

INTERVIEWS FROM SUMMER 1971, RE:
MINING, SAFETY, HEALTH OF MINERS

Karen Mulloy, cardio-pulmonary technician

"Miners asked Rasmussen to speak on black lung. But he had trouble speaking to union locals because the national union objected.

"There's a tremendous volume of people here. People come in, pull out papers and he'll take the time to go over them. He's not like a regular doctor. I can't imagine a regular doctor like him.

"Miners feel at ease with him.

"His main work is here on the local level and being accessible to people.

"Other doctors' findings are based on low numbers like 25 miners. His studies have been based on more than 300 miners. He says, 'Someday I'll win over them by sheer volume.'"

His father is a vet. Studied sheep killed by Dugway

Rasmussen has received the President's Citation of the American Public Health Assn for his black lung efforts.

Mike Trbovich, 50 years old, 25 years in mines since 1940, spent 4 yrs in the service

"I'm not going to quit the mines until union problems are settled. If I quit I would be giving up my membership.

"I was Jock's campaign manager and after he was killed Miners For Democracy was formed.

"The union tries to discourage people from coming here.

"Rasmussen has put a lot of pressure on the union for fumbling on black lung and he's put pressure on the Social Security Administration.

"All the miners in the area know Rasmussen. If the union tries anything like shutting him out of the hospital, the miners would close up the mines.

"The UMW originally opposed some of the compensation in the black lung law. Why would our own leadership be against black lung benefits? I don't know.

"You have a few representatives in government who are interested in the coal miners.

"The companies kill and maim coal miners then throw them on the refuse pile, like a machine when it's worn out."

Rasmussen home guarded by two German Shepherds, carried 38 briefly after Yablonski was murdered,

"The coal companies' troubles are just beginning. They can scare older people but younger people won't buckle under. They won't stand for it."

Black Lung Blues, by Mike Paxton, c. Fayette Music Co.

I went to see my doctor 'cause I couldn't get my breath
He said, boy, you got something could well mean your death

Pneumoconiosis,, Black Lung Blues

You get the one, get the other, either way you lose.
I've always been a miner, breathed coal dust all my life
Too old to learn a new trade, what can I tell my wife

(chorus)

I'll tell nobody nothin, I'll just keep working on.
The kids need all their schoolin before I'm dead and gone.

(chorus)

Pneu-mo-con-i-osis, black lung blues

I'll lay down my pick and shovel, lose those black lung blues.

When I get up to heaven St Peter going to cry
When I tell him the reason this poor boy had to die.

Arnold Miller, director, Black Lung Assn.

"Dr. Rasmussen is one of the foremost men in his field and one of the best men I know. Not many in the medical field want to tackle him.

"The miners will support him in anything he wants to do. If he wants to run for any political office, the miners would vote for him.

"I have to give Dr. Buff credit for his early work. It's hard getting factual evidence to miners.

"The doctors got started by holding small rallies. Some people would come and then go out and tell the world. When the doctors came back for another rally if there had been 100 before, there would now be 500 in the audience. Miners always have had a lot of respect for professional people.

"The first rally I went to about 200 attended. Dr. Buff was the first to speak. He started by saying, 'All of you have black lung and all of you are going to die from it.' Then he paused and waited for the miners to react. Most of the miners there had been working in the mines at least 20 years so they had to have black lung.

"Buff was good at inciting the crowds,"

Dr. I.E. Buff

"Twenty years ago we were doing a study of doctors. In coal miners we found doctors in 90% of those who had worked more than one year in the mines, meaning that they had some lung damage. We followed these people and in 10 years they had developed full blown cases of black lung. From this we wondered why so many lung cases in the Charleston Hospital among coal miners. Then we found out that 40 to 50% of the coal miners who entered the hospital, we could detect black lung which meant we had many more cases.

"In the last 10 years due to mechanization the situation got worse. These people were getting disabled at 40 to 50 years of age, some of them with young children were being thrown on the relief roles. They could get no pension until they were 55 and by that time they may be dead. Families most need money when the man is 35 to 55 years old.

"A review of compensation boards of coal mining states showed that no one paid black lung benefits except Pennsylvania which started in 1966. The bad thing was that industry didn't pay this compensation.

"In West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee the compensation laws are worthless."

Said that when miners do get benefits all too often lawyers get a big chunk of it. One widow got \$30 a month compensation and lawyer got \$7 of that each month, he said.

