I only had two other opponents in [elections for] the House. I served 11 terms in the House [for] 22 years.<sup>6</sup> The only reason I stayed so long was Omar wanted me to take his seat in the Senate. He was a very close friend of mine, obviously, and he kept saying, "I'm not running next time. I'm not running next time!" He finally just got sick, the poor guy, and had to quit. So then I got appointed to the Senate; [Governor] Bangerter appointed me.<sup>7</sup> I ran four elections for the Senate so I served a total of 40 years: 18 in the Senate and 22 in the House.

LB: When you were elected, was the coal mining vote in Carbon and Emery counties important to your election?

MD: Well, at the time in Carbon County it was very important. At that time we had two representatives from Carbon County--hard to imagine! We've barely got one now for the whole area. They were all union mines in Carbon, so that was very important at that time. The Union really, basically, kept me in office for a long time. There was a time when I was working for Plateau, which was a union-free mine, [when] the president of the United Mine Workers<sup>8</sup> said "We can't support you anymore." I said, "You want one of them?" meaning a Republican, "Or do you want me?" So they laid off.

LB: Were there issues in the mining industry at this time that you carried forward from a legislative perspective?

MD: Well, there were two big issues. Number one was mine safety and health. We had a State mine inspector, total State mine inspection, it was the only thing we had. And pretty soon the Feds came in with MSHA<sup>9</sup> and they wanted to take over the total primacy of the State inspections office. Well, I obviously stuck up for State control of the thing, and lost out. We really didn't

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<sup>6</sup> The oath of office was administered for the first time in 1969, and for the last time in 2005 (UT Dept of Administrative Services, Division of Archives and Records Service at [archives.utah.gov](http://archives.utah.gov)).

<sup>7</sup> Senator Bunnell resigned in January 1992 and shortly thereafter Governor Bangerter appointed Mike Dmitrich to fill Bunnell's chair ("Bunnell Departs Senate; Dmitrich May Get His Place," *Deseret News* 16 Jan 1992).

<sup>8</sup> United Mine Workers of America, abbreviated UMWA or UMW.

<sup>9</sup> Mine Safety and Health Administration, the agency established by the 1969 passage of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act ("45 Years of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act," news release posted at [msha.gov](http://msha.gov)).

have State mine inspections; we had the MSHA looking over us. That was one of the big issues. The other big issue at that time in the Legislature was a money deal, the severance tax on coal.

LB: Describe severance tax to me.

MD: There was a proposal to tax coal 2% of the gross sale price. In other words, if coal were selling for \$40, the State would get 80 cents out of it for severance tax. We were really having trouble competing with outside markets and at that time there was a lot of coal going to Korea and Taiwan, and we were really having trouble. So I really opposed it [severance tax] and basically kept it off. My argument in keeping it off was that all of our coal was on federal leases, 90% or more, 95%, and the Fed[ederal government] charged an 8% royalty and then the State got half of that back. We basically had a 4% severance tax anyway, and that was my argument for [opposing the severance tax proposal]; the competitive part of it. At one time we had a \$1 a ton mining tax credit for coal exported. A funny story about that was that it was my idea.<sup>10</sup> I worked with mining to put it on. We had an issue in the Legislature that they wanted to do away with the eight-hour State law that you could not work underground for more than eight hours. It was direct slap in the face to the Union, number one, and to our coal miners, number two. So I got involved in that fight. I just told the mine operators, "Stay out of this battle. It's not your battle, it's a Legislature issue, and it's a Kennecott issue. It is not your argument." Well, I go up to the Legislature the next Monday and there is a letter passed out by all the coal operators supporting doing away with the 8-hour workday. It passed the Legislature in the Senate by one vote; it was 15 to 14. Then we lost in the House, obviously.<sup>11</sup> I got to thinking, "If they're going to pull that on me, I'll get rid of that \$1 a ton credit." And we did it; we got rid of the \$1 a ton credit just to show them that you don't mess with a legislator. Anyway, it was kind of ignorant and it didn't kill the coal industry and it didn't kill the export market, but it hurt those mines that supported the 8-hour workday; it kind of spanked them for doing it. In the meantime, they lost that export market anyway; it dried up and went to Australia.

LB: What were the markets for Utah's coal?

MD: The real market was Nevada Power, which is right down there in Moapa, Nevada, and there is one [power plant] up in Reno. They were the major ones. Then IPP was the big one. That really kept the Utah coal industry alive. As you're seeing now, the IPP is going to go to natural gas,<sup>12</sup> Nevada Power is going to natural gas; so the only market we have now is Utah Power & Light.<sup>13</sup>

LB: When you were first elected, do you remember what year that was?

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<sup>10</sup> Then House Minority Leader, Dmitrich filed HB27 for consideration in the 1990 legislative session ("Tax Plan Offered to Boost Coal Sales," *Deseret News* 17 Dec 1989).

<sup>11</sup> Emotional debate in the Utah Senate preceded the 16-13 vote in favor of eliminating the 8-hour workday limit ("Mayne loses bid to retain 8-hour workday in mines," *Deseret News* 1 Mar 2001).

<sup>12</sup> The Intermountain Power Project plant at Delta, Utah consumed 5 million tons of Utah coal in 2013, but the operators, Intermountain Power Agency, announced plans to convert to natural gas ("Utah power plant looks to natural gas to fuel the future," by John Hollenhorst, broadcast on KSL.com 24 Mar 2014).

