

GARTH NIELSEN

Oral History Interview

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

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This is Lee Bennett and I'm here today at the home of Garth Nielsen in Spring Glen, Utah, to interview him about his experiences in the Utah mining industry. Also present is Jim Mattingly who will be recording the interview.

LB: Will you give me your name, date of birth, and where you now live, please.

GN: Garth Nielsen. I was born August the 11th, 1953 and I live in Spring Glen, Utah.

LB: Have you always lived here?

GN: I was born and raised in Emery County until I was 18 years old. I moved over here to Helper and lived there for about six years then I moved to Spring Glen. So basically, yes, I have lived in the mining area here my whole life.

LB: Was mining a family tradition?

GN: No, not in my family. My family was farmers. I was born and raised on a dairy farm in Emery County. None of my family was in the mines.

LB: So what got you into mining?

GN: I graduated from high school. My mother was killed in a car wreck right when I got out of high school. I was going to college and the funds kind of slowed down because my mother was killed. So I decided I'd better do something, and I got married at the time, I tried to be a butcher. That didn't pay well, so I went with what a lot of fellow classmates did, and went to work in the mine to make a good living for a family.

LB: What was your first job and what was the name of the first mine?

GN: The first mine I worked in was the Deer Creek Mine. It was owned at that time by Peabody Coal Company,¹ and I went in as a laborer.

LB: That was what year?

GN: That was [looks at his resume] in 1973.

LB: You went in as a laborer. Does that mean that you were on the belt?

GN: I shoveled belt. At that time they had some holes and you had to bucket water to get rid of water. I did rock dusting. Just the odds and ends, labor jobs. I went into a section just a few months after I started, and I was in a section with a boss telling me to do all the labor type work, not run equipment, but all labor work.

LB: Like what?

GN: Like rock dusting, hanging braddish,² shoveling ribs, cleaning feeder-breaker. Just all that type of work.

LB: What's a feeder-breaker?

GN: Feeder-breaker is a piece of equipment.³ The continuous miner cuts the coal in the face and puts it in a shuttle car, and the shuttle car will haul it to what they call the feeder-breaker. It sizes the coal and puts it on the belt, and then takes it out of the mine.

LB: At that time do you know where this coal was bound?

GN: I did because the first mine that I worked in, Deer Creek, was tied to a power plant, the Huntington Power Plant.

LB: How long did you stay with that mine?

¹ Peabody Coal began operating the Deer Creek Mine in 1969 and sold it in 1977 to PacifiCorp. It was acquired in 2006 by MidAmerican Energy, the owner of the power plants to which the Deer Creek Mine provided coal. The mine is scheduled to close in the spring of 2015 ("Deer Creek Mine," viewed at SourceWatch.org; "Emery County mine to shut down," *Salt Lake Tribune* 15 December 2014).

² Brattice cloth is a fire-resistant canvas fabric or plastic material used to control airflow in underground mines (Glossary of Mining Terms, Kentucky Coal and Energy Education Project at coaleducation.org). Utah coal miners often pronounce it braddish.

³ An above-ground demonstration of a feeder-breaker can be viewed at Feeder Breaker, Feeder Crusher, Coal Feeder Breaker, Chain Crusher on YouTube.com.

GN: I worked there for approximately three years [1973-1976] and then I went to the Valley Camp Mine up in Scofield, Utah.⁴ It was a small mine, and I worked there about a year.

LB: Was it also a coal mine?

GN: It was.

LB: What did you do there [Valley Camp]?

GN: I was hired on as a Fire Boss-Miner Operator. The whole time I worked there I was doing those jobs: Fire Boss and continuous Miner Operator [1976-1977].

LB: How did you learn to be a Fire Boss?

GN: By the other people. I learned all the things they had to check, and all the things that you needed to do. Then you studied and had to take a test to be a Fire Boss. If you pass that test the State of Utah will give you a Fire Boss certificate and a number which gave you the right and privilege to be able to inspect the mine for safety issues. You were basically an inspector for the company to go around and check for all the safety issues. You had to fill out a book every shift, with all the results of your inspections and the things that needed to be done to correct those inspection items.

LB: Why did you get into that instead of staying with the mining activity?

GN: I was still a continuous Miner Operator. I would just go earlier and I would Fire Boss the mine before the people got there. Then I would go and do my regular job.

LB: Were both of these mines union or were they non-union?

GN: Both Deer Creek and Valley Camp were both UMWA [United Mine Workers of America].

LB: Where did you go next?

GN: After that year I went down to Braztah. It was called Braztah Corporation and it was up in Spring Canyon. It was a mine they'd just opened up and I worked there, again approximately a

⁴ The Valley Camp mine, owned at the time by Quaker State Resources, Inc., was one of seven small mines in the vicinity. During the 1970s the coal was shipped by railroad from a loadout near the town of Clear Creek, UT, and delivered to the Gadby Power Plant in Salt Lake City, UT and the Reid Gardner Plant at Moapa, NV. The mine was placed on standby status in March 1989 and in 1994 it was sold to White Oak Mining & Construction Company, Inc; the mine is now named White Oak ("Valley Camp of Utah," viewed at Utahrails.net).

year, as a Miner Operator.⁵ I left the Valley Camp operation because the person who was the manager over the Braztah Company contacted me and asked me to come down, they needed some good Miner Operators. That was also a UMWA mine. So I did, I went down there and I worked there approximately another year [1978-1979]. From that point, the same guy that got me to go there went out to the Soldier Creek operation right above Wellington; he was the manager there. He again contacted me and asked me to come up there as a foreman. I told him I didn't have quite enough years to be able to take the test and become a foreman. He said, "They can put you on a permit which will allow you to boss until you get to the next test and take the next test." [By then] I would have had the time, and then you could get your actual Mine Foreman certificate. So I did that and went out to work as a working foreman. For the first part I ran miner, did Fire Bossing, and was a working foreman at the same time. Eventually I became strictly a section foreman at that mine.

