

JOY HUITT
Oral History Interview

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

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This is Lee Bennett and I am here at the Price City Library with Joy Huitt to conduct an oral history interview for the Utah mining history project. Shirley Haycock is present as a silent observer, and Jim Mattingly is recording the interview.

LB: Joy, would you state your name, date of birth, and where you live now?

JH: My name is Joy Huitt and my date of birth is September 14, 1935, and I live in East Carbon, Utah.

LB: Ok. How long have you been in this area and why did you come here?

JH: I have been here, probably, 30 to 35 years. I'm here because my husband [Donald Huitt] and I were living in Wallace, Idaho and we thought it would be better for our children. We have six children and we thought it would be better if we moved back to where we came from, so that they knew their relatives and were acquainted with their family. He worked in the hardrock mine, so it was easy. At the time there was a lot of hiring going on in the coal mines and so we came back to East Carbon and he went to work at Kaiser.

LB: When did you go to work mining?

JH: I went to work in 1978, when I was 43 years old. I was laid off from the mine in 1984.

LB: Was that layoff because the mine was shutting down?

JH: The mine was shutting down, yes. At that time things were, you know the mining industry, it's either feast or famine. You don't get much in between. We worked real good for those years, for those 4-1/2 years and then the layoff came. Fortunately, my husband didn't get laid off, but I did. And they closed the mine.

LB: Did you come from a mining family?

JH: I do. My father was a coal miner, my husband is a coal miner, my son, and my grandson. They [son and grandson] work in Rock Springs, Wyoming. My father worked in Alabama in the coal mines.

LB: So you were working in one of the hard metal mines up there at Wallace?

JH: Right. We were in the silver mine. He was, I never worked in the mine until I came back to Utah.

LB: How did you find out about the work down here?

JH: Well, we have a lot of relatives here and they were encouraging us to move back. At the time, we had lost a child in that area and it kind of lost its glamour for us. So we were pretty anxious to move back.

LB: Was your family young at the time you moved here?

JH: Yes, they were reasonably young. I still had five of my children at home. So when we moved back to East Carbon, it was quite an adventure for them as well as us. But it was home for me [laughter].

LB: How is it that you got to work in the mines?

JH: Well, I was working in a nursing home. I was an LPN and I was working in a nursing home and a couple of my friends had decided maybe we ought to try the coal mine. So I ran that past my husband and he said, "Well, I don't know. Let's think about it." And then I asked my children and of course they were all for it because they knew there would be a lot of benefits that I wasn't receiving in the nursing home. For instance, you were expected to be on-call all the time and vacations were shortened a lot of times because a lot of people just don't like to work in a nursing home. You don't ever leave them short handed with older people to take care of. I was at the point where I was getting kind of burned out on all of it, so I thought I'll just pick the right time and I'll approach my husband about it and see what he thinks. He thought about it overnight and he said, "I think that's a decision you need to make because I'm not sure you know what you're getting yourself into." So I said, "Well, I'm willing to give it a try." We went from there, went to mine class and got hired right away at Braztah, it was Braztah at that time before Price River Coal bought them out. I went to work on the beltline where most of the new hires work. I worked there for quite a while and then I decided I wanted to kind of move up a little bit. So I checked into what the requirements were for a Fire Boss, to get your Fire Boss papers. I found out it took two years in the mine and at the time that I started thinking about it I had about a year and a half. So I studied and my husband helped me. I took the Fire Boss test and I passed the test, so then I started fire bossing at the mine.

LB: Let me take you back to when you were working on the belt.

JH: Ok.

LB: Tell me what that involved.

JH: Ok. Mostly shoveling, lots of shoveling. Before, I don't think I had picked up too many shovels in my life. A lot of the gals that work in the mine knew farm machinery and that type of thing. I'd never done anything like that. I'd been a waitress and a cook and a nurse, but nothing like that. When I first started I had blisters on my hands, I had tennis elbow and my knee, I'd wrap all these up every day going to work so I could get prepared and try to keep up with the guys I was with. We were with a crew at the time because we were all new hires. Fortunately for me, I was 43 when I went in the mine, so that made it a little easier for me than it did, probably, for the younger miners because the younger miners and the older miners were a little bit more helpful than they might have been had I been a few years younger. So that worked out well for me and I really enjoyed it. I'm sure Shirley [Haycock] has told you, and other people who have worked in the mines, when you go underground you're like a team and get very close. It's like a family, a family affair type thing.¹ After I'd worked on the belt and toughened up a little bit so I didn't have to wrap my elbows and knees and everything every day, I could work just with the gloves on without having to put a lot of bandaids on my hands. Then I went in the section for enough so that I could experience for when I became a Fire Boss, I would know what was going on in the miner section.