<sup>13</sup> The Hunter Power Plant near Castle Dale, Utah is now operated by Rocky Mountain Power, a unit of PacifiCorp.

MD: Yes, 1968.

LB: How many coal mines were actually working in Utah?

MD: The numbers were the same, but the number of miners was like 1,700. You really test my memory! The long-wall mining had just started in Kaiser Steel; the first long-wall mining in the United States went to Kaiser Steel about 1961, maybe earlier than that.<sup>14</sup> But it was the only long-wall that we had; eventually all the mines went to long-wall mining. For every 70 miners that used to work on the face, there were ten [in a long-wall mine]; I think there were over 2,000 miners before that came in, then we got down to like 1,400.<sup>15</sup> But the only new mine that started in the meantime was the Skyline at Scofield.<sup>16</sup>

LB: Did you get involved in regulations? There was MSHA, but there were lots of other regulations that address mining. Were you involved with any of that?

MD: I basically made my living in the mining industry tracking regulations, trying to take the positive step in implementing all those regulations. So I not only did the State stuff, but I did federal stuff. We had a lobbyist in DC and I worked with him on some of that stuff, with our Congressional delegation. The big issues then are the same issues we have now in the mining industry. The Office of Surface Mining Act came in in 1977,<sup>17</sup> I think it was, and that just progressively got tougher and tougher to comply with. All this clean air stuff has really put dampers on it.

LB: What was the attitude in the mining industry toward all this regulation?

MD: Basically they said, "We want to do it. We want to comply. We want to do it right." If it got overly burdensome, that's when they kind of took a little stance, "Let's oppose that." To some extent we were able to make things better but when they had to comply with, especially, the Surface Mining Act; they didn't have too much choice. So I think the mining industry went out of their way to comply with the Surface Mining Act, which by way was primacy with the State.

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<sup>14</sup> The first long-wall mining machine was installed at a West Virginia mine in 1960, but roof supports were not self-advancing and limited the utility of the equipment until self-advancing roof supports were introduced in the mid-1960s. The nation's first long-wall shearing machine (a method of cutting coal) was introduced in 1961 at the Sunnyside Mine operated by Kaiser Steel Corporation in Sunnyside, Utah; this technology was soon improved and became commonplace in long-wall mines (Energy Information Administration, [Longwall Mining](#), US Dept of Energy DOE/EIA-TR-0588, March 1995, pg 12).

<sup>15</sup> At the onset of long-wall production in 1960, the average daily workforce in Utah coal mines was 2,418 and production averaged 10.73 short tons per employee per day. By 2013 there were 1,445 employees who averaged 47.31 short tons per employee per day (Table 2.9 Coal Production and Miner Productivity in Utah, 1960-2014, Utah Energy and Mineral Statistics by Michael Vanden Berg viewed at [geology.utah.gov](#)).

<sup>16</sup> Production of coal from the Skyline Mine began in 1981 ("Skyline," Bowie Resource Partners, LLC viewed at [bowieresources.com](#)).

<sup>17</sup> The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement is an agency within the US Dept of the Interior that was created in 1977 with passage of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act ("Who We Are," viewed at [osmre.gov](#)).

LB: How did the Legislature feel about the federal regulations?

MD: We took the primacy over with the State Division of Oil, Gas and Mining.<sup>18</sup> We passed a particular piece of legislation that we could not make our State regulations any more stringent than the federal regulations. You may have read about that this past legislative session in Utah in the clean air stuff. They tried to repeal that deal and we're just saying that we don't want our State regulations to be any more stringent than the federal. I think it was a good law. They tried to repeal it this year in the Legislature. Really, they are not complying with the federal regulations right now, the ten [gestures with fingers showing a small size].

LB: Oh, the particulate?

MD: Particulate matter, ten [microns]. They aren't complying now so why do away with it? Anyway, they passed some version where they could apply for certain deals, which is all right. We passed that, number one, for the mining industry and for the oil industry to make it no more stringent. We helped those two industries.

LB: Did you hear from public that were not part of mining and energy?

MD: No. The environmental community just was getting raised up in arms at that time. We basically got along pretty good with environmentalists in the mining deal.

LB: Over the period of years that you were an elected official, did the regulations get tougher and tougher over time? Was there anything that slacked off?

MD: I don't think they slacked off. I think they got tougher on water quality, air quality, progressively. It all came down from the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency], you know, and I think they really got a lot tougher on air. You take the replacement of water, it was a real big issue in the mine.

LB: Tell me about that.

MD: If we tapped into an aquifer and the water got drained into the mine or something, and it dried up the spring, we had to compensate that water company for that. We had that incident on the [Wasatch] Plateau where we had to help the Huntington Water Users because we'd dried up one of their aquifers, one of their springs. From that standpoint, I think it was good, I think it should have been done right; I don't think you should take somebody's water. But during all of these struggles, regulations and that, we tried to maintain a workforce with proper marketing of our coal. We were very competitive.

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<sup>18</sup> Utah DOGM was created by the Utah Legislature in 1975 when the former Oil and Gas Conservation Commission was assigned responsibility for mined land reclamation and renamed the Division of Oil, Gas and Mining. DOGM was given primacy for coal mining and reclamation in 1981 under the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act ("History," Division of Oil, Gas and Mining viewed at [linux1.ogm.utah.gov](http://linux1.ogm.utah.gov)).

LB: Was there something special about Utah coal compared to, say, Wyoming or Nevada?