LB: What was the name of that mine?

GN: Soldier Creek [years at Soldier Creek 1980-1981].

LB: Who owned it?

GN: At that time, California Portland Cement owned that operation.⁶ It has changed hands several times in the past few years.

LB: Tell me about what a foreman does.

GN: A section foreman is over a certain portion of the mine. He has the responsible for all the safety, all the production, compliance with the government, in that part of the mine. There could be anywhere from six to 12 people usually, in a section. The section starts either from the belt drive [and goes] all the way to the face, or in some operations it was from the feeder-breaker to the face. It depended on who you were working for. You produced the coal, you managed the people, you comply with the law; that's what a section foreman does. You have to sign the books; you have to check for all the safety issues. You're the responsible person at that point for all those people.

⁵ The Braztah Corporation owned and operated several mines in the Castle Gate and Spring Canyon locales. In 1978 they opened the Braztah No. 4, which is probably the mine Garth went into. The company was a subsidiary of the McCulloch Oil Company and operated under the names Carbon Fuel Company at Helper, UT, and Price River Coal Company at Castle Gate ("Hardscrabble Canyon Mine" viewed at UtahRails.net).

⁶ California Portland Cement Company acquired the Soldier Creek Mine in September 1974 and began producing coal in June 1976. By the summer of 1979 there were 85 hourly workers and 30 administrative personnel employed at the mine to cover three shifts per day (Decision and Order, Soldier Creek Coal Company, a Division of California Portland Cement Co., and Elven Ray Stokes, Case 27-CA-05689-2, National Labor Relations Board, 13 July 1979).

LB: How many people worked in a section?

GN: It varied, like I said, it varied sometime depending on which operation. I was in a lot of different coal mines. I've been as low as four people on a crew running a section, to as many as twelve.

LB: With a continuous miner, what is the size of the working face?

GN: That depends on what Mother Earth gave to you. The average width in most coal mines is right around 20 feet. Some mines vary depending on the roof conditions; they can be anywhere from 21 feet to 17 feet, 15 feet, depending on roof conditions and what you're allowed to mine by law. If the roof conditions are bad then the government might want you to be a little bit narrower to help hold the roof up. But the width is somewhere in that ballpark. And it depends on what Mother Earth gave you as far as height. I worked one mine that was 43-46 inches high, but most operations around here average between six and nine, sometimes 10 maybe 12, feet. It depends on what the seam thickness was, and what equipment you had to mine it with. How high you'd cut was a decision made by management so you could manage the size of the equipment you put in, whether it was long-wall mining or whatever it might be. You had to have a piece of equipment that would vary on the height. If it was all real high you could use a bigger piece of equipment, but if it was going to go high and low then you had to get a mid-range piece of equipment.

LB: How did you decide which direction to go to get to the coal? Did mining engineers tell you that?

GN: Oh, yes, they do a lot of core sampling from the surface. They'll drill down and take core samples, then make a decision on the amount of holes, whether they're one-mile centers or whatever they might be. They will drill down and core to see how the immediate roof is, how thick the seam is, how thick the floor is, and then they would plot this out on a map. The Engineering Department has a very sophisticated way they survey. Believe me, they are very, very good. They keep you right where you need to be and you know exactly where you are. Every so often they come in and put sight strings in and you stay on those sights and cut exactly straight with what they put in. They drive the section just exactly where we need to go. The belts have to be very, very straight, so the entries have to be straight. Yes, it is very sophisticated, and we knew where to mine due to the core drilling and surveying, and those types of things.

LB: As a foreman, were you given targets on production, so much volume per shift, or something?

GN: Yes, everybody was budgeted. You knew what your budget was. We knew basically how many tons you could mine safely. You had to hit X-amount of tons because that was what they did their budget on, with all their overhead and power and all those type of things taken into consideration. You knew you had to get so much coal. Conditions sometimes dictated whether you could hit that production. There were times it was very good and you could really hit it easy, and there were times that you hit something that the Earth would give you that caused you to slow down and you wouldn't quite get the budget. They would work with you on that.

LB: From Soldier Creek where did you go?

GN: From Soldier Creek I went to Andalex. It was a mine that was just back towards Price just a little bit. Again, I knew the people there. They had contacted me and asked me if I would go to work for them. It was a pretty good deal that they gave me, so I went to work for Andalex Resources. I worked at the Pinnacle Mine. They had the Apex Mine there at that time; the Apex Mine was the one that was low coal. The best we ever got in there was about 60 inches, but that was very, very seldom. It was basically about 42-46 inches high; it was a little tough to mine because of the height. The Pinnacle Mine was a very good mine. I think I worked at the Tower from 1981-1985; I worked there about five years.

LB: And when you say the Tower, what do you mean?

GN: Tower Division.⁷ That was what they called the mine. It was the Tower Division, the Pinnacle Mine, the Aberdeen Mine, and the Apex Mine out there at that time.

LB: What did you do for them?

GN: Again, they had me running the miner, but I went to section foreman after a few months. They just barely opened up and started a new mine. I worked there as a section foreman on development, then I was a pillar-extraction foreman for quite a while, in the five years I was there.

LB: How does working in development and working in pillars differ?

⁷ Andalex Resources, Inc., which had operated in the Book Cliffs coal field since 1980, is now a subsidiary of UtahAmerican Energy, Inc., itself a subsidiary of Murray Energy Corporation ("Murray Energy buys Andalex coal facilities," *Sun Advocate* 15 August 2006). The mines of the Tower Division were located in Deadman Canyon about seven miles north of Price, UT and included the Aberdeen and Pinnacle; the Aberdeen closed in 2008 and the Pinnacle in 2006 (Michael D. Vanden Berg, Annual Review and Forecast of Utah Coal Production and Distribution 2009, Circular 112, Utah Geological Society 2010, pg 9-10; this report does not mention the Apex Mine as part of the Tower Division).

