

MEMORIES OF BLAKEBURN

1925 TO 1940

INTRODUCTION

This is an abbreviated story of life in the coal-mining town of Blakeburn, British Columbia. In our stay of fifteen years there we met many interesting people whose names I will mention as they come to mind and reminisce on many experiences, both happy and sad. No doubt I will miss many people that are well known in Blakeburn – Coalmont and the surrounding area. To them I tender my apologies, as I have no previous experience being an author. My formal education ceased at the age of twelve as I voluntarily left school to follow the family occupation of mining for coal. This narrative will be done entirely from memory with the hope that boredom will not interrupt the reader's interest. I hope to get some help from family and friends, to whom I offer my sincere thanks.

Robert Stewart Murray



Blakeburn, British Columbia – About 1925



Murray Family Scotland 1923

Girls Jessie & Marg, Mom & Dad

THE BEGINNING -- CHAPTER ONE

A Beautiful July day in 1925 was witness to my goodbye to my dear wife Jessie and young family. I boarded the steam ship Metagama bound for Canada and eventually a small coal-mining town in British Columbia. My brother George and his wife Ann met me at the C. P. Railway station at Coalmont B.C. and accompanied me on the last leg of my journey. We arrived by motorcar in Blakeburn; it was the middle of July. This town was in the B.C. interior approximately twelve miles West North West of Princeton on the Southern slope of Lodestone Mountain at about the four thousand foot level.

In 1925 there were two operating mines, the Wilson Tunnel or number three as some called it. This was close to the town centre and the second was number four located one mile from town. The coal was hauled by electric locomotive to a point where the loaded cars were transferred to an aerial tramway that terminated at the railhead in Coalmont after a four-mile trip over quite rugged country. The railway distributed this good quality steam coal to its various distribution points. According to earlier reports the output from the mines was first hauled by wagon as early as 1912, over a road to Coalmont that was a corkscrew of downhill terror. This was an expensive operation but no more so than the 1920 overhead tramline. The mines were owned and operated by Pat Burns and a syndicate of wealthy entrepreneurs, but I don't think their wealth was increased much by this operation. I remember during one of their visits in the late 1920s hearing Pat Burns remark to his partners, "Lads we had better go for a free meal in the dining hall as it's probably all we'll get out of this in the end." The superintendent of operations when I arrived was a fine old gentleman named Donald McLean. My brother George was his foreman and he took over from Mr. McLean when he retired shortly thereafter.

Though pretty well isolated from the outside world this company town did not lack many amenities found in bigger centres. It boasted a good school, a fairly good library and tennis courts with a covered in spectator area were added in 1927.

There was an outdoor skating and hockey rink at the top end of the town with a soccer field and ball diamond alongside. Volunteer labour built most of these venues with help from the company.



Two tennis courts with covered spectator area



The ice-skating and hockey rink

The camp was fortunate in the quality of the teachers that came to Blakeburn, most were very interested in arranging and helping with entertainment for locals. These consisted of dances, whist drives and other suitable events in the company cookhouse.

The teacherage, gymnasium, three-room schoolhouse and schoolyard with swings were directly below the ice rink. One of the Chinese men that worked for Coalmont Collieries Ltd., would arrive each morning during the school year, light fires and do light janitorial service.

One memorable day, a group of lady schoolteachers, some from Blakeburn, asked to tour an operating mine. One more fire boss and myself were delegated to conduct this outing. I'm sure being so deep underground was a unique experience for them. They were quite impressed with the workings and methods employed by the miners. We attempted to satisfy their curiosity on anything they did not understand.

When travelling down #2 slope deep in #4 mine, the pressure of the roof had broken some of the cross-timbers, or collars in the centre, consequently it was necessary to duck underneath. One of

the more reserved young ladies did not duck, hit her head and was promptly deposited on her rear in the middle of the roadway. Her vocal opinion of this sudden jolt would make one think that she had earlier knowledge of underground language. We proceeded to a face where the miners were using a jack – hammer drill, one of the group, of course wanted to try her hand at this operation. She was hanging on and doing quite well until someone pressed the air button that cleared the dust from the drill hole. Everyone got sprayed with fine dust as the hole was being drilled in a hard rock shelf. The mine was not in full operation as it was the week - end and we all made it out to the portal laughing at their experiences and in a happy mood. They were all in need of a bath and told later of their visit to a coal mine with great glee.