MD: Very good point. Nevada doesn't have any coal; Wyoming coal is strip coal. We were lower in sulphur and during, I'm saying the mid-1980s, they passed a federal regulation, the EPA that you had to meet certain quality of air emissions at power plants. If we sold coal to back east, at that time they had to run it through scrubbers and such, our coal was better before it got to the scrubbers than they required. But it still had to be done. In other words, the low sulphur was the biggest selling point Utah coal had, low sulphur and high BTU.<sup>19</sup> Wyoming strip coal would be less than 8,000 BTU, I think; we sold [Utah coal] at 11,000, 11,500 BTU. The sulphur was less than 2%. That was the biggest marketing tool Utah coal had.

LB: Were most of Utah's coal mines in the Price vicinity?

MD: It is interesting that most of the Utah coal mines in Carbon and Emery counties were in the Book Cliffs and the Wasatch Plateau; it was kind of a horseshoe shape. It started over there in Sunnyside coal mines and that was highly gassy coal; when you got to the Wasatch Plateau it wasn't. So that was the big coal mining industry [the horseshoe-shaped area], but the biggest coal mine in Utah was the SUFCO [in terms of production], which is down in Sevier County.<sup>20</sup> The Carbon-Emery field was the largest, by far [in geographic extent and number of mines].

LB: If you could characterize the relationship between the coal industry and elected officials, what would that look like?

MD: I think it was very positive. I think the State of Utah and the Legislature realized the importance of the coal industry to Utah.<sup>21</sup> Not only the royalty payments, which by the way were very important not only for the State but the local governments, because at 8% royalty, 4% came back to the State of Utah. Half of that came to the county that produced it, which was really big for Carbon, Emery and Sevier counties. The other half went throughout the State budget into community impact funds, which come back here in water resource stuff, things like that. So it was very positive from that standpoint. Plus, the high generation of sales tax on mining equipment, which we ended up doing away with; later on we didn't charge sales tax on new mining equipment for probably the last 20 years. But the employment taxes and all that, you know, the residual effect, the so-called 7 to 1 factor. It was very important to the State; the Legislature realized that. I think we had a very positive deal. We conducted mine tours through mines for different legislative groups and people, and did that PR work which is very important.

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<sup>19</sup> BTU = British Thermal Unit, the amount of energy required to cool or heat one pound of water by one degree Fahrenheit.

<sup>20</sup> The SUFCO mine was opened in 1941 by the Southern Utah Fuel Company and now produces low sulphur coal by the long-wall method; the coal is rated at 11,000 BTU ("Sufco," Bowie Resource Partners, LLC viewed at bowiereources.com).

<sup>21</sup> In 2007, for example, Utah's coal industry accounted for about 4,700 jobs, of which 1,900 were directly related to mining and 2,800 were indirect "ripple effect" jobs. About 85% of the jobs were in Carbon, Emery, and Sevier counties. Direct financial benefits to the State were \$196 million, exclusive of the related coal-fired power generation industry ("Economic Impact of Coal on Utah Economy Means Jobs, Tax Revenue," University of Utah News Center 29 Jun 2010, viewed at unews.utah.edu).

LB: Tell me more about the 7 to 1.

MD: That's for every dollar that the mine generated, supposedly seven other dollars are generated because of that mine. We're talking about suppliers, about the retailers, the oil and gas people and all that; they all have an impact for every dollar generated by the coal mine. Seven to one might have been a little heavy; I think it's closer to five to one. But it did have that residual effect: Employment tax, income tax, all that, and the money that the miners spent in their communities. Just about everyone working in the mine had a four-wheeler with a gun in the rack on the back!

LB: Were mining wages competitive with other kinds of work in the State, do you remember?

MD: Miners were higher paid. In fact, Carbon County at one time had the highest amount of savings in the bank. Miners worked hard, they played hard, they spent it, but they always saved. In the old days the mines used to shut down in the summertime, you know the sugar beet industry was a big user, but [the miners] always had a large savings account. They always made more than the average wage in the State of Utah. Carbon and Emery counties were rich counties compared to San Juan County, for example, which was very poor. So it was a very important industry.

LB: You had mentioned there was a lobbyist in Washington, DC that you worked with. How does that process work?

MD: Just about every coal company had their own lobbyist in DC; we had ours. All the national issues affected all our mines. We had mines in nine states so it was more of a states deal than a national deal. But it was very important to have that presence in DC because they are the ones that keep you going.

LB: What does the lobbyist do?

MD: A lobbyist tries to get the point of the mining business, the importance of certain issues. In fact, our Washington, DC lobbyist was very heavily involved with retirement legislation, the OSM regulation, surface mine regulation; they stayed right on top of all that. Taxes were not a big issue on the federal level because they had the royalty payments you made and the bonus payments you made when you got a bid, which were big.

LB: Were you also involved with oil and gas?

MD: No.

LB: With uranium?

MD: No.

LB: Mostly just coal?

MD: Just coal. As a legislator I was involved with oil and gas, but my livelihood was all coal. As a legislator I got heavily involved with the stuff in San Juan County, and I worked with the oil and gas industry throughout the State of Utah.

LB: In San Juan County it had to have been uranium.

MD: It was. The uranium mines down there.

LB: What did that involve?

MD: You may recall they were taking uranium to recycle and the question was, was that nuclear waste or was it recyclable mining [waste]? That was always an issue with that plant [White Mesa Mill south of Blanding, UT] in San Juan County. It has been very stressful I think; they complied a lot.

LB: And how did you get involved as a legislator with that?