GN: Totally different. The development process is when you develop entries, like we were talking about. You develop whatever size of pillar of coal that engineering has decided was of sufficient size for the work that you're going to do. When you come back you extract those pillars and let it cave. The development was a little bit harder; you had to do a lot more roof bolting. You had to do a lot of things as you advanced. But coming back there wasn't as much roof bolting because you were extracting, pulling it out, and it was falling in and caving at that point. It was a full recovery type situation, you get as much coal as you can get.

LB: How was the pillar pulled so that it doesn't come down on top of you?

GN: It's a very calculated thing that they do. We learned from the way they did it in the past. Your senior people had done it a lot. Basically you have to leave enough coal to protect the people that are pulling it. As you pull the next pillar it will crush out that little bit of coal you left to hold the roof up where you were working. You systematically work your way pulling pillars across in a row, then you come back and pull the next row, and you keep doing that. It's a very good way of mining, a good recoverable way of mining to recover the coal. But you have to be very knowledgeable on how it works, and how to do it. People get very proficient at doing this and they still do it. Now days they have a lot more involvement, I think, than back then with the government, as far as MSHA.⁸ They have to have very extensive plans on how they're going to extract pillars. You just comply with that plan.

LB: What kind of equipment is used in pulling?

GN: The same thing you use as you develop. It's a continuous miner, a shuttle car, a roof bolter; the shuttle car dumping into a feeder-breaker. Back then we didn't have what they call MRS, which is Mobile Roof Support. They are four big cylinders with a big canopy that they set on, and you'd run your miner between them to pull back the pillar. Back then they didn't have MRS, so we set timbers. We'd set roof supports of wood timbers wherever we need to protect the people; we'd set [them according to] the government plan.

LB: Was it the Pinnacle Mine where there was a collapse or some kind of an accident?

GN: No, not that I can remember. There was no major accident at that mine.

LB: And from the Pinnacle where did you go?

⁸ Mine Safety and Health Administration, an enforcement agency within the US Dept of Labor, was created by the Federal Mine Safety and Health Act of 1977 (msha.gov).

GN: From there I went over to the Energy West Mining. After the Wilberg Mine fire,⁹ I had a real close friend that was one of the people that survived the Wilberg Mine fire, and he was the head engineer there. He was looking for management people. The Wilberg Mine was a long-wall operation, they used long-wall mining. I was still a young miner and I knew that I needed that experience to continue to grow in my occupation, so I went over there to work to get long-wall experience. The gentlemen at the Andalex operation, at the Pinnacle Mine, they understood that. I asked them, "Are you going to have long-walls?" and they said, "Probably not." I said, "I'm going to go get this long-wall experience because I'm going to be miner my whole life; I need that experience." So they said, "We understood," so I went over there and went to work. Right next to the Wilberg Mine we opened up the Cottonwood Mine.¹⁰ As we developed that we bought a new long-wall in and they moved me into a long-wall production foreman. At that point I was able to learn long-wall mining.

LB: Describe for me the difference between long-wall and continuous [mining machines].

GN: Wow. There is a terrific amount of difference. A continuous miner in a long-wall mine basically develops entries for the long-wall. It can vary in size, depending on what size of long-wall equipment you have. Whether it's 800 feet wide by a mile long, or whatever it might be, these continuous miners just drive both sides of the panels and around the back of it [panel], and they hook them together so you have ventilation down and around this long-wall panel. They set the long-wall up between these two sections and the long-wall [machine] cuts that coal out. It caves right behind the long-wall machine. It is very highly productive. Just a ballpark figure, a real good day on a [continuous] miner was 1,000 tons and a real good day on a long-wall, when I started, was 10,000 tons. That shows you the difference for the same amount of people. It was a very safe way of mining. You're under roof support all the time with the big canopies on the shield. It was really a very self-gratifying job to be able to see that big, massive piece of equipment to mine coal. It's caving right behind you so you live with your mistakes. If you make a mistake, you don't back this thing up; you just don't do it! You move forward and you've got to correct those mistakes. It is hard to steer it through the mountain. It was very intriguing to be able to run a long-wall, and a very interesting concept of mining. They've really changed the mining industry with long-wall mining; highly productive.¹¹

⁹ On 19 December 1984 a fire broke out in the Wilberg Mine, killing 27 mine workers. The mine was owned by Utah Power and Light Company and operated by Emery Mining Company ("Wilberg Coal Mine is Sealed to Put Out Fire That Killer 27," *The New York Times*, 31 December 1984).

¹⁰ The Wilberg Mine dates from the 1890s and in 1958 it was divided into two separate and independent mines, the Wilberg and the Cottonwood. In 1990, Energy West Mining Company, a subsidiary of PacifiCorp, began operating the Cottonwood-Wilberg complex ("Cottonwood/Wilberg," Permit No. C0150019, Utah Division of Oil, Gas and Mining at linus1.ogm.utah.gov).

¹¹ In 1993, Utah was the third largest long-wall coal producing state, accounting for 13% of US long-wall mine output, which was more than double Utah's 1983 long-wall production (Energy Information Administration, "Longwall Mining," US Dept of Energy, March 1995, pg 36).

LB: So as the long-wall moves forward, it's collapsing behind it.

GN: Right behind the shield that you're working under.

LB: So how do you get out of there? How do you get your equipment out?

GN: Out of the tailgate or the headgate. Everything in front of you is protected; you've already bolted it up, the pillars help hold it. You've got very safe access going out both ends of the long-wall at all times. You have to maintain that. So as you pull forward it is just caving behind the shields, not where your headgate walkway [is], which is where you go out along side the stageloader and by the belt.¹² That area is always protected; you have to keep that open to get your people out. Same thing on the tailgate, you have to keep a safe access out the tailgate. The caving is a good thing, it's what relieves the pressure of the mountain. It allows the pressure of the mountain to release so it doesn't [cave] in front of you. If it doesn't cave real good, then you've got pressure in front of you. It is a very, very safe way to mine. It has its problems, just like anything else, but when mining is good on a long-wall it is the safest, best way you can mine. Sometimes when things go a little sideways and you get into some bad roof, or something, it can be a little bit challenging to be able to manage that type of machine, to keep it going. But it is highly productive so it makes a lot of dollars for a company and that is a good thing. It was a good thing to bring long-walls into this area, and most mines have them now days.

