

INTERVIEW WITH HOMER DAVIS

Ferraro: Ok, tell me a tell me how old you are and what you were doing in 1921.

Homer: Loading coal.

Ferraro: How old are you?

Homer: I am 83 fifth day of April past. This April past.

Ferraro: What year were you born in?

Homer: 1900

Ferraro: Ok, what do when I ask you these questions I want you to try and answer them in a complete sentence, Ok. ^{:30} Just don't give me one word answers if it's alright. Ok, tell me tell me a the kind of job describe the job that you were doing in 1921.

Homer: Excuse me. I was loading coal and back then they cut coal you know, with a machine and shout it with powder and every load of coal then...by the ton.

Ferraro: ^{1:00} Stop yes I - So you were loading coal in 1921. Tell me about the kind the kind of work it was - the wages.

Homer: The wages in 1922. Well, they at that time it was seven dollars daily. Seven something, I think seven fifty at sixty four cents a ton for coal

but at that time it was loading..twenty two hundred and forty pound for a ton. See twenty ton or twenty hundred was a ton still now it is but then the companies got that much off the man. Before you got a ton of coal you had to a load twenty two hundred and forty pound. That was over a ton.

Ferraro: Why a how'd they get away with that?

Homer Well, they did for a right smart while. ²⁰⁰ Is there any questions you want me to comment on it or do you want...

Ferraro: No, I just a

Homer: Yeah

Ferraro: I just want to know how they were able to get away with that.

Homer: They got away with it. They didn't have the union strong enough.

Ferraro: The union wasn't strong enough. Tell me what you were doing in 1921 when the miners came into Boone County.

Homer: I was loading coal or so be coal. ^{3:50}

Ferraro: Well, tell me what say and what you heard when they came in.

Homer: Well, they come in the morning. I didn't know nothing else next morning and see the train pull out and the coaches was filled up on top and there

was a man shot up there at at Edwards just above that. He was on that train taking him to the hospital but they never bothered him and the a so they picked them up all down the river. Taking the train over and a ^{3:00} engineer just stood back. I want . He run the train where ever he wanted to go. Try and tell us no and here and everything.

Ferraro: Ok, what a...did a you were a union miner then?

Homer: Yeah, yeah.

Ferraro: Ok, tell me what the you you didn't even know they were going till they till they went then?

Homer: Well, that night I didn't go to the local you know, where lots of times you miss and the next morning I see them pulling out. I came to ask and they couldn't tell me that a where it is going. Going to Logan.

Ferraro: Did you want to go?

Homer: Yeah, I offered to go. I didn't refuse, but they told me it wouldn't be necessary they left sail. They wasn't no men nowhere all bout all of em went. It's just a few and they was trying uphold the union and a Don ^{4:00} Shafins was doing away trying to do away with it so they met on Blair Mountain.

Ferraro: What a why were why were they going to fight for the union?

Homer: Well, that it was trying to do away with it. The coal companies and

they shot one union man that Sid whatever, if I could think of his name. Yeah, they shot him. Killed him and they was trying to do away with organization and they was the union man was upholding for it.

Ferraro: What stories did you hear the men that went a what stories they tell you about what happened up there?

Homer: Well, they never told me a the killing. I heard it but the...

5:00

6:00

Ferraro: (Long pause) Ok, Homer tell me what a what you heard about what went on up there again.

Homer: Well, I have this about remember when I heard that...they killed several but didn't know who they was. They never did state their name they killed, who they was. They was accused this an nothing but a they never stated it...as far as I can remember back a then.

6:30

Ferraro: Tell me about your family being put out of their house.

Homer: Well, that was my mother a - step father. I wasn't married then see. They put them out not only my mother they put them all out. Lots of em cause they wouldn't go back to work.

Ferraro: Where was this?

Homer: Over at Rumel - Rumel. Was that a telephone?

Ferraro: Yeah. 7:00

Homer: Excuse me just a minute. Just a second.

Ferraro: Wait wait we gotta unplug you. Pause - Before you get back to that story, tell me tell me again about your a your family being put out. Tell me when and where and why. Ok?