"The first meeting on black lung was held in (Beckwith?) W Virginia. Approximately a hundred miners were there. Then some disabled miners invited me to come to Clifftop, W Va. I got a formal invitation from the union this was in 1968 before the Farmington walk-out. I've been speaking every weekend since then, attending about two meetings a week."

Estimates he's spoken to 40,000 miners and their wives.

"Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois: I've spoken in all those states.

"I don't have any trouble getting invitations but I've had trouble speaking. Schools have done all kinds of things, turn on the heat in the summer, turn off the heat in winter, lock the bathrooms. We've had to meet outside. We had shot guns at us in Big Stone Gap, Va. Police with shot guns dispersed the crowd. That was only 6 months ago but it was the same as the company cops in the 1920s. The coal operators have gotten the schools to keep us out.

"In Flat Fork, Ky., the gym was locked and then opened for us. The superintendent said he knew nothing of the meeting but it had been in the paper and on radio. I told a store proprietor that television was coming from Lexington and by the time I got back the doors were open.

Dr. I. E. Buff, born & raised in Charleston, medical school in Morgantown, W. Va., the school sent us to the gym on a mountain top which no one could get to. They finally let us have a downstairs room.

"The coal operators act like little children."

Buff travels in Datsun station wagon, loaded with his own sound system plus slide projector, slides, charts, photographs, and lungs with the disease.

"I have x-rays and I show how dust shows up and why you can't find black lung through x-rays. And I demonstrate the breathing test and show why it's worthless."

"I tell miners that there's no treatment for black lung, they can't stop it. They can only get their benefits and try to enjoy the rest of their life. I tell them if they have any children working in the mines they should get them out or they'll die too."

"I first thought it would be difficult to do this but it works pretty well."

"They would never give us a school in Whitesburg or Jenkins, Ky., or Wise, Big Stone Gap and Lebanon in Virginia. In Hyden, Ky., they gave us a school and then locked us out. In Payneville, Ky., they gave us a school and then locked us out. Kentucky is terrible."

"The coal operators said 3 per cent of the miners have black lung, 7,000 miners at most. Congress believed them and passed the law. But 300,000 miners have black lung and it would cost \$650 million a year to give everyone the benefits they're entitled to."

"There's only one way to handle the problem. And that's to tax coal \$1 a ton and give the money to Social Security for black lung benefits. But then questions would be raised about the 40 cents a ton that goes into the union's welfare fund. That's why the union hates me."

"Benefits don't make the miners any better but it makes them feel better."

Said miners have offered him money from their benefits which he has refused. "Miners are used to being taken advantage of. They have no faith in anything. They believe you have to pay someone off to get anything done."

"In Ashers Fork, Ky., when three men were crushed to death in a mine accident, I went and talked to the widow of the only one of the three who was married. I said don't sign your name to anything the state gives you. She said, 'I won't because I can't read nor write.' She was only 24 but she never went to school."

"In Clay County, Ky., many miners' children don't go to school because they don't enforce the school attendance law. I checked and that's true. They do it to keep the people fodder for the machines."

"I have many people who come into my office who can't even write their names."

"Coal miners have no faith in their doctors. This is a very serious situation. Doctors are not individuals they are vassals of the coal companies. They do the companies' bidding or they're not there. I had one doctor who doesn't accurately diagnose black lung tell me, 'Hell, I'm no crusader.'"

Said one miner x-rayed for black lung, x-ray showed Stage 1. Buff had voltage doubled, new x-ray showed stage 3 which meant more benefits for the miner. Three weeks later the miner died of black lung.

"The SSA is like an insurance company. They won't give you anything if they don't have to. The UMW is probably not to be trusted in view of what's been happening."

"Unless Congress extends it until 1974, or makes it permanent, responsibility will pass to the states and that will kill our whole program. The state workman's compensation board will call you in and say that God cured you or that what you really have is emphysema or something."

Miners
also black lung

Tom ~~Marlowe~~ Marlowe, 9 N 14 St., LaFollette

Injured in a cave-in in which his co-worker was killed the day Pres John F Kennedy was assassinated. "He didn't want to work in the mines but his wife charged him with desertion and judge ordered him."

"They said the mines or jail, not much of a choice," said Louise Adams, Clairfield postmistress. Tom was left paralyzed from waist down.

"We've had two or three miners smoother to death in the past years" Mrs Adams said. "They just couldn't breath any more."

Ed Marlow, Clairfield, Tenn.

Started in mines when 18, spent 17 years in big mines, injured paralyzed in 1957 when he was 35 years old. ~~45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100~~

"I done everything I could do in a coal mine except boss."