LB: Were any of the pieces of equipment manufactured locally?

GN: None of the big equipment, like the miners, shuttle cars, roof bolters, the long-walls. None of these were, but there was a time when some of the local vendors would make tailpieces or belt drives or stuff like that. We didn't have any big, major manufacturer in this area, but we have, for instance, Joy Manufacturing, a big mining manufacturing company that does mining equipment. Cat [Caterpillar] does it, it goes back several generations on what they were called. But there are two manufacturers of mining equipment here in Carbon and Emery Counties. In fact, the hub of the western mining, as far as equipment, is right her in Price and Emery County. A lot of equipment has been pushed through here and also a lot of rebuilt equipment.

LB: The two companies are Cat and Joy?

GN: Yes. Joy Global and Cat. Cat has changed names several times. It is basically those two big mining manufacturers for underground mining; they handle all the West.

LB: Was the Cottonwood Mine parallel to the Wilberg, or did it actually get into the Wilberg?

¹² As the long-wall machine cuts the coal, the coal is moved to a stageloader at the side of the panel. From there it is fed to the belt, a conveyor that carries the coal to a central loading point or to the outside of the mine.

GN: The portals, the bathhouse, the warehouse and all those things are in the same area for both mines. It sits way up on a cliff and all the operations are underground, like the bathhouse is underground, all the offices were underground. All those things are underground on the Wilberg side. So when they did the Cottonwood Mine it was just 400-500 feet around the edge of the mountain where the portals are. So they were adjacent. After the fire we actually did start mining the Cottonwood Mine. We did go back in to the Wilberg Mine and pulled several panels and finished off that mine. It was almost like one mine.

LB: And when you say "pulled panels" what do you mean by panels?

GN: Panels are the coal between two miner sections that the long-wall machine is going to cut.¹³

LB: You stayed at the Cottonwood until when?

GN: Oh gee. I was there from 1985-1997. From 1997 to 2006 I went back to the Andalex operation, because lo and behold, guess what they did? They purchased a long-wall. They said they never would but they did. They actually purchased two of them. At that time, I was contacted by my old boss and he said, "Are you ready to come back? We need you to come back if you would." It was well worth my time to do that. They made it worth my time and I really did like that company. I liked the one I was working for; they were both good. I went back to work for them [Andalex]; I worked for them from 1997 to 2006. I was the superintendent of the Crandall Canyon Mine, I started there, and as they grew they also gave me the Westridge Mine, which is in Price; so I had both mines at that point, the Crandall Canyon and Westridge Mine for Andalex. Then they decided to put a long-wall back into the Aberdeen Mine, which is up to the Tower Division where the Pinnacle Mine was, and they asked me to do all three operations. So I was over all three of those operations.

LB: In being over all three of the operations, how did you do that? Did you drive from one to the next?

GN: I did. I would get up at 4 o'clock in the morning, and now I can't do anything but get up at 4 o'clock in the morning! I would call all three mines [early in the morning] and ask them what's going on. If any of them had any problems, and usually a coal mine has some type of a problem, I would pick which one had the problem that needed my help the most and I would go to that mine first. Then after I got that one checked out and what we needed, I would go to the other one and then the other one. I'd try to get all three places in about a 12-14 hour day.

¹³ After reviewing a draft of the interview transcript, Garth made several changes to wording to clarify explanations and mining procedures. His description of a panel is one of the post-interview changes he made.

LB: At least one of these was a long-wall mine?

GN: At one time we had a long-wall in all three of them. I had three long-walls at one time. If I remember right, I'm just going off memory, I had nine miner sections, two pillar sections, and three long-walls. There was close to a thousand employees if you added them all together.

LB: How did one mine differ from the next?

GN: Condition-wise there would be a lot of difference. Anything on the Wasatch Plateau, basically from Spring Canyon all the way to SUFCO, mining conditions in that area were basically very good. Very, very little gas, if any, it was basically flat, fairly good roof conditions. Anything from Spring Canyon around through what is now called the Lila Canyon Mine towards Green River, all of that was on the Bookcliffs, and the Bookcliffs was a lot harder mining. It had a lot of gas, it was on a 12 percent, sometimes a 13 percent grade, so it was on a pretty steep grade. It was a lot more challenging. There was real heavy, thick, rock that you had to break; it was just challenging. All operations had different things they had to contend with. You just go at those things and you learn how to manage them very well. The good thing is the mining people were just good people no matter where you went. Those that had worked there in that area and in those kinds of conditions knew how to do it, and a smart manager would listen. Because these guys knew what they were doing and you're going to find out that I am so thankful for the people I worked with in my career. Miners are the best people that ever walked the face this Earth as far as I'm concerned. They are just good people.

LB: Then what?

GN: After Andalex in 2006, I went back to work for Interwest Mining, who I worked with at the Wilberg-Cottonwood mines, only I went as a corporate guy. I worked for Interwest Mining out of Salt Lake City,¹⁴ They had me as a management-type person that would go from operation to operation, helping out with the conditions and things that were going on. I was part-time at the Deer Creek Mine, and then I was in Rock Springs, Wyoming at the Bridger Mine after they'd opened. I worked with them about two years; it was close to two years that I was in that corporate office. It was the same thing. They were both long-wall operations doing the same type of work. I was an administrative type person.

LB: Did being in administration give you a different perspective on MSHA and the other mining requirements, rules that you had to follow?