Homer: Well, there they had struck a year see and a...they want a go back to work. ^{7:30} They didn't go out and they threwed them out. All the furniture went anywhere you get it. Some went in tents, some in barns anywhere you put your stuff...and a at that time the man went back to work. They never spoke to be was a dared to speak to you in the mine. Dares have ^{8:00} a union man into your house. He was deprived in being there.

Ferraro: That was a company rule.

Homer: Yeah, that was the company done that.

Ferraro: Why was that?

Homer: Well, they was against the union and they wanted a they didn't want the union to have any say so and a they afraid the union might get around and get em back outside. ^{8:30} Get em back-call em out again.

Ferraro: Ok, you were going to tell me a ok what happened after a Battle of Blair Mountain. What happened with the union or you saw the soldiers come in?

Homer: No, I didn't see em but I saw the people did after that. Their governor ordered em out and a...they got trains and taking em back home.

Ferraro: Did you remember hearing about the president declaring Marshall Law? ^{9.00}

Homer: Yeah.

Ferraro: Tell me about that.

Homer: A see what was that mans name?

Ferraro: Harden.

Homer: Yeah, yeah oh he he did and a he he didn't there was dared to speak to anybody. You know we're from Marshall Laws declared. Am I talking loud enough you can hear it?

Ferraro: Sure, just tell us what you you were in what happened to the union after Blair Mountain. ^{9.30}

Homer: Well, after the union went down...they went back to work. Once could get back. Some couldn't never get back right then. They would order meat. It would cost us if they was. They could pay the same scale... got a plum broke. Then cut the wages, cut the weeks down. Didn't work everyday but they worked good for awhile and paid the same wages and they'd haul stuff to your house and give you...see to get you after got back to work. Alot of the men went back to work there didn't go because they wanted to, it was force...and if ^{10.00} be no long time there then quit feeding them and they went in tents. ^{10.30}

Ferraro: What happened with the a Blair Mountain with the union? I thought they lost the union?

Homer: They did lost it but they paid the same scale to keep the men working. It it did use it but alot of em wouldn't bow to it. They struck right on. Went in tents anywhere they could get them to keep with the company.

Ferraro: Was there any trouble down here after Blair Mountain? ^{11:00}

Homer: Well, they was a yeah, some not a not a big lot but just a litte here and there you know, talk scattered.

Ferraro: How many miners do you think came down through Kanawha and Boone to kinda want to get out on Blair Mountain?

Homer: Well, a bunch of them. It must have been about four hundred maybe five, something like that. Most of them went ^{11:30} was in that march.

Ferraro: Were the guy that went a there dressed in any particular way? Anything special?

Homer: Do what.

Ferraro: Were they did they wear anything special? Any kind of uniform or did they have any bandanna?

Homer: No, they just a had guns is all.

Ferraro: I thought some of them wore red neckerchiefs.

Homer: Well, they could some and some didn't. I think some did probably.

Ferraro: Um, you were going to tell me some stories about a what happened if you remember. ^{12:00}

Homer: Well, I can remember this well. They fed em had the men went back to work. Ah, they couldn;t get no there was a union turned em down wouldn't feed em any longer. The coal companies carried em around give em anything they wanted to eat, didn't pay for it and a didn't pay no rent or nothing but after got it broke like they wanted it they cut their wages. Cut em down see. I knowed that true. ^{12:30}

Ferraro: Ok, what else do you remember a the stories that people told you about things that happened up there?

Homer: Well, there just told about the shooting and there had been several killed. They didn't know how many. They it would come out later in the newspaper you know, the certain man killed, Gore and that other man, but they never did prove that they went to Charlestown..had that trial and they throwed it out of court...a the best I can remember. ^{13:00}

Ferraro: Do you - How did you feel about what was going on at the time?

Homer: I didn't feel good over it. I was against what the coal companies was a doing. ^{13:30}

Ferraro: How did you feel about what the union was trying to do?

Homer: I felt good about it. I felt they was doing what they ought a be doing and I would have done more but they told me it wouldn't necessary to go they had enough over there anyway.

Ferraro: Ah, did it bother you or did to bother anybody that you talked to that a that you couldn't you couldn't go through the legal channels to get a fair treatment?

Homer: Yeah, it did. You you couldn't go to nobodies house have to put that Marshall Law on you. You couldn't go talk to nobody. That's particular experience do you, yeah I was bothered in alot of ways. In that period of time come up and is thrown out of the houses you see. Threwed them out.