LB: Now, tell me what's the miner section.

JH: A miner section is where the coal is mined. Of course in Braztah, and later Price River Coal, they had a miner section, but they also had a long-wall section. So the miner section kind of prepares for the long-wall to go in and set up. You have, let's see how can I explain this? You have a cutting machine, or a miner, that cuts the coal and I'm sure things have changed a lot since I've been in the coal mine, but at the time it cut the coal. The shuttle operator, of course, the coal would go into the shuttle buggy and it would be dumped onto the beltline, and the shuttle car would go back and forth.

I went in as a Roof Bolter helper. The Roof Bolter goes in and pins the top according to specifications of how each roof bolt should be put in and how far. I was a Roof Bolt assistant; probably they gave me about a month being an assistant, which was great. But pretty soon they started having me help on the roof bolter when the Roof Bolter would take a break. Then pretty soon it evolves into if there's a bid that comes up, and you bid on it, and you have the seniority you can become a Roof Bolter. I did that probably for about six months. I really enjoyed it because you were more of a crew. When you went into the section, then you were on the beltline, because the beltline you were often times working with different people. But once you get into a section and you're on a crew, then it's really a great place to work. I think I enjoyed my time in the coal mines, after I got used to it. Got used to the fact that the people that I worked with kind of treat that you the way that you want to be treated. If you try real hard to do your part, and if you can't do it they're always there to give you a helping hand. I think that's why they probably let me be a Roof Bolter helper for a month before I did any roof bolting.

LB: Did you earn a different rate of pay on the belt as opposed to roof bolting.

¹ Joy was among 24 women miners interviewed by Marat Moore for *Women in the Mines: Stories of Life and Work* (Twayne Publishers, 1996) and remarked "...eventually a crew must become a single person in order to get the job done right."

JH: Right, and that was the incentive to get into the section as well as the fact that I wanted to get my Fire Boss papers. It was what I had in the back of my mind when I went in the section.

LB: What did a belt operator earn?

JH: I'm sorry I can't remember exactly it was. If you worked in the section, you're high rate, and that's all I can really remember. I know it was really good money at the time, but I don't remember the exact amount. I should have written that down.

LB: What attracted you to the Fire Boss role?

JH: Well, I watched the Fire Bosses and I saw that they have a lot of responsibility and I wanted to put my heart into what I was doing, I wanted to learn. I wanted to make sure I could do what was required for a Fire Boss, because they have to go in the mine four hours before anybody else goes in. There was myself and one other Fire Boss that would go in. Maybe I should back up. You asked me what attracted me. I watched them and I watched that they did. They would be at the bathhouse when we were just starting because they had already done their shift and fire bossed the mine.

LB: What did the Fire Boss do? They go in first, what are they doing?

JH: Ok, they're checking the mine for any hazards. You each have a section and my section was eight miles of beltline, plus there were a couple of different areas that I would have to get off the beltline, go in and check. Like some of the old works that needed to be checked to make sure they were ok. Of course, at Price River Coal the older part of the mine was close to the mouth of the canyon, and so there was a lot of old works that had been sealed off that they were no longer working. They put the stoppings in and you had to check and make sure that the seals were secure in all of those different stoppings. Interesting thing, just a little sideline. Up at Braztah, the walkway coming into the mine was crooked. I said, "What was that for?" They said that was when there were horse-drawn carts that took the coal out and that was to slow them down so they wouldn't get going too fast down the slope. I thought that was kind of interesting when I first learned about it.

LB: You had to study to be a Fire Boss?