Blakeburn Teacherage



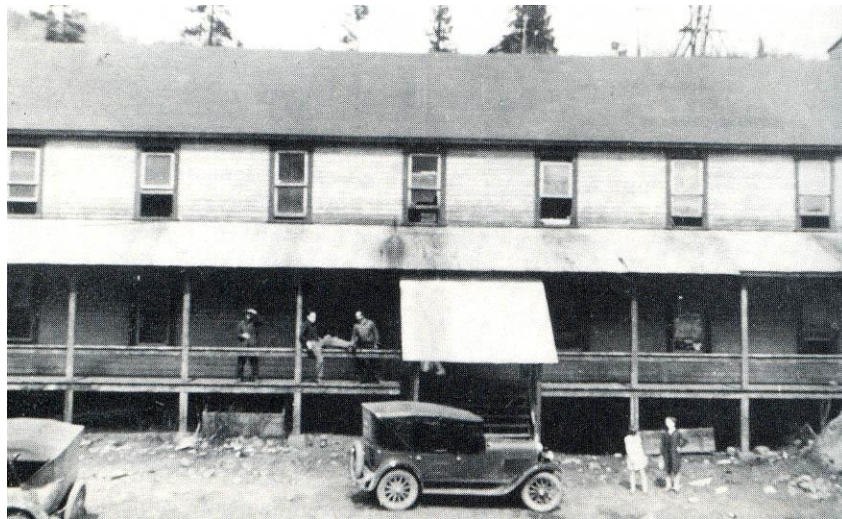
Madge Jones and her Elementary School Class in front of School Building

CHAPTER TWO

Robbie Burn's night was a well-attended annual celebration that was amply supplied with local talent. The one and only Jerry Brown was always in the forefront on these occasions and took a leading part in the proceedings. Jerry was my first partner when I started in the mines, a fine man to work with and a good friend. He was known by many in a wide area as a man of his word and a true friend. In time Jerry took over the taxi business, cashed the miner's cheques and brought the liquid refreshment up from Coalmont. Eventually he bought the Coalmont Hotel, which he and his wife Lizzie operated successfully for many years. Jerry and I were the best of friends and remained so until his passing in 1960.

Blakeburn had a football, or as it is known in Canada, a soccer team and though not having a great deal of players to pick from, we put together a pretty fair side. We competed with teams from Princeton, Merritt and any other interested sides. These matches produced quite a lot of entertainment for the residents of the area. Once, on a hockey team trip we made to Copper Mountain, we had to travel over their light railroad to the foot of the incline where we were hoisted up on a skip without incident. Coming back down was something else, the hoist engineer decided to have some fun and let the skip free fall and then would snub it quite curtly. I'm sure some of the ladies screams could be heard for miles but we all arrived safely with a sigh of relief. By the time we arrived back up the hill, travelling in winter conditions, it was almost time to be at work.

There were a real variety of countries represented by the miners employed at Blakeburn, they were a mainly happy working bunch and crime was unheard of. The miners who lived in the main bunkhouse spent a lot of their time playing, crib, poker and blackjack. Many others often joined them, especially on pay weekends when a lot of money would change hands. It happened occasionally that a married man would arrive home minus his pay and would not be too popular with the unfortunate wife.



Main Bunkhouse Blakeburn B.C. – Washhouse to the Left

As is the case in most mining camps you will meet many interesting types. One of my favourites here was known to all as “Butch” really Joe Cherroti. Butch lived in the bunkhouse with “ Sharky” his faithful old mongrel dog that was famed for his beer lapping capacity. Butch could leave his room with trust that no one would try to come in if Sharky was there. Butch was a hard worker and an equally hard drinker with a heart as big as a mountain; he was usually happy and broke.

The “ Count”, as he was affectionately known was another of the likeable mining characters that lived in the bunkhouse. Some claimed that he actually was of a line of nobility in his native country, a fact never proven. During the week the Count looked like any other black-faced coal miner. The arrival of the weekend would cause a complete metamorphosis, he would appear in his finery. A fine quality suit of clothes, walking cane, leather gloves of the best and shoes that glistened from much polish. The Count’s personality shone at the Burns Night celebration held in the company cookhouse. His insatiable love of the main dish, Scottish Haggis was a much-discussed topic afterward.



Cookhouse and attached dining hall, Blakeburn B.C.

The men devised many diversions to the ordinary work- week; many of them would head for Granite Creek and try their luck at panning for gold. One smart old operator had the bright idea of collecting an ounce of shiny brass filings from the machine shop, washed them well and headed for Coalmont where one of the businessmen bought gold. Tony did real well with his scheme and got paid for an ounce of gold. The buyer was so intrigued with the joke that Tony had played on him that he did not press charges. No doubt he examined his future purchases with a sharper eye.