Ferraro: What about a...do you ever any other a being told any other things that happened about a about how by any of the other miners - about things that happened up on Blair Mountain besides a John Goore getting shot?

Homer: Well, that's about all I can remember. Goore and somebody else. They was the main men you know, for the company and they was killed or shot and they accused certain men the union could doing it, but I can't remember who it was now.

Ferraro: Tell me about Bill Blizzard.

Homer: Yeah, Bill Blizzard he's a vice president. This Mooney I think, was the president. Yeah, I know Bill Blizzard. He used to come to he is a local.

Ferraro: ^{15:30} Tell me what you remember about him.

Homer: Well, I I best about remember he upheld for the union and tried to get it to where it is now.

Ferraro: What kind of man was he?

Homer: They were good men far as I know, Blizzard and Mooney.

Ferraro: I mean, how how big were they? What did they look like?

Homer: Well, at that time they was a pretty big..but there was on the mens side. ^{16:00}
I don't believe there was any crooks on them. Betray I think, they was all liked far as I know.

Ferraro: Yeah, I think that's true. I was just trying to get an idea of like what you remember about them personally. Did you ever talk to them personally?

Homer: Yeah, I've talked to them.

Ferraro: Any conversations, I mean what they what did they say to you?

Homer: Well, they talked like they was, I don't know whether you can remember this or not the union see, there was a man killed over at Whitesfield. ^{16:30}
He was going to talk but they didn't want him. Mother Jones was living then and a...so they tried to pull her down. A fellow by the name of Scott was shot through his lungs. He's dead now. He'd been a board

board member. He was against Blizzard. He was against Mooney and a
so he aint pull Mother Jones down and this a town make was shot and ^{17 00}
you might have remember him. Did you, he was a low land he shot him.
Tell it like it is.

Ferraro: Remember anything about Mother Jones?

Homer: Yeah.

Ferraro: Did you see her talk?

Homer: Uh.

Ferraro: Did you ever see her speak?

Homer: Yeah.

Ferraro: Tell me about her.

Homer: Well, she was a she done a whole lot of cussing when she was a when she ^{17.30}
was talking and she was against the coal company. She talked that up to
them and a yeah, I hear her talk several times.

Ferraro: Where? Where did you hear her talk?

Homer: Well, I hear her talk at Mt. Hope and I hear her talk at Unis. That's
been several year ago you know, yeah, I seen her.

18:00

Ferraro: Why were you there? Were you there as a member of the union?

Homer: Well, yeah in a way. The union hand't built up strong then see, where it is now but I was there to listen to all and I hear her talk...and she come out and cussed out front hus a face wide open. Yes, she was a great great lady, I mean a union.

18:30

Ferraro: How did you and the other miners feel about Mother Jones?

Homer: Well, they all felt good about her. They felt she was alright.

Ferraro: What did you think about her I mean, did you did you admire her or did you think she had alot of...

Homer: Yeah.

Ferraro: Well, tell me that.

Homer: Well, I had admire her for her couragement of talking you know, and how she talked up. She was not afraid and she was upholding miners. I remember way back when they was a trying to organize for you had the union. Then later I remember after got the union she build up.

19:00

Ferraro: What did - what did she look like?

Homer: Well, I don't know whether I can make - she a pretty old lady and a I can't remember just exactly how to scale her but I I remember much of her.

Ferraro: Well, we're trying to figure out was she a big woman or was she a little lady? 19 30

Homer: Well, she was no real big woman kind she's kinda small. Yeah, I remember her. I hear people talk to I remember Matt, he was an organizer. She taken his place after he died or he got killed or something - she taken his place. Yeah, I can remember that whole story...when I started in the mines they had wood track. I told somebody the other day about that. They they didn't know what to think about it. You didn't have no rails you had motors. Mules, started driving a mule I was just a small kid, sixteen years old. The mules what they had in the mines. and a later years would open motors route - used to have stables in the mines. Kept mules in the mines. I can remember a whole lot it I get to thinking. 20 00 20 30

Ferraro: Go ahead and tell me.

Homer: Yeah.

Ferraro: Tell me what else you remember about working in the mines.