¹⁴ By 2013, Interwest Mining Company and Fuels Resources was a subsidiary of PacifiCorp, with responsibility for the Energy West Mining Company and Bridger Coal Company (pacificorp.com; www.psc.utah.gov, Testimony of Cindy A. Crane).

GN: As far as being a salary-type person or a management type person?

LB: Yes.

GN: I don't think so. MSHA, their purpose is good. You've got to have rules and regulations in this life, everybody needs somebody that will check on what they're doing so you make sure you're doing it right. I was only an hourly employee for about five years in my career. As a salary person the only thing that I can ever see that was really different as far as MSHA was concerned is you have more responsibility as a salaried because you have the responsibility of the health and safety of the people. So they look at you that you have that responsibility and they let you know that they know that. It is your responsibility because you do have the right the say, "Hey, don't do that" or "You can do this." I didn't see any difference in my thought process whether I was a company personnel or whether I wasn't. I have to admit it's sometimes an interpretation of the law, and sometimes people don't agree with things like that. But they always seem to work out, one way or another. But there is definitely a purpose for all those things and we realize that. Everywhere I've worked people knew who MSHA was, why they were there, and they needed to listen and take care of the situations and run a good, safe operation. These mines out here are very, very good, are very, very safe.

LB: At some point you were no longer with the union, is that right?

GN: That's right. When I went to Braztah that was my last time I worked as an hourly employee in the union. Soldier Canyon and Tower, both of them were non-union, and at the Deer Creek operation I was on salary. I was over the Cottonwood-Wilberg Mine, that was UMWA and also when I was working for that company they did flop me from there to Deer Creek;¹⁵ I was over the Deer Creek operation as superintendent. Almost half of my career, especially my salaried positions, I was probably half in the UMWA, half not. But when I was a salaried person I was not a member of the UMWA.

LB: When you first started out mining, right out of high school, do you remember what your wage was?

GN: Holy cow! I don't, but I can remember that they took more out in taxes than I was making as a butcher. I can remember that! I worked as a butcher for my brother and he said I'd regret going to the mine. I took my first paycheck to him and said, "Now wait, my taxes they took out are more than you were paying me." I remember that. It was a good wage and the other thing was, very good benefits for a person who had a family. Medical, the dental, the 401Ks, all those things that, a lot of time when you're working at other places, you don't have. So it was a very,

¹⁵ At the time of its announced closure, the Deer Creek Mine workers were members of the United Mine Workers of America.

very good place to be employed to provide for your family. I can't remember what I started out at; I can just remember that it was a very good wage for a person that had a high school diploma that knew how to work. They paid you a good wage; I don't remember how much it was, though.

LB: Do you remember your last wages, before you moved into salaried positions?

GN: I don't. In the back of my mind I can remember one of my first bossing jobs was \$1700 a month, if I remember right. It kept going up with inflation, you know, as the wages went up so did the salaried peoples wages. It is still a very good paying occupation.

LB: When you were working in those mines, did you remain here in Spring Glen or did you move into a mining camp?

GN: When I went to the Valley Camp Mine in Scofield we thought, as a husband and wife, maybe we ought to move there because it was an hour drive. But as I looked--at that point I'd already changed jobs once in two years--I realized as I looked at the geography of this area that this is kind of a center point. Any direction you go, it's about the same distance to drive to, so I was able to plant myself here and I was able to work all the different places with almost the same amount of drive [commute]. Yes, I've always lived right here; I've never lived in a mining camp. Knew a lot of people that did in the area; this area is just rich with older people that lived in those mining camps and all the different nationalities that were in this area. This is just an unbelievable blessing to have been my age, at 17, 18 years old, to come out of Emery County to here in Carbon County where all the immigrants were at these mines, and to get to know those people. They were the best people you'd ever met in your life. They knew how to make a dollar stretch, they knew how to live with very little, and they knew how to take care of everything they had. They were extremely hard workers and they were good to you. There were so many different nationalities here, it was just unbelievable, and all of them were just good people.

LB: On your days off or in your after hours, weekends, or whatever, did you recreate with the people that you worked with during the day?

GN: At times we had things we would go [to] that other people were there, that you worked with. Weren't a lot of social things that I did with those people. The miners, between salary and hourly people, some of my best friends were hourly people. They were people that if I had a problem I would ask them [and] they would help me in a heartbeat. I would vise-versa do for them. My wife on her side, she has four generations of miners: Her grandfather was a miner, her father was a miner, her husband was a miner, and her son is a miner. She also had three brothers and two brothers-in-law that were miners. So in way, whenever we'd have a family thing there was a lot of mining mined! We mined an awful lot of coal in those situations of talking about mining and stuff. There was one time at the Deer Creek Mine, that there her father, two brothers,

one brother-in-law, and her husband worked on the same crew. We had some interesting situations.

LB: You had mentioned that you moved around [from mine to mine] a lot because people you had met previously called you up and invited you to come work at a new location. Is that a typical way that a miner finds jobs?

GN: Back then, in the 1970s and 1980s, there were so many miners and so many mines that were producing, there were a lot of jobs. There were a lot of people who could work one job and if you didn't have enough integrity to give them notice to quit, you could actually go work the night shift at another operation. There was a lot of movement from mine to mine at times. In a salary type position a lot of times there was a lot of recruiting. If somebody needed a good person that was good at a certain thing, sometimes another place would recruit them and offer them, possibly, more money or something different to get them to come over to their operation and work for them. That happened quite frequently.

LB: You had mentioned about 2008 or thereabouts you were appointed to a State position in mine safety?

GN: Yes. After the problem they had at Crandall Canyon, it was about a year later, [Governor] Jon Huntsman asked for a Director of Coal Mine Safety in the State of Utah, which they'd never had. They asked for people to apply, or for people to be recommended for this job so he would have some people to choose from. I was recommended and I did apply. At that point I was appointed to be the Director of Coal Mine Safety for the State of Utah;¹⁶ I did that for close to two years. Part of the reason was I was able to work right out of Price, Utah so I was home all the time. That helped. And my love for the miners; I wanted to do whatever I could do to help them in any way as far as safety.