MD: That was the issue: Whether it was hazardous waste by the State definition, or whether it was recyclable waste. There was a fine line between the two.

LB: Looking back at your time in the Legislature, what do you think was the most memorable experience in terms of regulatory changes?

MD: Probably, the OSM [Office of Surface Mining] act. When it first came in it was a federal act, total federal act, and then we had the State take over the primacy of it. So they had to re-draft everything to comply with the federal act and create a whole difference agency in the State of Utah, which was a larger agency, as you know. So that was probably the most memorable one. The other that comes to mind is safety. Mine safety was a big issue. You know, I was really professing that the State Mines take the primacy over, ahead of federal MSHA, [but] then it turned out that the Union objected to that. They wanted MSHA to take over. As things developed and we had a few disasters, then that role reversed and they [Union] wanted the State to take over. We'd take the primacy and not the federal [government]. That was the battle because we had no way of funding the State agency at that time. It was interesting.

LB: What do you think caused the change of heart in the Union?

MD: A couple of disasters had happened, the Crandall Canyon for one,<sup>22</sup> [and the question became] whether the federal [government] was properly inspecting or not. It was a legitimate excuse, they had very legitimate excuse [to raise the issue]. Were the feds doing their job in that

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<sup>22</sup> Coal "outbursts" in the Crandall Canyon Mine in August 2007 resulted in the deaths of nine individuals, including members of a rescue crew ("Crandall Canyon Accident Investigation Summary and Conclusions," Mine Safety and Health Administration viewed at [msha.gov](http://msha.gov)).

particular instance? Did they allow those guys to mine the coal that way? Their [the Union] argument was if we had a State inspector there, we'd have a little better control over it. There is a lot to be said for that, too.

LB: In your role as a consultant or an employee in the mining industry, did you find the Legislature receptive to the mining interests? Did you have to do a lot of schmoozing and that kind of thing to get rules to be favorable toward the coal industry?

MD: The Legislature really didn't play a particular role in that. The rule-making stuff went through the agencies and that's where more of that came in; we had to keep track of [the rule-making done by the agencies]. You know, the Legislature passes laws and the rule-making implements that law. If nobody is watching the rule-making you could really get hurt, so the rule-making was closely watched. I think the cooperation was good. It just took a lot of time and really needed government affairs people to do that. The mine managers, their only interest was mining coal, so someone had to look out for what regulations were going to have an effect on them. Some, like new leases, that was a big issue. Can we bid honestly? If we bid on it, we have to get permission to mine it. That was a big issue, a lot of work there.

LB: Why were you interested in that sort of thing?

MD: It was my living.

LB: I understand that, but I mean why did you step into it in the first place?

MD: I came from a family of coal miners and they made a very good living off of it. Some of the issues, like the black lung deal, affected many of my relatives and many miners are affected by the black lung disease. In general, the mining industry got safer as the years went by. I worked underground for 2-1/2 years and there were people getting killed more often than they should have been. Now we are just about to zero fatalities, which is really good. So the interest was there just because of the people I grew up with, the mining community. Carbon County is a mining community.

LB: What was it like growing up in Carbon County with mines being busier than they are today?

MD: I think growing up in Carbon County is probably one of the greatest experiences that you could have. You were around a lot of grown-ups and a lot of stuff is going on within the community, within the towns you know; they had gambling, they had liquor, and all that stuff, until everybody cracked down on them. So you really got a life experience, how to grow up in a world and be a part of that world. Growing up with coal miners was great because they worked hard, they played hard, and they spent their money.

LB: There were union and there were non-union mines. Was that a point of tension?

MD: It was a very serious point of contention in the late 1970s, early 1980s. There were only a couple of non-union mines. When the mine contracts came up they would strike, the United Mine Workers would strike the mines. We had some serious mine strikes within the county, some serious stuff where they rolled buses over, threw rocks through windows, and all that. That's hard to believe but that happened in the early 1980s. Eventually the pendulum turned and there is only one union mine now in Carbon and Emery counties, that's the Utah Power & Light mine. Before there were only a couple of non-union mines, so the pendulum really swung around. At the time it was really tough. When the Wilberg disaster happened [1984] that was the first time non-union coal went into a union power plant, which was a power plant in Emery County. Plateau did that and we got a contract based on the fact that the minute they went back into production in the Emery County mines we'd get out of there, and we did. But now the whole thing has opened up and it's all non-union coal going in there. I mean a lot of non-union coal. I think the hardcore days of the United Mine Workers vs. non-union miners has gone.

LB: Why is that?

MD: I'm a very strong union guy, but there's a very strong anti-labor, organized labor [sentiment], throughout the country. When I worked at Plateau, a union-free mine, we paid more than the union miners made to keep the unions away. That's basically what it was. So all the non-union guys had to thank the United Mine Workers for their wages being just a little bit more than [union wages].

LB: Do you have any impression whether safety in a union or a union-free mine were different?

MD: Well, having an experience with the one particular mine, with Plateau where I worked, I used to attend their mine safety meetings and I think they were more stringent than the union mines because those guys would have a guy from every section of the coal mine meet and tell management what was bad about their particular area in the mine. There was immediate action taken to clarify. The union mines had the same thing but they weren't required to have that many miners involved in it. I think between the two, mine safety was probably the most important thing there was. There have been some exceptions to that, though.

LB: Was your family union?

MD: Yes. I was the only non-union guy. I was not mining, I was government affairs.

LB: That kind of let you off the hook?