Homer: Well, when I started first started to work in the mines, I got a dollar a day. One dollar..eight hours a nine hours. I started driving a dollar and a half a day. That was big money then. That was the biggest part. Yeah, I remember working for a dollar a day is all I got. 21 00

Ferraro: You were happy to get it too.

Homer: Oh, Lord yeah. Paid off onced ever two months. See you held back a

month like you do a hold back two weeks on you now. You work a month and then ^{21 30} the next month you get a pay day. You don't know what kinda play day it was. You just got it on a day. Trap in the mines. Yes, you have trap was let air venelation for the miners and the mules go in and out...and you had to have a door you know, to hold this air. Yeah.

22 00

Ferraro: What kind of conditions were they inside the mine? I've heard from alot of people they weren't anywhere near as good as they are now.

Homer: Oh, Lord no. Dust was that deep. I believe the conditions now is better. I don't say it's to good but you didn't have none. You done what they told you, whether you had to load coal or bring your tools. It it takes you an hour clear up in the night you had to stay there till you cleaned up...before you got out of there - they'd let you out. It was bad. The union was as a greatest thing they ever did have - the only thing, but before they got any union at all they didn't have nothing...and I can remember when peddlers come in and sell stuff you know, you had to go up in the mountains ^{23 00}. They couldn't come in the community on a road like that. They wouldn't allow you to buy. You had...

Ferraro: Why not?

Homer: Uh.

Ferraro: Why not?

Homer: Well, it was against them. You had to deal with the company store... whether you wanted to or not.

Ferraro: You mean you couldn't - the only place you could buy. How tell me how they paid you? They pay you in script?

Homer: Yeah.

Ferraro: Well, tell me about it then.

Homer: They had a paper script and a they ^{23:30} thats pays you had a number, one on up to a dollar. A dollar about all you ever get.

Ferraro: What a do you say peddlers couldn't even come into town?

Homer: No, I can remember that when they couldn't come in. They'd tell em not to get on their on their land nowhere. You didn't have no say so at all. ^{24:1}

Ferraro: Do you remember them using mine guards?

Homer: Yeah.

Ferraro: Why?

Homer: Well, these mine guards was to keep people from agitating the union, talking to one another. You could think alot of things but you couldn't say nothing and if they catch you, I was worked over here at and they fired twenty seven at the breakfast table one morning. Slipping out in the woods going to union. Fired them right at the table. They catch you going to a local meeting they fired you.

Ferraro: Did they a they ever bring out a yellow dog for you to sign?

Homer: I can't remember when I was they brought everything else, I figured they did.

Ferraro: I mean were they a were the mines you worked in did they use those yellow dog contracts?

Homer: ^{25 00} Yeah, what they call a yellow dog, yeah a

Ferraro: Did they make people sign them or did they a..

Homer: I believe they did. I believe they did. If you worked there I think, you did. You had to come on the rule I knowed I know is you sign em.

Ferraro: What else do you remember about a about the old days..in the mines?

Homer: ^{25 30} Well, I can remember alot of things. I can't think of them now. That you couldn't go nobodies house that a was a union I mean, a you was a union man you couldn't go to a nobody without talking to anybody. They had that Marshall Law was in all that. Companies rules that done just what they did - wanted you...

Ferraro: ^{26 00} What a what were the operators like that ran the mines? Were they good men basically, or were they just were they bad?

Homer: No, they was bad. They you just had to get used to that kind of rule. Nobody liked that, had to do what they said. It was a slavery is all

I call it...and you wasn't allowed a talk to nobody.

Ferraro: Did you live in the company town for a while?

Homer: Uh.

Ferraro: Did you live in the company town?

Homer: Yeah, I did as was years ago.

Ferraro: Tell me what it was like.

Homer: Well, I don't know. It was so bad I couldn't hardly tell it. You had no say so in nothing. Done what they wanted you to do. What they felt about.

Ferraro: What were the houses like?

Homer: Well, the houses wasn't to good. Just ^{27 00}boxed in houses. They wasn't real good then.

Ferraro: How many rooms?

Homer: Best I I can remember I think, they had about four. Some of them three but they was throwed up with well lumber. Nothing like what they got today.