LB: Do you think the creation of that position was a direct result of the Crandall Canyon situation?¹⁷

GN: I don't know that for a fact. I'm sure that was something that brought it to their mind, that they needed a representative [for safety] in the State of Utah because there hadn't been one. Years and years ago when I first started to mine they had state mine inspectors in the state. I

¹⁶ Prior to his appointment, Garth was a technical advisor to the Utah Mine Safety Commission during its investigation of the Crandall Canyon Mine disaster (Utah Mine Safety Commission, Report and Recommendations to Governor Jon M. Huntsman, Jr., January 2008).

¹⁷ On 6 August 2007 roof supports in the Crandall Canyon Mine failed, violently ejecting coal over a half-mile area and killing six miners. Ten days later two mine employees and an MSHA inspector were killed when another collapse occurred in the same mine. The mine was operated by Genwal Resources, Inc. and owned by Murray Energy ("Crandall Canyon Accident Investigation Summary and Conclusions," no date, msha.gov).

can't remember when they did away with them, but from that point until [2008] there hadn't been one. I was appointed to do that.

LB: You were working where at the time you were appointed?

GN: I was working for Interwest Mining between Deer Creek [Utah] and Bridger Mine in Wyoming.

LB: What was your job as the coal mine safety guy?

GN: I had a lot of responsibilities. I was to visit all the mines on a regular basis. I was to work hand-in-hand with MSHA on any investigations of a Part 50 accident.¹⁸ I was to hold safety workshops. I had a committee that was made up of people out of the industry that we would meet together and discuss the situations in the mines, how we could improve the safety of the mines. I had different responsibilities like that. I worked under the Labor Commission for the State of Utah; the Labor Commission guy I worked under was Pete Hackford, an absolutely wonderful guy. He definitely had the people's safety and interest right as number one and he had me go about it as hard as I could, to do whatever I could to help make it safe.

LB: Where in the state were the coal mines that you visited? Obviously, there are lots of them around here, but was this the only area?

GN: This is the only area, at that point, where there was coal being produced underground. There were a couple of times for the Labor Commission I went to the Vernal area and went into a gilsonite mine, and there was a time I went down to Moab and went into one of the uranium mines down there. The Labor Commission also had the Division of Boilers that inspected all the boilers, pressure vessels, and I went with them a couple of times to these different mines when they went underground, just to be with them and see what was going on and that type of stuff. Ninety-nine percent of the time I was right here in this area, everything from the SUFCO operation all the way around through this area. All the mines were here in Carbon and Emery Counties, so this is where I spent most of my time.

LB: Today there aren't very many active coal mines in this area.

GN: We have dropped a lot. Our annual production is less, there is a lot less actual mines that are here working. In my mind, it is a sad thing.

LB: What happened? Why the difference?

¹⁸ Refers to Title 30 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 50 - Mine Accident and Injury reporting requirements.

GN: A lot of it has to do, I guess, with the environmental people [who] don't like coal. A lot of things have converted to gas. Just a lot of different things that have hurt the demand for coal in the United States, not just Carbon and Emery Counties. We've still have our power plants here that are coal fired. The plants, like in Delta, are still coal fired but they are talking about going to gas in some of the units, which reduces the amount of coal that is needed out of this area. There are just a lot of reasons why, I guess. I don't know exactly what the total answer to that question is.

LB: Obviously, you've spent quite a lot of time underground in coal mines. Have you ever had a close call?

GN: A few times. I've had a couple of close calls, you think, "Wow, why did I do that?" or "Why wasn't I thinking a little bit straighter, a little more clearly?" But I've also had a lot of close calls on the highway, you know. Underground mining is a safe occupation. It can be done safely and it can be done right. In my opinion it is a lot safer than driving, sometimes, on the freeway. You have a lot more chance of being injured doing that [driving on a freeway]. But I think there are a lot of miners that can say, "Yes, I probably had a close call here or there." They're no different than, "Man, I just ran a red light. I didn't realize it was red and it was a close call." I guess we learn from our bad experiences, the bad things we did; hopefully we correct them. Through some of those situations in life, miners learn and they correct those situations to make it better for the future. I think we've progressed, not only safety-wise but productivity-wise. It is because we've listened to the people, we watched what they've done, used their ideas and all that's progressed to actually become better, a lot better. Things now are more highly productive, they're safer, they've just improved horrendously on the amount of things that we've done in the mines to make them more productive and safer.

LB: You often hear on the news about subsidence worries. What's your take on subsidence? Is it a problem?

GN: Not in my mind. The places I've worked I know we've subsided the earth, but I don't think you'd be able to see where it did. You'd have to be able to take measurements and know where it was to start with compared to where it is now. I know in our area I don't think there is an issue with subsidence. That's my own opinion.

LB: Did the mining techniques at, say Deer Creek or Crandall Canyon or Pinnacle, did they change through time, or was it pretty much, once they got the long-wall installed, it's what they stuck with?

GN: I think you always continue to improve. For instance, room-and-pillar work, the old timers knew what they were doing, but as things advance in equipment and a little more in engineering and knowledge, with all the practical experience, I think we continue to get better and do it better. Definitely there has been advancement in equipment. It's been highly advanced in the years of my mining, from day one to now. I mean, again, it is just totally impressive to me the evolution of better equipment. It has come around to the so-called computer age. To see these miners adapt to it as it came, and be able to handle all the sophistication of the equipment and how it operates and how it works, how you can get it to talk to itself and back-and-forth and communicate, is just phenomenal to me. The interesting thing is a lot of these miners are self-taught either by themselves, or they are taught by their peers. They'll have a class here and a class there, some of the engineering groups they're educated out of schools, but underground workers, mechanics and mechanic foremen and some of the electricians, a lot of that they are self-taught. It is amazing at how good they get at their jobs, just totally amazing how they can adapt as the technology advances. They advance with it and are able to just go with the flow and learn how to fix it and make it operate. [Technology] has highly advanced in the 38 years I've been working in the mines.