JH: Definitely. You had to take the state test. To my knowledge, at that time there were not other women in the West, I don't know about the East, but in the West that had taken that test. When I did take the test, when I had the experience -- two years in the mine -- and I had worked in the section and was pretty familiar with all of the workings and everything that was going on inside the mine, then I decided "Ok, it's time." So I took the Fire Boss test. It was quite amusing, at that time you had a lamp that you had to carry on your belt and in order get your certification you had to be able to take the lamp apart and clean it, and show them that you knew what was going on with the lamp, when the wick would go down, everything about it. As soon as I went in the group and took the test, as soon as I would turn in a section of my test, the guys wouldn't noticeably do it, but almost before I would sit down they would take my test and check

it out. First one. When we went in there were six of us that went to each area, and they said, "Well, one of you needs to take the lamp apart and clean it and show us how to put it back together again." They said, "Why don't you do it?" and I said, "Ok." So I did it, I took it apart, because believe me I, watched the guy who was the bathhouse attendant at the time. He used to let me come in a little bit early and he'd let me take it apart and put it together, showed me how to clean it. They were so helpful, encouraging for me to get my papers, because I think they kind of wanted to have a woman because it was the time of affirmative action, and so I think they really pushed it for me to go ahead and get my papers and to pass the test. I held my breath until I passed the test, then they immediately gave me a Fire Boss job.

LB: More money still?

JH: No, it wasn't more money. It was high rate. But I think for me it was just something that I wanted to succeed at. That was more the incentive than the money. I know that most of the women are very curious about everything. They ask a lot of questions, they want to know what's going on, what does he do, what's going on there? I think most of them are very inquisitive because it is a whole new world. It's not like anything I had ever been in in my life. My learning was great for me and I loved being a Fire Boss. A lot of the coal miners would not go in the mine alone, and there was only myself and one other Fire Boss that went into the mine four hours early on the weekend, to start the mine up. I was pretty proud of that fact, you know. Some of them would say, "I'd never be a Fire Boss."

Sometimes it gets a little eerie in there, you can imagine, in the mine with nothing but that light on your cap, your cap light, and you're walking along and there might be some water and the light'll flash off it and it kind of startles you for a minute. And in Price River Coal there's low coal and for 15 crosscuts you walked bent over in low coal, and so I would go as fast as I could through there and stop, I had my places where I stopped to rest, and I disciplined myself that I wouldn't stop anymore than that. I just wanted to get through that low coal because it's not much fun to walk bent over through there.² That was an interesting part of it. Also the fact that I think the guys kind of gave me a little extra respect because I wasn't afraid to go into the mine. I mean, if something's going to happen to you, it's going to happen and there's no need being afraid of anything. You do get a little leery, and the guys asked me "Now tell us honestly, Joy, was there ever anytime that you really, really got scared?" and I said, "Yeah, there was one time." I was almost out of the mine and I had to go back into one of the sections that I talked about. You had to go up a ladder and climb back to check one of the seals. It was almost outside. When I got there and my light shown, there was a rat right in front of me. A big rat! I screamed, I threw my walking stick, I threw everything. And I mean, it startled me! It was pretty ugly. But I tell you it was as afraid of me as I was of it. So I never admitted it. Sometimes I'd get a little nervous but I never wanted to tell them if I was really afraid. I would always tell them that story [about the rat] if they asked me "Did you ever really get really scared?"

All the old coal miners, and I'm sure that you've probably heard this story, they say that if a coal miner is killed and you go by those stoppings, any of them that were killed in that mine,

² After the interview, Lee asked Joy how low was low. She held her hand out at about 4 ft above the ground, and said it was about that high and that's what made crawling through it so challenging.

their spirits are back there. And if you ever hear any scratching on the bricks, you'll know it's them. If you ever hear that noise, don't worry about it because it's just those spirits of the old coal miners. I said, "Well, I'm going to tell you something: If any of them scratch on the wall I'm going to tell them to come on out and help me. I'm not going to be worried about them." They tried a lot of tricks to scare you, which is normal and which is fun, and it's a lot of the spirit of working in the mine. I mean these are the things that make it interesting and make it something that you hold dear in your heart. And the people that you work with, you really start to think of them like family. And I think that's why it was such a tragedy to this area when there's a mine disaster because it just feels like part of your family's gone. It is really moving. Even if you hear of a disaster in China or India, it still gives you that feeling because you know what was going on. You just have that kindred spirit, I guess.

LB: Did you every have any close calls?

JH: Well, yes, but they were behind me. When I was walking the belt I had a whole area just slough right off, but I had just passed by there and fortunately for me, I'd gone passed that and I wasn't hurt at all. It made you know that you were in a coal mine, because it was a huge bounce and then the side slacking off. Of course, you have to go check and see what happened. I shut the belts down immediately and called outside. There is a person outside all the time when you're in the mine. There's periodic cell phones, not cell phones, excuse me, that's the new thing, the squawk phones that they had in the mines at the time. I understand now that things are a lot different, that they have ways they can almost keep track of where you are in the mines. So I called out immediately and they sent somebody down the slope to bring me out, and came and checked it. And then called in the belt crew to come and break it up and shovel it on the beltline. That was probably the only really close call that I had in the mine all the time I was working there. I was very fortunate. A lot of times in the section it gets a little scary when the miner is cutting and the top comes down, and those kinds of things. But I really was not ever in really a close call.