Ferraro: And the only reason and you got to live there as long as you a did what ^{27 30}

the mine operators said you could then?

Homer: Yeah, whatever they wanted you to do you would you could stay in em. They was alot of men done alot of things they didn't want em do because they was deprived to doing right...and the union what brought a the mine you know, a ^{28:00} if I can think of his name a, Woodrow Wilson. He gave them a right to organize at Logan where all this killing was. He gave em a union and a that's what West Virginia had. I seen the time you couldn't walk in Logan. Couldn't talk you couldn't walk in - they wouldn't allow you in there.

Ferraro: They wouldn't let union men in Logan, would they?

Homer: ^{28:30}
A no.

Ferraro: Did you ever hear about people going into organize and getting roughed up?

Homer: Yeah, getting killed.

Ferraro: Tell me about then?

Homer: Well, I heard I didn't see this but I heared I heared they threwed people in the furnace. I'd hear it for straight and bottom up coming in there. That was Don Shafins. They they didn't want them in there see to try to ^{29:00} organize see. They got so much off over time the coal to keep you or not. He was operators man you see. Yeah, alot of things back then I can I can remember happening...and you couldn't you couldn't

deal with the like church. You had to be or open shop...see you had
a church up here. If it wasn't open shop, you couldn't go to it -
company. You had to go to their church. It wasn't no good at all but
now you go where you want to right now. I found a million things now
what you had then.

3A 30

30 00

Ferraro: Remember anything about Don Shafin?

Homer: Well, he he was no good. I didn't know too much about him myself. I
was younger then but I know he wasn't no good by the talk of the people.
Yeah, you couldn't you right over here in the old farm printer. A union
man couldn't board that club house I mean, a if you was union, you had
to be open shop...so I I wouldn't want to go back to that see this again.

30 30

Ferraro: Do you think anything like that could ever happen again?

Homer: Yeah.

Ferraro: Like what happened at Blair Mountain?

Homer: Possible. I believe it could.

Ferraro: Why?

Homer: People fall away. If they fall away from the union and don't uphold for
it and don't fight for it it will go back like it was. You get back again
the operators. ^{They're} There trying to do away with it I see in the paper.

31 00

Ferraro: How?

Homer: Well, I see the other day they're trying to fight the union. The union man now they they want they want them come under the rule under their rule. I don't believe it be like it is a if a operators gets back in. ^{31 30} They 'll have full power see. Our union whats saved us to what we are now.

Ferraro: How many years did you work in the mines?

Homer: Fifty. I started when I was a kid. I picture, I got somewhere lets see. Here it is that marked on it see there - fifty years. ^{32 00} Right on that end there. Yeah, I had yeah, I had alot of experience in the mines. Been there a long time.

Ferraro: Were you a union miner all those years?

Homer: Yeah, well I worked a little outside different job mostly in mining - fifty years.

Ferraro: What's the union mean to you?

Homer: It means all to me. Not only me - everybody else that works in the coal mine. ^{32 30} It means a our union built is built up to where we get social security. We got welfare. We got alot of things that you never even thought about having then and I think it it's it's the only thing.

Ferraro: Where do you think the miners would have been if they'd a would never

got a union? 33:00

Homer: They'd been nigh of the graveyard. I believe starvation, that's where they'd a been. Yeah, the union is what's keeping em going today.

Ferraro: Ok stop. (charlie is talking) 33:30 One more time, tell me what the union has meant to you in your life.

Homer: Well, it's meant all all. Just spent my life all together.

Ferraro: Tell me how important it is to you?

Homer: Well, I it's it's most important everhing every rule they make. A you go to hospital want you want to go to. You get the doctor you want to go to. You spend at any store you want to. Place like Madison or Charleston you wasn't allowed to go. Only place you went is what what they told you to go. 34:00

Ferraro: Well just a just tell me one more time what the union means to you. 34:30

Homer: Well, a the way I explained it the best it just means all to me - my life the whole thing. Right now ah, if the union would go down they wouldn't be no business. You couldn't go down they as far as Madison and spend a nickle if you had it and now you spend it where you want to and you've got your freedom. Anything you want to do. I'm trying to explain it as near it I know. 35:00

Ferraro: Your're doing a good job. Is that it? Ok, lets pause it.

35:18

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35:18