LB: Could you go back underground and operate this modern equipment?

GN: Oh yes, I could. I couldn't fix it; I never was into that but I know how to get somebody to fix it. I could go back underground. When I was a Miner Operator we sat in the cab and ran it; now days they run it by remote control standing away from the machine. That's just a slight thing that advanced. The long-walls used to be you pulled all the shields under the roof supports with finger valves and you moved every one. Now the shearing machine that cuts the coal actually tells the shields what to do and how to do it; you don't have to do it. It is just highly advanced. These miners and the people who worked with it, advanced right with it.

LB: What's your favorite experience in the mining industry?

GN: As far as actual mining, when I first went in as a long-wall foreman it was so exciting. It was just a thrill to able to see that monstrous piece of equipment and what it could do, and learn how you operate it, all the moving parts and how those parts all work together. The ground control of it, and learning how that works. I think it is one of my more exciting things to learn as far as mining is concerned. Probably one of things that I enjoyed the most was the camaraderie with the people, especially in management. It just made me so happy to be able to get people full-time work, to be able to say, "Yes, you can come to work here. We'll pay you these wages and we'll give you these benefits." To realize that is going to benefit his family, or her family. That was what I got the biggest gratification out of. I just loved that for some reason, it always made me feel good. I look at myself: I'm so thankful because it helped me raise my children, I have five children that went to college, and all five of those kids got their education because

mining; that's what put the bread on my table. That's what helped me get them to school. It has been an absolute wonderful life, at times very, very hard. The mines never sleep, they're open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and they always have different situations and different problems come about. You're usually on call 24/7/365. I give credit to my family because they tolerated me and my career with that problem, to say, "No, I can't be there. I've got to go the mine; we've got a problem." But they realized how important it was.

LB: Was there a difference in a union mine and a non-union mine?

GN: Depends. Difference in mining, no. The conditions, that depended more on what part of the country you were working in. Union: You had to have a contract and you had to live by that contract you made with the union workforce. The non-union didn't have that. When it came right down to the basics of getting the job done, and the actual work, miners are miners and they're good people. Those who are there to do a good job, do their job the way it needs to be done; they just did their job. There's an old saying, and I find it to be pretty true, "Seems like 90% of the people did the work, and the 10% gave you the problems you had to work with." That 10% usually caused you a lot of problems at times but the others did their jobs and when you needed them, they were there. I've seen that on both sides. Like I said, a contract [has] certain things that have to be the way they have to be. You just had to live by the contract and work with it the best you can. That was probably the biggest difference. I know when I was a foreman in a non-union mine you could be a working foreman; in a union mine you were supposed to be just the supervisor but there were times they'd allow you to work and be right there with the guys. There are good people no matter where you worked; they're there to do their jobs and they are the ones that made it tolerable to handle the problems.

LB: You've obviously been involved with safety in the mines.

GN: Yes.

LB: Were there things that you saw more often than not, that needed correction? What things were those?

GN: There were times that somebody might have been trying to take a shortcut, or might have been doing something they're not supposed to; you'd have to correct that situation. Most people didn't take big chances, especially later on in my career it seemed like there was more of an emphasis on the safety side and people took it to heart. Most people wouldn't take chances. But it is just like you driving down the road, you might be doing the speed limit and you might think you can go a little bit faster; there's a police officer there and he reminds you, "No you just do the speed limit." Sometimes a supervisor, that's all they do; they walk through and a guy realizes, "I'd better think about this." I think the biggest worry I always had was people would get kind of

complacent with their job because they did it every day; the repetition of the job, "this won't happen." I always worried more about the complacency of "It hasn't happened for so long, there's been no problem" that you get kind of callused to it, that it is not going to happen. You might let your guard down. That's why supervisors or MSHA can make sure; you've got a different set of eyes for looking at things to make sure that doesn't happen.

LB: When you saw one of those situations where, perhaps, a miner was becoming complacent, what did you do?

GN: I would stop the work and would pull them in and would talk to them and their supervisor, explain what was going on and what problem could happen if they continued to do that. Most people are very, very receptive. Most people don't believe it, but it is the truth, people like direction. We like the security of direction and it might upset somebody [to hear] "You shouldn't do that" or get on their case a little bit but actually, after they think about it and you go back and talk to them again, they realize "Hey, I understand. That won't happen again. I didn't realize I was doing that," or "I didn't realize that was going on." Most people will correct their situation. The biggest thing to correcting safety behavior is being involved with them. Be aware of where they're at, working with them, seeing what they're doing; rubbing shoulders with them and letting them know. Again, you're the second eyes; you're not there running the shuttle car every day and when you go in there you'll catch something that they don't; they do it everyday and they don't realize it. It is just bringing it to their attention, a lot of times.

LB: How did you get your own background in safe practices?

GN: Through other people. Through management type people who you respected and they really believe in what they were doing; they would do it the right way and you would realize there was a better way and you could see what happen by doing it the right way. I think that's probably the biggest thing. But you have to take into consideration that you live by what other people did in the past, and you realize what they've done, so you learn, sadly, by some of their mistakes and some of the things they've done. You realize and as you hear of other things that have happened in the mining industry, as that communication goes it is brought to you by an enforcement agency or other company personnel or through the Utah Mining Association, whatever it might be, you learn and you take that and think about it. The safety issue comes when you have the responsibility for those people. This was one I always believed in: "Why would I want to hurt somebody that I love, that is a close friend or family? Why would I ever want to do that?" If there is a way to keep that chance from happening, why wouldn't you do that? It is a personal issue to me. You never want to hurt people but you are working in an occupation where there are some hazards. It's like your kid driving your car for the first time, you don't want to do it but you realize it's got to happen. You turn them loose and you just hope

you've taught them properly. Of course, you do follow up on it, make sure they're doing it right or correctly. If they get a ticket you call them in and you talk to them; same principle.