I will tell you an interesting story of one of the Indian girls that worked on the beltline. She was pregnant, and of course she didn't tell anybody for a long time. And finally she told me she was pregnant. She was working and she fell off of one of the ladders. Sometimes you had to climb up the ladder to get across the belt. She fell off of there and they thought she broke her leg. Of course they called me because, you know, she was a little timid because she was a Native American. They said "You'd better come down here because she's kind of timid about everything." I said, "Ok, give me a few minutes. It'll take me a while to walk down there." Then I said, "I think I'd better tell you that she's pregnant." Oh, my word! They said, "You get down here! We're going to send one of the carts up to get you. Hurry, get down here! We don't know what to do with a pregnant woman!" I said, "You don't have to do anything any different with a pregnant woman than you do with any woman." And I said, "If she's having any difficulties she will tell you." I told her, "I hope I didn't betray your confidence by telling them, but I thought maybe they'd better be aware of it when that happened to you." But she was fine, and I worked with another girl in the mine that was pregnant. She was a Roof Bolter and the guys used to be really good to her. They would let her go rest in the kitchen, as they called it. Take more breaks than normal. They said, "Ok, now remember when this little boy is born that he already has nine months seniority in the mines. So when he signs, up make sure they know

he's got nine months seniority in the mines." They were really very good with her. And she was a lovely girl.

LB: When you worked underground, say as the Fire Boss, what was your typical day like? What time did you have to show up? Where were you living and how did you get to the mine?

JH: I lived in East Carbon and I worked at the mine that is in the canyon. When you were coming down you probably saw the loadout there in the canyon if you came from Salt Lake.³ I worked straight graveyard, and I would go four hours early on Sunday. That was the only day you had to go early. The rest of the time you would go at your regular time because the mine had been fire bossed on all three shifts after it had been opened. But when it was closed down for the weekend, or a holiday or something, then that's when you would go in, and every Sunday. I would leave my house probably around 10:30 and start to work at 12 o'clock.

LB: Midnight?

JH: At midnight. I would get through the whole thing, it would take me 12 hours to walk. I was allowed 12 hours because you get 4 hours time and then your regular shift. I was allowed 12 hours to walk the beltlines. It usually was early morning, then people would be coming on shift. I would be so happy I was getting off. But it was kind of hard on Sunday, especially, to leave and go early, but it was part of the job. The drive was ok except in the wintertime. It gets pretty rugged going up that road in the wintertime. Especially if any of the trucks are running, you get a little nervous there. But other than that, I didn't run into any difficulties as far as that was concerned.

LB: When you went to work at the mine, did they have bathhouse facilities for women?

JH: They did. We had a trailer and it was nice. We had our lockers and I know a lot of the women, like Shirley [Haycock] for instance that you interviewed before, had to go home dirty every day. But we had a nice bathhouse, and they made it very private for us. Instead of having open showers they had stalls, you know. That was something else I had to get used to, you know, running around naked in front of other women. That's as nice as I can put it. That gets to be old hat pretty fast. It doesn't bother you after a few days.

LB: How did your kids feel about you being underground?

JH: I think all of them were ok with it because I told them, "You know, if it's my time to go, I'm going to go whether I'm underground or walking down the street." So, they kind of took my attitude about it the same way. They were all ok. My one son-in-law had a little bit of trouble with it for a while. It made him real nervous, but he got over it. It worked out well with my

³ State and federal sources indicate that the Braztah Mine was a complex of older mines operated by Braztah Corp., a subsidiary of McColloch Oil Company who had begun acquiring the mines in 1971. Most of the coal was shipped to power plants in the midwest. Some of the older names for Braztah's mines were Hardscrabble No. 3, Carbon Fuel No. 3, Helper Coal, Blaze, Martin, and Spring Canyon No. 5; they were located in sections 4, 10 of T13S R9E SLM west of Helper, Utah.

family. Of course, it was nice for us because we had a better income coming in. It made things a lot more pleasant for them. And I was happy for that part, too.

LB: And your husband was mining also?