MD: When they had a particular strike or they had a picket line somewhere, I would conveniently miss it.

LB: Was there a perception in the Legislature about union vs. union-free mines?

MD: No. It was not an issue in the Legislature. I think it would be today, but it wasn't in those days. In fact, the United Mine Workers had a lobbyist up there full-time, which was good. They needed it, too, you know, just a good public relations deal to have a guy. They always had someone there who was really knowledgeable and did a good job.

LB: Did you work with that person?

MD: Yes, very good friends with him.

LB: When you were in the Legislature, were you on any committees that were involved with mining?

MD: Well, I was on that select safety committee appointed by Governor Huntsman after the Crandall Canyon deal. I was the legislative representative on that.<sup>23</sup> It was a great experience. I worked with some real high quality people on that. And then I worked on the Natural Resources Committee just about my entire legislative career, which had a lot to do with coal leasing and stuff.

LB: In the strikes that happened occasionally, where did that violence come from? Was that a frustration or what?

MD: I think it was frustration. You're out of work for a long time, you see people going to work and maybe think, "They're costing me my job." I could see that point of it. Law enforcement came out of Salt Lake [to the mines] and they were kind of patrolling. There were some sad deals but that kind of slacked off, but it just came from frustration. In the early days of mining they tried to kill the miners off at Sunnyside. They had guys up there with guns and all that, you know, to kill the union guys off. That was the turn of the Century. You can still see on the Sunnyside hillside where they used to have guys with machine guns or whatever guns they used up there. But that was a long time ago.

LB: Carbon County has a fair ethnic diversity. Was that ever a factor in these union vs. non-union squabbles?

MD: No, not at all. The union and non-union make up was alike, both had mostly foreign people, immigrants and immigrants' children.

LB: When we interview people who have actually worked in the mines for their career, one of the common comments we hear is the wonderful camaraderie among the workers. Were you aware of that?

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<sup>23</sup> On 27 Aug 2007, Utah Governor Jon Huntsman, Jr, issued an executive order establishing the Utah Mine Safety Commission. Members included Chairman Matheson, Senator Dmitrich, Representative McIliff, former Senator Garn, Litvin of the Utah Mining Association, O'Dell from the United Mine Workers of America, and the mayors of Price and Huntington (Executive Order 2007-0010, viewed at [laborcommission.utah.gov](http://laborcommission.utah.gov); Utah Mine Safety Commission, Report and Recommendations to Governor Jon M. Huntsman, Jr, Jan 2008)

MD: Yes, very aware. We worked the graveyard shift and I think the oldest guy with us was, like, 21 years old. But we stuck together, there were five or six of us. We did our work and we were very safety conscious, but if an accident ever happened in the mine everybody was there to help, to assist with it. Like I said, my father got killed in 1957; there were three of them killed and boy, everybody went there to try to uncover them. To no avail, but yes, they really take care of each other.

LB: What about management, was there a similar sense of fraternity in management people?

MD: I think management people were a fraternity within themselves. I'm not so sure that management and hourly people were that close, with the exception of when they had to be. It was always them vs. us, so to speak. But when there was a need, safety for example, then they got together but usually management didn't have that much to do with the hourly people.

LB: Was there an animosity there?

MD: No, not animosity. You had the salaried people and the hourly people, and they had to work together. As far as upper management goes, very seldom did they [hourly people] get involved with them; they went through their superiors.

LB: Did management encourage their employees in any way to become involved in community affairs or organizations in the community?

MD: I don't know if they encouraged them, but they were very good financial providers for local things; you know, the rodeos, the Little League baseball, and all that. I think they were very liberal with their contributions to keep those community events going. In my particular case, they were glad that I was in the Legislature. Representative John Gar used to work for Coastal States [Energy Corporation]; they were very happy to have him there. I think they [mining companies] encouraged that, encouraged the members to be in Kiwanis Club, the Rotary Club.

LB: When you took people on tours of these mines, to help sell your points, what kind of reactions were you getting from the people on the tours?

MD: I did mine tours at Plateau and I must have taken hundreds of Japanese people through the coal mine. Just about weekly I was taking four or five of them in there. One of the good stories about that, I always had an interpreter with us and part of the tour was we'd show them the working face, and I told everybody, "When you see me run you get scared. Just stay behind me and be careful." So I was very safety conscious with them. As part of the tour on the way out, there were dinosaur tracks in the roof and we always showed them that. It was one of their real highlights, to see the real dinosaur track. Well, one particular day the interpreter didn't go with us. I said, "Well, just tell them to stay by me and not mess around, and be very safety conscious." He did. On the way out I'm showing them the dinosaur track; they had no idea what I was talking about. So I kind of got down on all fours and was walking around! They still didn't

know. So we got up [to the surface] and [the interpreter] told them. They got to laughing and they wanted to go back to see the dinosaur tracks. We took a lot of Chamber of Commerce people through. When they went through the mine safety orientation, you always had three or four people who would drop out, get scared because they put on the safety equipment, oxygen mask and all that, and they'd back out. Some of them would back out and wouldn't go under[ground]. Just about every one of them that went through the mine was very impressed.

LB: Is the inside of a coal mine actually black?

MD: The inside of a coal mine is white. It is unbelievable, but it is white. It is the rock dust.<sup>24</sup> They put rock dust on it, that's to stop the explosions from happening. It is amazing. You go in there and it's really dark if you turn all the lights off in the mine; you get a weird feeling how dark it really is. But when you turn them on, it's not real white, but it's white not black. Except where the coal has sloughed off.