Two well-known miners, Stan Cunningham and Walter Mottishaw had cabins well up Granite Creek; many of the miners would make the trip up and stay overnight. Time would be spent fishing as it was excellent on this high mountain stream, and there were other activities that will be related later. First, I must tell you about a favourite sport performed in my Scottish hometown of Lesmahagow. Guddling was it’s name and it consisted of lying alongside a stream motionless with hands in the icy water until the fish became used to you there. The experts could snag quite a few trout without the expense of fishing gear. On one of my trips to Stans’s cabin he told me of two trout that were in a pool out front and challenged me to guddle them. I arose early the following morning and did just that. When I came in with the fish Stan wanted to know where my fishing rod was, I told him that I had guddled his two pet trout. I hesitate to tell you what Stan called my exploits and me, it was unprintable.

There were many jokes and pranks pulled on the unsuspecting greenhorns that arrived some weekends. A young man from Vancouver came up one weekend, of course the bunch decided to pull the old snipe-hunting trick on him. They led him to an open clearing about a mile upstream from Stan's cabin, armed him with a lit candle and two sacks, one for catching the snipes and one to put them in. He was instructed to lie flat on the ground and wait for the snipes to come scurrying out of the woods where the rest of the perpetrators had fanned out to scare the game. The gang of course had retired back to Stan's place to play cards, have a drink and relax. They did leave a guard out to warn them if he returned, which he did in about an hour. The alerted hoodwinkers made themselves scarce until the young man had also checked the second cabin, where Walter, who was wise to the gag told him the hunters were all still up the creek. He returned to the clearing and hunted for them but soon gave up and returned to Stan's cabin where he found most of them in bed and sound asleep. He then realised he was the victim of a practical joke but was a real good sport about it. Next day he admitted that he did have some jitters when he was left all alone in the dark with only the candle the previous night.

Andy Gordon was one of the serious prospectors on the creek; he had been at it for nearly fifty years, his crippled hands and joints proved the length of time they had been subjected to cold water. This kindly old fellow would spend all summer working the creek for gold and then climb up to Blakeburn when the winter weather arrived to work in the coal mines for a grubstake for the next summer. Andy and another gold miner had a little tunnel that they were working by the side of the creek. One day some interested friends came to visit and as luck would have it, one of the men found a nugget worth about \$ 5.00 on his way in to the tunnel. When he arrived at the face where Andy was working, he tried to give him the nugget. Andy refused and told him to keep it as a souvenir because there were lots more to come. The gold seekers were always living for the day they would strike it rich. It never happened to my friend Andy and that was too bad because there was none more deserving.



Coal Mine #4 – Blakeburn B.C.—June – 1929

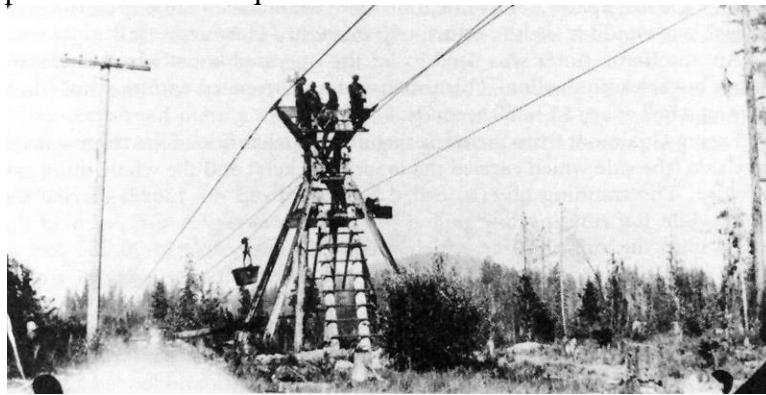
CHAPTER THREE

The coal seam at #4 mine required a vast amount of timber due to the nature of the strata. Frank and Tewie Barnes met this need with their crew. This was a difficult operation as the timber had to be hauled over very rough country to the Barnes timber yard at the foot of #5 incline. Jack Rhodes took over at this point, with his assistant would cut and frame the posts and collars. These set were then loaded on timber trucks and skipped into the mine as they were ordered.



Fred Fielding at work in the Timber yard between #4 portal and #5 incline.

The mine worked three shifts and at peak production, the aerial tram way to The C.P. Railway at Coalmont operated about 20 hours each day. There was a steady crew of two experienced employees who patrolled and repaired the line and towers. The aerial tram consisted of two cables, the heavier one was the standing cable and it bore the weight of the loads. The lighter cable was the running line which supplied the locomotion and braking, the suspended buckets were clamped to it with a unique device.