JH: Yes, at Kaiser. He worked at Kaiser Steel until they closed down. He worked there for 22 years at the same mine. He worked straight afternoon shift, and I worked straight graveyard shift, so that made for not a lot of time together, but it good quality time and it was kind of nice because we were familiar with everything. You know, he would talk to me about things in the mines before and I would want to be interested in them, but a lot of times I didn't have a clue what he was talking about. But when both of us were in the same profession it made it very nice. I might add that he got his Fire Boss papers when I did because I think there was kind of a little pride thing there [laughter].

LB: Tell me a little bit about East Carbon as a place to live. What was that like?

JH: Oh, it was great. It was started during the war. My father, as I told you, was a coal miner in Alabama and work was really, really slack. Him and a friend of his, of course with no money to speak of, hopped a freight [train] and went to Illinois because they heard they were hiring coal miners there. They said, "We're not hiring them here, but we're paying fare on the train for any miner with experience to go to Utah because they're opening up Horse Canyon," which produced coal for the steel plant. Of course, that was during the war. My dad said "Yeah, great," so him and his friend went to Utah.⁴ Daddy worked for a short amount of time, got enough money to get all of us kids because we came from a family of 13 kids. At the time my mother had nine children, so we had to come on the train from Alabama to Utah. My mother had never been out of the county that she was born in. She took us kids, it took three days on the train, and we changed trains three times. It was a great experience for us kids, we just thought it was the grandest thing ever. But when I look back and think of what my mother must have been like at that time! It was during the war and, and of course, the conductor would always bring the kids on board and give us a seat before they let any other passengers on, which was so wonderful. But then, all of the service people would come on and my mother would say, "You kids move over and let one of the boys sit by you." That was a pretty neat experience because they wore their uniforms; they didn't have to pay if they wore a uniform. It was neat and I met a lot of young men that probably went off to war and didn't come back. They were so young, you know. They would draw pictures for us, give us their names.

Daddy was so happy when we got to Utah. We got to East Carbon [then called Dragerton], a brand new town, then the section [of town]. J.W. Galbreath, the name might be familiar to you, he owned the company there. The company store, the company everything. He built the houses. That was in 1942. We lived in the first section of the houses that were built there. They built on about four more sections, and then there were two other small towns up the canyon that they built. During that time, the coke ovens were going and it was a bustling town

⁴ According to his obituary (*Salt Lake Tribune*, 9/14/1958), Tilton James Coggins was a native of Alabama who had moved to Carbon County, UT in about 1944. At the time of his death, he was a unit foreman at the Horse Canyon Mine and a resident of Dragerton (now East Carbon).

and I think Horse Canyon probably employed about well over 1,000 men. Then there was Kaiser and, I think, they were pretty close to the same. It was a wonderful place to grow up. Everything revolved around the community, around the Union Hall, and Christmas was great. Big Christmas party and Santa Claus come around and give all the kids presents and everything. And it was very sad to see when the mines went down, and the town went down. It was hard to see that happen, but it happened all over our country. A lot of people felt that. Of course, by that time my father had been killed in a car wreck [1958], so he wasn't working in the mines when the town really started going down. But immediately after that my husband started working in the mines. We had left East Carbon, which was Dragerton at the time because I think the contractor's name was Drager and they just called it Dragerton. But the mail kept getting mixed up with Draper, so they changed it to Dragerton. Later on it became East Carbon; they got incorporated, became East Carbon.⁵ It was a real family oriented place, I mean, everybody knew everybody. The families kind of took care of other people. My sister lost her husband when he was young and she had three little girls, and that community just felt responsible for those little girls. The girls said, "You can't get away with anything unless my mother knows about it, because everybody's a watching us." But that was the kind of community that I grew up in, and that was what I wanted for my children. It wasn't quite the same, but it was quite a bit the same when we moved back because the mines had started back up. There was kind of a boom going on again. It was a lot the same thing.

LB: Was it after you were laid off with with the mines that you got to be active with the union? I mean I know you were a union member, but I'm thinking more of the office upside.

JH: In the office upside I was pretty active in the union because there was a lady that came from back east and organized what was called the Coal Employment Project. A lot of the women miners became a part of that and they were very strong union. And I'd come from a strong union family, so there was a lot of influence there.

LB: Were there a fair number of women miners at this time?