LB: The companies that ran these mines, did they actually have a physical presence at the mine? Their corporate office or anything, was that right there near the mine?

MD: Early on it was, but as the big companies bought the coal mines the corporate offices were out-of-state, usually, Colorado or somewhere. Ours was in Colorado. Some in Pittsburgh, you know. The bigger corporate offices weren't in the state, in fact, very few of them had a presence in [Utah]. Coastal States, I think, was one of the few that had a presence; they had an office in Salt Lake.

LB: Did that impact the relationship with the miners and the local communities?

MD: I don't think so. I think their charitable giving more than made up for any negative that they'd have by not being a presence in the State of Utah. The locals did a real good job, like I said earlier, really making sure that the charitable stuff went out to the proper places. They were very good about it.

LB: There were a lot of different communities in the Price-Helper vicinity that were all tied to mining: Latuda, Kenilworth, there are just bunches of them. Were those rival communities? Were there relationships among the communities?

MD: When I was in grade school, early high school, just about every mining camp had their own baseball team. They got a lot of good baseball players, some major leaguers; they'd get them a job in the mines so they'd play baseball. The sports were a rivalry. Kenilworth had their own team, Wattis had theirs, Hiawatha was one of the big ones, Helper had a team. So every little town had a little baseball team and it was a big event for the people to go watch them play. It

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<sup>24</sup> MSHA defines rock dust as a light-colored, non-caking, pulverized stone manufactured from limestone, dolomite, gypsum, or other inert material applied to prevent coal dust explosions ("Rock Dusting," Mine Safety and Health Administration viewed at [msha.gov](http://msha.gov)).

was really an interesting thing, and like I said, a lot of real good ball players came here as a result of that.

LB: Can you think of a name?

MD: Herman Franks, San Francisco; he actually grew up in Price but he ended up playing for the New York Giants.<sup>25</sup> He and Willy Mays were great friends. There was a Settle guy that probably could have gone to the majors. A Burge guy that was real good. There were quite a few, really.

LB: And the mining companies sponsored these teams?

MD: Yes, they actually gave them jobs. They actually recruited good ball players and gave them jobs outside the mine, doing hardly anything, so they could play baseball.

LB: Were there other social things?

MD: Labor Day was a real big day, especially when all the union mines were there. They had all kinds of events on that day. They had coal loading, who could shovel the most coal and all that, horseshoes; it was a big all-day event. Everybody kind of got together on Labor Day; it was a big deal. Now, they don't even have it, hardly.

LB: What do you think has been the reason for the diminished production in the coal mines in Utah?

MD: Demand. The demand for coal is not there like it used to be. We're losing all the power market. I think it is a sad day in the United States when we get to thinking we can produce [power] from natural gas and solar and wind power. I think your power bills are going to keep growing out of sight without the coal-fired power plants. That impact hasn't hit back East yet because they've been able to hold their coal-fired power plants, but out here they're shutting down the Castle Gate plant.<sup>26</sup> I think it is all market oriented.

LB: The train maintenance facility near Helper, is that going to last through this coal shutdown or is that independent of the coal trains?

MD: There is still a lot of coal being shipped out of the Skyline Mine and there is some out of the East Carbon area, and then Lila Canyon. So there is still coal being produced and they have to go by rail. It is cheaper to go by rail, so the railroad is a very important part in the coal mining

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<sup>25</sup> Herman Franks was born in Price and attended the University of Utah. He began his major league career in 1939 and played through August 1949; he played for the Dodgers, Athletics, Cardinals, and Giants. Franks died in Salt Lake City in 2009 (Baseball-Reference.com).

<sup>26</sup> The Carbon Power Plant at the mouth of Price Canyon is operated by Rocky Mountain Power, owned by PacifiCorp. It is Utah's oldest coal-fired generating plant but is scheduled to close in 2016 when federal limits on mercury emissions take effect. About 74 jobs will be lost ("Utah's Carbon Power Plant heads for early retirement," *The Salt Lake Tribune* 29 Mar 2015).

industry. We used to have Utah Railway, just a little branch there in Helper that used to just service Hiawatha and Plateau mines; there is no more Utah Railway.<sup>27</sup> But the others are still shipping a lot of coal. IPP really hurt us when they slowed down and are converting [their power plant] to gas, because they had their own unit train and everything.

LB: Tell me what IPP stands for.

MD: Intermountain Power Project. It was a deal that was put through the Legislature, a joint agreement that was 25% owned by Utah cooperatives and 75% by LA Power.<sup>28</sup> LA Power made the decision that they did not want any coal-fired power or plants producing their power and I think it is a terrible mistake. They're not buying any coal-fired power. But IPP used four million ton [of coal] a year, maybe a little more. That's a lot of coal. The Emery power plant, she uses about eight million ton a year. The rest was exported; I think we got up to 27 million ton at one time. I don't know what it is now, I haven't kept track.

LB: Well, you drive through Price now it sure feels different than it did in the late 1980s.

MD: It is no longer a mining community, you know. It is an oil and gas community; they got the big crude oil plant out in Wellington<sup>29</sup> where the Wellington [coal] washer plant used to be. It is kind of turning around a little bit. Then Castle Gate used to be real neat mining community and that's gone, all of it is gone.

LB: In your role as a Legislator, what do you look back on with the fondest memories?