Dec 13, 1970, turned down for black lung.

Apr 3, 1971, request his case be reconsidered. July 13 doctor exam diagnoses black lung. Paid \$65 for the doctors exam. Given form by community worker to fill out for social security to get money back.

"I knowed I could get the money back but I didn't know how. You can't find out nothing from Social Security."

"Two boys reopened a little truck mine and then they quit."

Another boy and I took it over. One day I was in the mine. I had the flu and was hunched over the track, coughing. This flat rock came down and hit me on the back. It was only about half an inch thick and about two feet across. It shoved my back bone over and pinched my spine. It took 18 stitches.

"I took mining up when I was a boy and just stayed right with it. ~~imagine me in a pretty good mine~~ That's pretty much all there was around here. I liked it pretty good. I worked on a few I didn't like but they paid so good I just stayed right with it."

Short cropped black hair, mixed with gray, thin, incl his face. Rolls own cigarettes from small tin of Prince Albert, spitting and dropping butts into enameled pot next to bed. Illiterate, all he can do, except watch old tv set in corner. Gun rack above bed with 3 guns, and a pistol on bed at his side. Coal trucks, coming down from strip mines rumble past house every few minutes, drowning out conversation.

"When they go by I can't even here nothin' on the phone."

Lee Peterson:

"I was about 16 when I started in the mines. The company hired me to play baseball for them. Then I left for a few years and played professional ball. I belonged to the Cubs at that time. I thought of going into baseball professionally. Then I hurt my arm in the mine."

"You take this bottom here. They want \$10,000 for that little bit of property there. But yet when they want to come to tear up your property 10¢ a ton is all they'll give you. That property isn't fit to raise hogs on."

"Nothing can stand in the way of their mining coal. That's the story of it all. All they're interested in is that block of coal. They don't care what happens to the houses or anything else."

"These hollows have all been flooded and they're going to get it again. In a couple of years from now, they're going to be completely washed out."

"When they're told they have silicosis, it has a moral effect on them and then they go down real fast. Trouble is when you take a breathing test you can't trust 'em. You may be bad off and not know it."

"Miners should be taken out of the mines after 20 years. If they've been in the mines 20 years regardless of their age, they should be taken out of coal."

Miners
Black Lung

Ralph Martin, Dickinson County, southwestern Virginia, in mines 32 years
Loves the mines. "I don't know why. I never thought about it.
Maybe it's because of the temperature. It's cool in the mines in the
summer and warm in the winter. Maybe it's because it's the work I'm
good at. I don't know."

Then he began to feel symptoms of blacklung.

"I had an easy job and I hated to quit. I was making pretty good
money (\$350 a month), so I kept battling on with it. But I reached a point
where I couldn't get out of bed. I couldn't put my clothes on in the
morning. It took me three or four times to get my shirt over my head,
and then I had to stop and rest.

"I remember times in the mine when you couldn't see a man that
was three feet away from you for the dust.

"I was lucky. I never had anything happen to me other than
broken ribs. I had seven of them broken on one side one time. Then I
broke two of them on the other side. And I broke my left arm once.
And I had a few holes knocked in my head, but they didn't amount to much."

&foreman

John Tiller, Virginian miner/who was beaten up by sheriff's deputies on
an isolated mountain road and told to shut up about black lung.

"They used to tell us that coal dust couldn't hurt you and I
used to turn around and mouth it to the workers. And the worst part of
it is that the doctors in the area are still involved in a conspiracy.
Tomorrow, if I'm in trouble, there isn't a doctor in the state who'll
tell me the truth. I'd have to go clear over to West Virginia."

Black lung law-benefits

"I got reports from eight of the best doctors in the country and they all say I got silicosis and pneumoconiosis and got it bad. But Social Security turned me down."

"I actually got holes in my lungs from coal dust and rock dust in the mines. I can't hardly breathe. But they won't give me no benefits."

"They sent me 400 miles for x-rays and give me all kinds of breathing tests. My doctors I seen all says I got it but I ain't getting a penny."

--various miners last May at Letcher County meeting with Keller Whitaker of Ky Workman's Compensation Board.

"Last week we buried two men at my funeral home. Both had applied for black lung before they died and were turned down. Well, they performed autopsies on them and they had the worst case of black lung. I just don't want miners to have to die before you can prove they got it."

--Ky State Rep. Ray Collins. on state benefits

"It's not just the SSA you're up against. It's the law. The lawmakers are the ones who filled it with loopholes. / You're all walking around dying but you can't get anything done about it. That's the position you're in and it's the position you'll stay in until you organize. By the time you get the changes you need, it might be 3 years or more and some of you will be dead. That's how it is."--Everett Tharp, 37 yrs in mines at same meeting.