LB: The news, over a lot of years, has kind of zeroed in on Winter Quarters, the Scofield disaster, and the Wilberg disaster and more recently the Crandall Canyon catastrophe. And I realize that some of those are outside the scope of your own personal experiences, but do you think unsafe practices played a critical role in any of those disasters?

GN: Oh, I couldn't answer that because I wasn't there. I have no more reason to say anything than you do because I hear the same things and I hear people talk about it. Not having a first-hand experience, other than when I first went to Crandall Canyon, I couldn't answer that one. I don't know. When you go back in time to, like, the Winter Quarters, they didn't have the rules and regulations we have. They didn't have that ability to do a lot of rock dust[ing] and they didn't have the things that we have now days. So I would think there could have been some unsafe practices but it might be just due to lack of knowledge or lack of having the resources; I don't have any idea. I just think that sometimes it is just sad that things happen. Can some things have been prevented? Yes. It is always easy to sit back after it's happened and say what should have been done. That's the best answer I've go for that one.

LB: Ok. Do you want to look at your resume there and see if we've left out anything?

GN: When I left the State I went to work for Savage, who I'm working for now. The reason I left the State was we had a new administration from the State, there were a lot of rumors about making a cut, cut the budget and I could just feel it coming that they were going to reduce or get rid of the Office of Coal Mine Safety. At that time there was a position here with Savage that they'd asked if I would accept. So it happened just perfect because I decided its right here in this area, I don't have to move, I can finish my career here; so I accepted that. Very slightly after I did they took that job, Coal Mine Safety, and made it a part-time job.

LB: And what is it you do for Savage?

GN: I'm a general manager for the transportation facility; we transload coal onto rail and trucks and oil onto tankers on the railroad. It's still in the industry. Savage used to haul our coal at the mines that I was over, now I work for Savage taking care of the coal for the people who are doing what I used to do. It has been kind of an interesting swap. What I do like is I go to these operations that we're working for, our customers, and to see those people that came up as young miners; now a lot of those are the managers of some of these mines. To see those people progress is just a wonderful thing to see.

LB: Is that a common career ladder in coal mining?

GN: A lot of people they'll start out and if they've got the drive and want to. My drive was driven by a pretty little brunette lady that said, "If you're going to go to work in the mines, you're going to go to work in the mines. You're going to make it a career, you're going to advance as fast as you can and make the money. If you're going to be there you'd just as well be making the money." So I took that to heart. The other thing that she told me, she said, "With my experience in seeing what goes on--her childhood, if you make yourself invaluable as a miner you'll never have to worry about work." So I took those two things to heart and made myself invaluable wherever I worked and that's why I have worked for 38 years and I have never been laid off one day in 38 years. So the mines have been really good to me. But I've given my heart and soul to them, too. Great occupation! My son wanted to be a miner and all I could say, after all the headaches I've had in my whole career, was, "Well, I'll give you a taste." One summer I said, "All right, come to work in the mine," and I put him in the mine and I gave him one of the worst jobs I could find and I made him do it. I thought I'd break him of this want. Backfired on me. He says, "I love it, Dad. Working hard, those people are good. They understand and they teach you. They joke around with you and stuff." I said, "I'll support you son, but one thing--you get your education." So he went to the University of Utah and got his mining degree, engineering, and he is presently an engineer with a local operation. And we discuss a lot of coal mining at times!

LB: Well, with your wife's family background and yours, it sounds like coal mining is an easy topic.

GN: My blood is black. You know it is interesting. With her [wife], there were times I'd get between 50-100 phone calls a day and night. There were times I can remember talking on one phone and she'd pick up the other one and answer their questions for them because she had heard it so often she knew what the answer was. She's been around the mines for a long time; she understands. I've been away from home for a long time and worked a lot of hours and she's supported me every minute of it. I asked her one time, "Were you ever worried?" [She replied], "Oh, yes, there were times I'd get nervous and I'd worry about you. It's no different now, I worry about you being older and falling asleep while you drive."

LB: Anything else about your mining career that you want to tell us that we haven't hit on?

GN: I don't think so. It has been such a wonderful career. The thing that I love now is that I can go to town or out in the public, especially in this area or, say, in Wyoming or areas where these miners have moved or relocated or whatever it is, I seem to always run into a happy face that remembers working with me. It is just a joy to see a smile on a human being's face and say, "Man, remember this? Can you remember when we did that? Can you remember this?" You can't buy those types of things. I've got some close friends that are miners and I'm telling you if I

needed help I could call them and I know they'd be here to help me. I think there're a bunch of those. If I was destitute and they had \$5, they'd give me their last \$5. They're that type of people. I come from a management to hourly employee type of relationship, but I tell you I never had that problem. I did my job and they did theirs and we'd still work really good together. As I look back on my career, I can think of all the really good things that we did, produced a lot of coal or doing this or that, but when it comes right down to it those relationships that you made are just unbelievable. Sad to say, I started out when I was 18-19 years old and some of those people I worked with were 50-60 years old; now I'm 60 years old and a lot of those have passed away. Yet some of those memories of those people I can still remember, and I can still think of some of the lessons they taught me and made me who I am. Some of the sad things in life is people do pass away even younger people that might have an accident or whatever. I can still think of one young man, he died at a young age not hurt in the mine, out of the mine. If I stop and think long enough, I worked hand-in-hand with that young man for a lot of years, I can still hear his laugh. He had a unique laugh and I can still hear him laugh. You can't buy that type of thing; that comes through living it. These miners are close knit. They have their problems; that many people working close together you're going to have your disagreements! But yet, as a whole, they stick together; they work very well together.