MD: I think the fondest memories you have as a law-maker is what you can do to help your communities, or what you can do to help individuals. A couple of things come to mind. The college that is now Utah State Eastern,<sup>30</sup> I think, was a big issue; you know we have a branch in Blanding. To get the new buildings we've got on those campuses has been a big addition and something to be proud of. I think improvements to Highway 6 [SR-6] was a big, big deal. I was

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<sup>27</sup> Utah Railway was organized in 1912 as the Utah Coal Railway, whose parent company was United States Fuel Company, a subsidiary of US Smelting, Refining and Mining Company. Its purpose was to transport coal from the mines in Carbon and Emery counties to customers on the Wasatch Front. A maintenance facility was constructed in 1914 at Martin, located west of Helper. In 1985, Utah Railway and the Union Pacific began joint operations to service the power plant at Delta, Utah. Lately, the railway runs coal cars between Grand Junction, CO and Ogden, UT using tracks by agreement with the Union Pacific and BNSF railroads; Utah Railway is now owned by Genesee & Wyoming, Inc. (UtahRails.net; gwrr.com).

<sup>28</sup> The power plant is located near Delta, UT and is owned by the Intermountain Power Agency. The operating agent is the Los Angeles Dept. of Water and Power and operations and maintenance are the responsibility of the Intermountain Power Service Corporation and the Intermountain Power Agency. The cooperative participants include six municipal utilities in California, 23 in Utah, six rural cooperatives in Utah, the Nevada Electric Cooperative, and one investor-owned utility in Utah ("Intermountain Power Station," at SourceWatch.com).

<sup>29</sup> A transloading facility called the Price River Terminal was built to serve the Uintah Basin oil field. It opened in Dec 2013 and shipped its first trainload of Uintah crude in Feb 2014 ("Price River Terminal Ships First Unit Train of Uintah Crude," Global One Transport, Inc., 25 Feb 2014 viewed at ogfj.com).

<sup>30</sup> The College of Eastern Utah campuses in Price and Blanding merged with Utah State University in 2010 and is now called Utah State University Eastern, or USU Eastern.

fortunate enough to have that section of highway named after me.<sup>31</sup> People wonder why, but we had a deal. I was the only Democrat that voted for the gas tax in 1992 or 1994, the last gas tax we had until this session [2015]. I took a lot of heat for it, but I'd had a discussion with UDOT [Utah Dept of Transportation] at the time and told them, "I'm going to support you, but I want to see something done to Highway 6 every year." And they've kept their word; we've had a major project on Highway 6 just about every year. That was very important. Then you help certain individuals do something, you know. I've always used the case of a guy by the name of Bo Huff in East Carbon. He's world-renowned; he makes classic cars. He came to me and I didn't even know him. They had a regulation in Utah where a car could not be lower than 8 or 12 inches from the pavement. Well, we changed the law, he and I. That gives some satisfaction; an ordinary kid comes up to you and you can change the law; things like that.

LB: If you had to do it over again, would you run?

MD: I would run but I'd probably have to have my wife agree to it if we did it again [laughter].

LB: Coal miners say that they often spend a lot of time devoted to the mine. Did you spend a lot of time devoted to the Legislature?

MD: Yes. When I first got elected it was 60 days and 20 days, then it became a 45-day session. I was in leadership half my career, and that required a lot of time spent in Salt Lake. I spent a lot of time working, too.

LB: So you kept your day job?

MD: The day job was probably the most important. The Legislature didn't pay anything.

LB: Do you think that there are any rules on the books now that are detrimental to the mining industry?

MD: Boy, I can't think of any. You know, I've been out of that for six years or so. I haven't heard much complaining lately, though. The only complaining you'd probably get out of the mining industry are the water regulations and the air regulations. Probably water, more than anything, right now.

LB: Are many of the mines wet?

MD: They're all wet; they are all wet. Subsidence is a big issue for the coal mines, you know, especially with the long-wall miner; it takes 1,000 feet out at once and you get subsidence. You take seven foot of coal and you probably get two feet of subsidence on the surface. That is a big issue and that's where the water regulations come in, too.

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<sup>31</sup> In 2009 the Utah Legislature established the Mike Dmitrich Highway, composed of the existing SR-6 between Interstate 15 and Interstate 70 (Utah Code 72-4-211).

LB: So the subsidence would affect surface flow, then?

MD: Yes.

LB: Were there experiences you had as a legislator that were pretty unhappy or left you frustrated or feeling badly because they didn't help the coal industry the way you'd hoped?

MD: Not really on that side of it. The 8-hour workday was a real emotional deal for a lot of us. Our State Constitution says that no miner shall work underground for more than eight hours; that is still in the Constitution. They repealed it as a statutory deal. Our argument for doing that, in fact Plateau signed a variance, the miners would have to agree to do it. They'd sign a variance that "we're going to work ten hours, four days a week" for example and they signed that variance and we got along real well doing that. Then all of a sudden, they came and said, "Let's take this eight-hour workday away so we can put you under for 20 hours if we wanted." That became a very emotional deal for some of us and we argued that for hours in the Legislature, debated it. We about prevailed, but we didn't.<sup>32</sup> But it is still on the books in our Constitution and I'm surprised that someone hasn't brought that up. We'd better put it into law and enforce our Constitution.

LB: What did your family think about you getting into the political realm?