JH: At the time that I'm speaking about, yes I think there was. We used to have a women miners' convention every year and we had it in Price, Utah one time. Most of them were back east because that's where most of the women miners were from. We had them in Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Alabama. I was real familiar with a lot of things before, I would take my vacation days and go to the conventions. It gave me a real taste for things and the union at that time they were very strong. The union was real strong.

LB: Was that the United Mine Workers [UMW or UMWA, United Mine Workers of America]?

⁵ In July 1973 the citizens of Dragerton and Columbia voted to incorporate as East Carbon. In November of that year John W. Galbreath and Company turned over to the new city \$615,000 in assets, including deeds for 120 acres, the water and sewer systems, water rights, equipment, vehicles, and a building for city offices and the fire station. Shortly thereafter US Steel donated 700 acres, including part of the city's water supply (Ronald G. Watt, A History of Carbon County, Utah Centennial County History Series, 1997, pgs 93-94).

JH: The United Mine Workers, yes. The women miners were able to, I don't know if you're aware of the parental leave clause that is a federal law, and in the women miners there was a group that Betty Jean Hall, the administrator of the CEP, got together and formed like a little coalition from each area. We drafted the family leave clause, which is federal law now. We started out very, very small, like maybe 10 women miners and Betty Jean and two United Mine Worker women, and we took it all back to our local union and we started like a grassroots thing, and we got support from the unions, then we got it from the international. Finally we were able to take the clause to the Senate and Barbara Boxer presented it on the floor. It was passed. I know it would never happen now because what it does it lets a husband, if they're having a new child or have an ill child or elderly parent, take six weeks off. It wasn't a paid leave, it was a leave that they can take without any repercussions. And it's still in effect. At the time we thought we needed to go with not paid, because that would be pretty easy to pass and we thought maybe we could come back later. But then, of course, all the mines went down and it was impossible to get anything like that, but it's still on the books. That was one thing that we were really proud of, and we were all United Mine Worker members. That's where the grassroots thing started, was with the locals. Some of the guys weren't too happy about it to begin with until they really started thinking about it. They thought about how nice it would be if they could take, even if they didn't get paid for it, if they could take like a whole week or two weeks, even three weeks off, when they had a new baby and they could stay home and bond with their child. You know, not be in any jeopardy with their job because of it. Then they were very supportive. I'm very grateful that we were able to get that passed. That was one of the things that I was very proud of with the union, working with them and working with the CEP.

LB: You were elected to an office in District 22. Now I'm not familiar with union structure. Tell me what District 22 means.

JH: Yes. District 22 is the coal mines that are union mines in Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. And Wyoming, don't want to leave Wyoming out. That's the district that the mines consist of, and that's where you're elected from, from those four states, from the locals in those states. So you have to go to each local, to their meetings, and present yourself. Of course, Secretary-Treasurer, I think probably was a little bit easier to be campaigning for because a lot of the guys said "Well, you know, our wives take cares of our money." You had to get a fourth of the locals before you could even run.

LB: Was that hard for you to do?

JH: You know, it wasn't because I had been familiar with them through working the CEP at the time. I had come in contact with a lot of them because of lot of the women miners were from from that area that I had a lot of contact with them. I had to get a fourth of those locals and there was, I'm sorry I have to think for just a minute, I can't remember exactly how many locals, but I think there were 18 at the time, 18 different locals. So I had to go to each one of them, and of course, I didn't get them all but my first one was Wyoming and I was so excited to get that first one. Of course, I got the local that I was a member of and then my husband's local, and I had two brothers-in-law who were in the Horse Canyon local. Then I went down on the Indian reservation and I got their nominations because the Navajo are maternal, that's how their

inheritances go and so they look at things a little bit different as far as women go. So I was able to carry their locals.

LB: These were not just coal miners, where they?

JH: They were all coal miners. Some of them were surface miners. All of the Arizona coal mines are surface. All of the Navajo workers down there are surface miners.

LB: You mentioned CEP.

JH: Yes, that's Coal Employment Project.⁶ That's how I became involved, really involved politically with them to begin with.

LB: How long did you hold that office?

JH: I held it for one term and my second term, I lost it. I lost by three votes. I had a recount and then I lost by 10 votes! I should have just left well enough alone [laughter]. But I thought there's just something that's not right, but it was.⁷

LB: Did that end your involvement in the union?

JH: Oh no. No, I'm still a member. Of course, when the mines shut down they merged a lot of the locals, so I'm a member of Local 9956, which is the same one my husband belongs to. I'm not as active in the union as I used to be because I'm older. I don't have the time and my husband is ill, so I take care of him a lot. I'm not as involved but I still have a union card.