Tramline crew hard at work

Anchor Hill was known for its special set-up of trestles and towers from which point the loads dropped steeply to the tippie in Coalmont. Prior to Anchor Hill the tramway crossed a deep

canyon with a span of several hundred feet. This supplied a heart-stopping thrill to those who had to ride over it.



Tramline buckets over the Canyon prior to Anchor Hill



Coalmont Tipple – End of the run for the four-mile aerial tramway

The many salesmen who called on the camp generally had their wares shipped up by road on the company truck. A true story was told of one huckster who missed the company truck, which meant he would have to wait until next day. It was suggested to him that he make arrangements at the tipple to ride an empty bucket to Blakeburn. He made the necessary deal and climbed aboard with his sample case.

When he arrived at the terminal, he was crouched in the bottom of the bucket with a look of terror on his face. According to the tale he told later, when his bucket had levelled off after

climbing out of Coalmont, he rose up and looked out just as he was traversing the canyon. You can imagine how he felt when all he viewed was the depth of the gully. He dropped to the bottom of the bucket and remained there until he reached the end of his ride. Undoubtedly any future trips would find him arriving on time.



Aerial Tram Anchor Block – Blakeburn - Only Remnant of the Terminal - 2005

Si Smith and George Fraser looked after any building carpentry required at the camp. They also looked after all necessary tool sharpening and saw filing required, they were masters of their trade.

Following is a listing of Firebosses Bill Ross, Jock Malone, John Mc Murtry, Dave Francis, George Walker, Jimmy Sim, Jimmy McWhirter, his brother Archie, Tommy Smith, Tom Vincent, Tommy Bryden, Frank Bond, Wilf Valentine, Jack Ovington, Bob Barrett and myself. The duty of these men, was to examine the working places and supervise the loading and firing of blasting operations. They didn't all work there at one time but did at one time or another during the time I write from 1925 to 1940.

Why men such as Jock Smith and Tom Bryden spent their lives underground is a mystery to me. They both had exceptional singing voices that they proved time and again at many different entertainment events under the direction of Father Franey. He was a gifted man himself and organised quite a talented group of players. They put on a stage play entitled "Only Sally Ann" which played to full houses in the dining hall and also filled the theatre in Princeton. It was decided to book a hall in Vancouver where it played to a crowded house in the big city. The cast for this production consisted of Blakeburn locals, Stella Olsen, Mrs. Boag, Mrs. Littler, Mrs. Bob Murray, Mrs. Popovich, Mrs. McLaren, John Dalton, Happy Hackwood, Jack Pacey and Allan McDonald. They proved to be a very talented and versatile group of amateurs that was well received by their audiences. Unfortunately Father Franey moved from the area and no one stepped in to fill his shoes as a leader.

CHAPTER FOUR

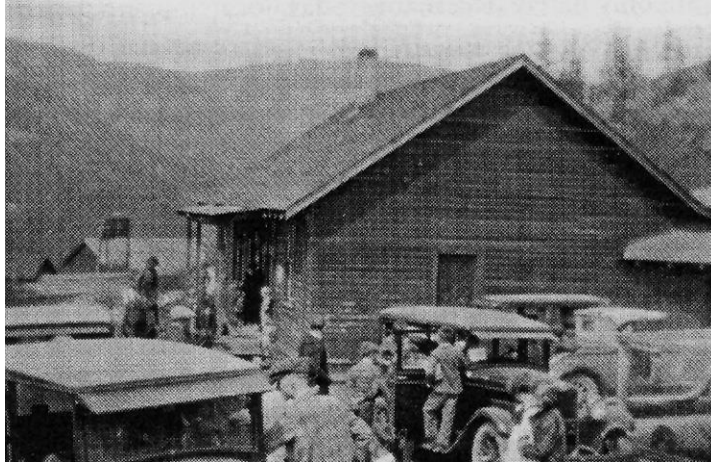
One year after my arrival I was able to send for my wife and three small daughters to join me in Canada. That day I left to go and meet them in Vancouver a large forest fire was raging on the Southern slope of Lodestone Mountain. I walked the four miles to Coalmont to catch the passenger train and on the way a truckload of flour passed me on it's way up the hill. It didn't get through that day as the fire was too close to the road and it passed me on it's way back down, still fully loaded. I met the family in Vancouver the next day, more about this after relating my going away visits in Scotland. In our hometown of Lesmahagow we had visited many relatives before my departure for Canada.. One of these was my Uncle Jake who must have made a deep impression on my second daughter Margaret. Back to our meeting one year later, I was on the platform when the train from the East pulled in and the first one to greet me was my eldest girl Jessie about 31/2. I said," Hello Jessie, do you know me?" " Aye, you're my Faither". A smiling Margaret was next and upon the same question, she answered " Aye, you're my Uncle Jake" The youngest of the three girls Rena (Bunty) was still a babe in arms and did not amuse strangers with her Scottish accent as her sisters did. She was named by Peter Sloan, my Father-in-law and nicknamed Bunty as she was known thereafter.