Under Ky law, person has to have worked in mine during the last 5 years to be eligible for state aid.

60% of Ky's applicants for fedl benefits are turned down.

Federal payment based on graduated need so if miner getting state aid his fedl payments will be reduced and remain at same lower rate even after state benefits run out.

Rep. Carl D. Perkins (D-Ky) (wants to extend fedl law 2yrs, no xrays reqd)

"Contrary to the intent of the 1969 law, the (SS) Administration has reduced social security benefits of those disabled persons who have been awarded black lung benefits. This is not right.

"If we don't extend the Social Security's administration of the black lung statute, it will be taken over by the state and the coal companies and you people will keep being kicked around." (Aug 15, Belfry KY)

Said SSA had "ignored the provision of the act" in their refusal to accept the disease as a total disability or a cause of death.

"Thousands of claims are denied because of a negative x-ray, while there are other tests which do show evidence of black lung."

Title IV black lung benefits

1969 Federal Act denies benefits to anyone who could do "light work" although no such work is available in central Appalachia.

SSA requires that miner work in mines 10 years before his claim can be accepted although act does not require this.

SSA does not state grounds for rejection.

3-5 year backlog in fedl court in Eastern Kentucky of rejection appeals to be heard.

President Nixon when signing bill: "I want to emphasize very strongly that Title IV is temporary, limited and unique and in no way should it be considered a precedent."

48 years old
Arnold Miller, director, Black Lung Assn. *totally disabled, wks pt-time as reserve*
"The Social Security people have made a shambles of the program. *not applied so can remain union mem.* They have failed to provide adequate examinations. They've deliberately resisted providing good examinations. The Social Security doctors use to say to miners that they have a little coal dust in their lungs. Now since the passage of the black lung benefit law they say you have ~~xx~~ bronchitis. Miners don't want to go to them for examinations.

"Social security will only pay \$12 for an x-ray. They pay for only one frontal x-ray. Nelson charges \$25 because he takes more x-rays.

"The breathing test Social Security makes is absolutely worthless as far as we're concerned.

"Social security is relaying on experts who in 1969 said there is no such thing as black lung.

"After Jan. 1, 1973, all black lung benefits are to be paid by the state or the coal company. The state is supposed to set up a law equal to or better than the federal law. (If file after Jan 1 '72, state pays)

"Since if the state doesn't pay, the company will have, the company will lobby for a state law with weak benefits so their premiums are low. Companies will have to either pay into a compensation fund or pay the benefits directly."

Said that in West Virginia as of July 1, 1971, 2,379 black lung benefits filed under state law, 377 claims have been processed.

"At least 100 of them applied for federal benefits and were accepted as totally disabled which is the government's only criteria. They also applied with the state and only 15 per cent got benefits and that was as partially disabled. So not even all of those found totally disabled by the federal government were found even partially disabled by the state.

"The coal industry wants the federal law as weak as they can get it so the state laws will be weak. We have to make sure the state laws are better than the federal law.

"Nixon was going to veto the federal law but the threatened miner walk-out made him sign it. But a social security official told me that when Nixon signed the bill he told Social Security how he wanted it run. He told Finch to write the regulations as tight as he could.

"The Kentucky state law was tailored by the union to meet the coal company needs. The best hope is for the people of Kentucky to reorganize the union.

"The Virginia law was weak and then it was repealed after coal companies exerted pressure."

12 active members in the West - have died from black lung
Black Lung Assn has 17 chapters; 1--Ind; 3--Ky.; 3--Va; 3--Tenn; 2 W Va
Totally disabled miner gets \$154 a month from Social Security;

\$229 a month if wife living; up to a top of \$380 a month if also has 3 kids
Said one miner, 40 years old, has 3-4 children in school, but won't quit tho he has black lung "until his youngest child at least is through high school."

Another miner 37 years old with 6 kids, 13 on down, has about 7 years left to live. Turned down for benefits. "He's worried about what's going to happen to his family."

Suggested follow English procedure. Miner taken out of mine, retrained for other employment and benefits pay salary difference so he still gets same about of money he made in the mines.

If miners file by end of this year, they can still get federal benefit after they retire if black lung diagnosed at that time.

"When miners went to local doctors--the same incompetent backs we have now--the doctors would say you smoke too much, even if the miner was a non-smoker."

"4,000 miners a year will die from black lung."