LB: Thinking about both your experiences underground and your experiences with the union, what's good about the union, as opposed to what the union isn't doing so well?

JH: I think the union has lost a lot of its power. I think it began when they allowed the, they call themselves "rent-a-miners" but I can't come up with the term right now. The union allowed them to come in. Different peoples would send their coal miners to the mines to work. What are they called? I can't remember, I'll just have to leave that blank! I'll just have to leave it at rent-a-miner until I come up with that term [contract miners]. I think that was the first step down, is allowing that to happen. And then slowly, slowly, slowly the unions have lost their power. I think a lot of it has been because the mines have become owned by large corporations instead of just companies. The large international corporations that have a lot of money can fight hard against the union, so they've lost a lot of their power. At the time that I was working they still had that. We still had a lot of influence. Of course Utah is a right to work state. It always has been, but that didn't pose a problem, but it does now.

⁶ Records of this project are housed in the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University. On line access at <http://archives.etsu.edu/?p=collections/findingaid&id=481&q=&rootcontentid=82762>

⁷ Joy was interviewed by Marat Moore for *Women in the Mines: Stories of Life and Work* (1996), and mentioned there that her election loss may have been due to harassment and discrimination in the District office.

LB: Was the union supportive of you going underground? Did you have to buck that?

JH: You know, I didn't really. I don't think they were real supportive of it except for the fact that it might look good for them. Especially if we attended the union meetings, and they really discouraged that. They said, "You don't want to go to those meetings. They're so boring." The women and I decided, "Hey, they don't want us to go. We'd better go find out what's going on." So, one of us went to every meeting from there on in.⁸ And then I became involved with it, and I served on the safety committee at the mine, and that helped a lot when I was campaigning for the office. I attended as many meetings as I could. But there was always one woman there, at least, and sometimes there were four. So, they began to accept us after a while.

LB: If you had to do it over again, would you go back underground?

JH: Oh yes! I'd love to go back underground [laughter], but I'm going to be 78 years old on my birthday so I don't think I have dreams of ever going back underground!

LB: Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your adventures in coal mining.

JH: Well, let me think for a few minutes. I probably could tell of a few things. I had to get used to the bounces in the mine. That was kind of scary for a while until you learn to recognize that.

LB: What did they feel like?

JH: They feel like an earthquake. Yes. Of course, that's what happens a lot of times. We have roof falls that take our miners. I do think as the UMWA has lost a lot, mines have shut down and the new mines that have opened up because they're owned by international corporations, they, of course, are non-union. They make sure that doesn't happen when they hire. I do think that the mines were safer, they were more stringent about safety than they are now. I think that MSHA [Mine Safety and Health Administration] has lost a lot of its power, especially, this is a little political under the Republican time they've been in office, it has really watered down a lot of our federal laws. It's not as strong as it used to be by any means.

LB: Anything else?

JH: Is that about what you needed?

LB: Yes, you did fine.

JH: I was a little nervous about it, too. Let me see what else I might have on here [looking at notes she brought with her]. I have on here about coal employment and when I was laid off. I think I've about covered everything that I'd written down that I thought you might ask me about. I don't have a good memory for dates anymore. I hate to admit that, but the old memory's not

⁸ In Moore's book Joy is reported to have said that the local union officers preferred the women miners to pay their dues and shut up. But she countered that women miners are not the type to be told to keep their mouths shut.

what it used to be. It surely isn't what it was when I was working in the mine, or when I took the Fire Boss test. Thank God for that, that I was able to that because I think it boosted a lot of things for me. Boosted a lot of things when I ran for office. Boosted a lot of things in the mine and in the community. When my son went to work at one of the mines, he was one of the rent-a-miners, the boss was giving him a pretty rough time. He [the boss] said, "What's your name, anyway?" and he says "Curtis Huitt," and [the boss] said, "Are you related to Joy Huitt?" and [my son] said, "Ya, that's my mother," and he says, "Ok, I'll get off your case" [laughter]. I felt good about it, I felt good about working in the mine. I think you establish your reputation and I think it goes a long ways. I've been out of the mine for a long time and yet once in a while I'll see one of my campaign stickers on one of the guy's mine hats, or something like that. It encourages me. I went in to one of the mines just on some business and checking out some things for my son, and there were a couple of my stickers in the office and I felt good about that, too. It was a good experience.