MD: Well, it was really tough on the family. The kids were small and it put a big burden on my wife to raise the kids. You really could not be a successful legislator without the cooperation of the family. My wife had some bad moments, while I was in the Legislature, being alone and raising kids. The kids had some bad moments, saying that their dad was a legislator and all that. But when it all turned around, I think it was beneficial to everyone. I think everyone kind of enjoyed certain parts of it, not all of it, but they enjoyed it. We got to see a lot of the country, my wife and I. We went to a lot of different places, conventions and such, legislative conferences.

LB: Can you think of anything that we haven't covered that is important for future people to know about mining and politics in Utah?

MD: Well, I think one thing that's important that probably most people don't realize in Utah, is the mines pay 50 cents a ton or a dollar a ton;<sup>33</sup> it goes to abandoned mine reclamation. For years Utah was just using that for coal and then I think we were the first state to allow that fund to help

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<sup>32</sup> Article XVI (Labor), Section 6 of the Utah Constitution places an 8-hour workday limit on "all works or undertakings" carried on or aided by State, County, or Municipal governments. Section 7 of the article requires the Legislature to enforce Article XVI. The workday limit was codified by Title 34, Chapter 21, Section 2 which placed an 8-hour workday limit on smelters, mines, and related industries. In 2001, the Legislature passed a measure repealing this code and the Governor signed it into law on 20 March after a limited legal review found "no obvious constitutional or statutory concerns" ([le.utah.gov](http://le.utah.gov)).

<sup>33</sup> Mr. Dmitrich may be rounding together two different assessments. Utah coal mines pay 35 cents per ton of surface-mined coal and 15 cents per ton for coal mined underground. See [www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/retrieveECFR?gp=&SID=356945a54ba254265bd0c6d1d1d10e0f&mc=true&r=SECTION&n=se30.3.870\\_113](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/retrieveECFR?gp=&SID=356945a54ba254265bd0c6d1d1d10e0f&mc=true&r=SECTION&n=se30.3.870_113) for details.

other abandoned mines throughout the State.<sup>34</sup> There are hundreds of abandoned mines out in the West Desert in Utah and I think that is a real positive thing that the mining industry helped reclaim a lot of those areas. They were real safety factors. And then the mines were required to put up substantial reclamation bonds to make sure they're restored. I know the Plateau mine that I worked at, restoring that steep hillside was an amazing thing to watch. They had a Caterpillar actually tied onto another big Caterpillar on a wire thing, hanging down that hill while the operator was doing that. I think they've come a long way in making things look better. The Hardscrabble Mine was the first big reclamation project that DOGM did.

LB: Where was that?

MD: It is up by Castle Gate, by that Utah Railway, up that canyon. You'd never know there was a mine there. On the contrary, there are some areas that had to be reclaimed that maybe shouldn't have been. I'd say Kenilworth was a good example.<sup>35</sup> They had the old lamp house, the old bathhouse, the old horse stables; maybe it would have been a real historical thing to keep. But it was torn down and reclaimed. That was probably some of the good stuff about it, the reclamation project, and the bad stuff that we lost some of our historical stuff.

LB: Did you have a role in expanding that reclamation to other kinds of mines?

MD: No, but we did not fight it. We were paying for it. I thought it was a good public relations thing to kind of say that we're doing that to the people who were really advocating severance tax and tax on the coal industry, to say "Hey, they're doing a lot more for us than just mining coal." I think it was a public relations deal and I think it set a precedent. I understand that other states have done that now, too. Since the on-going mines have a reclamation bond covering them, there is really no need to reclaim coal mines anymore.

LB: Can you think of anything else?

MD: No, I think it has been a pretty good experience. If I was a child I would want to grow up in the coal mining camp again. We think of discrimination now days, [but] in the old mining camps we used to have so-called "Dago" towns, "Jap" town, Greek town.<sup>36</sup> And they all lived in their little segregated communities and that was, you know, no big deal.<sup>37</sup> Growing up in Carbon

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<sup>34</sup> The first non-coal mine reclamation in Utah was completed in 1985 in Little Cottonwood Canyon, in and around the Alta Ski area.

<sup>35</sup> The mine portals and surface structures were recorded in 1983 before reclamation took place, when it was estimated that about 75% of these were intact; the mine-town complex was determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (David Merrill, IMACS Site Form 42CB385, 18 Jun 1983). A post-reclamation assessment was conducted in 2011 and found that nearly all of the mine structures and portals had been removed, buried, or otherwise obliterated; only the town of Kenilworth remained relatively undisturbed from the 1980s (M.Searcy, IMACS Site Form Addendum to 42CB385, 21 Jan 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Mr. Dmitrich explained that these words were once commonly used but are now considered derogatory. Dago meant Italian ancestry and Jap referred to people from Japan. His use of the terms during the interview was intended to reflect historic times and was not intended to belittle or hurt anyone.

<sup>37</sup> Utah historian Philip Notarianni wrote an overview of Carbon County's ethnic diversity, "Utah's Ellis Island: The Difficult "Americanization" of Carbon County" published in Vol 47 of the Utah Historical Quarterly, 1979.

County I didn't realize how strong the Mormon Church was, until you leave there. It was a great experience growing up in a mining community. I'm glad my kids got to witness it.

LB: Did any of them go into mining?

MD: No. I only had one son and he decided he was going to go work in a coal mine. I said, "Ok, before you do it, I want you to at least spend a day up there." So I took him to the mine and I told the mine general superintendent, "Take Tony in there and show him everything. Show him the good, the bad, and the otherwise." They spent like ten hours underground; he came out and said, "I think I'm going to school." So he went and graduated and is a very successful person now.