My wife was more than happy her long journey across Canada was finally over and she could settle in the hotel for a little rest. She had had a busy time shepherding three little girls on that arduous trip, although she said most people were very helpful.

We visited with friends at their home on Burrard Street the next day and suddenly missed Margaret, we found her at the front gate eyeing everyone that passed. We asked what she was doing and her reply was," I'm aye lookin for ma Faither". She continued to call me Uncle Jake for more than two weeks. We arrived in Coalmont the next day and were met by my brother George. My wife wanted to know where we were to go from here, I pointed to the mountain through the forest fire, and I think she was thinking of heading back to Scotland. George assured her that it looked frightening but he had just driven through it and it was safe. There truly was a large amount of smoke and spot fires flaring every direction you looked.

The new home that a friend of mine had helped me build was small but adequate for now and we settled in thankfully. We added a kitchen and a bedroom for the girls right away but we were miners, not carpenters and our green lumber ended up being a pretty rough job. The family soon adjusted and entered into life in Blakeburn quite happily. The annual company picnic was held at Tulameen (Otter) Lake shortly after our addition to the house company vehicles were used to transport the picnickers to the site so there was much to do to get everyone ready. My wife had finished her ironing of the girls' dresses etcetera and in the rush the electric iron was inadvertently left on.

We returned home after a pleasant day at the lake, we had been gone about twelve hours. Imagine our shock when it was discovered that the electric iron had burned through the counter top and one set of shelves plus the house was still there. Thank God for green lumber, had it been seasoned shelving, our new home would probably have been a pile of ashes on our return.



Coalmont Collieries Company Store



Manager----Miss Mary McKay

One of the more well know inhabitants was Miss Mary McKay who spent her working hours managing the company store with great efficiency. She had a genuine liking for people and treated everyone with courtesy. She was a good friend of ours especially my wife Jessie, they used to partner at special occasions such as masquerades and other entertainments put on by the miners wives. Her good male friend was Bill Waddell who took great exception to any joke on the Scots. Mary arrived at our home one evening in great glee and told us about Bill's latest radio listening habits.

It seems he was listening to an American station (radio reception was great at 4000 feet elevation) and the announcer was telling jokes with the Scotsmen as the butt. He told first of the coal deliveryman in Glasgow that couldn't get his dray horse to move after a delivery stop. He examined all equipment, harness, reins and bit, wheels and drag brake, nothing seemed amiss. He decided to check the horse's hoofs for stones or trouble and under the third foot he found a three - penny piece. Bill didn't see any thing funny and switched the radio off, exclaiming that's a darned lie. His curiosity got the better of him and he turned the radio back on in time to hear about the Scot who was working in a Canadian Lumber mill and had the misfortune to cut off a finger that fell into the sawdust. Several co-workers were searching for the finger in the hope it could be re-attached. The boss arrived and being told of the situation, told everyone to stand back and he pulled a dime from his pocket and threw it onto the sawdust. Suddenly the finger came popping over the sawdust towards the dime. This was too much for Bill as he again switched the radio off with a vengeance and a few well-chosen words for the radio station. Miss McKay thought this would be a good time to go visiting and let Bill cool down a little.

Another welcome addition to our camp was an excellent dance band composed of Bob Barrass on the piano, Joe Vickers on the drums and Joe Delprato violin. Wilf Valentine filled in on occasion when needed. Any band member who felt like it added vocals. These well-attended dances were held in the cookhouse generally on a Saturday night and amazingly there was never any serious problems from liquor consumption or any other reason.

CHAPTER FIVE

Shortly after arriving in Blakeburn, our oldest daughter Jessie, at four years old had a great want for a gramophone. Jessie would choke back her disappointment when delivery trucks would arrive and there would be no gramophone. About this time one of the miners who lived on Vancouver Island decided to leave the mines and as a consequence he raffled off a lovely large cabinet record player. I was fortunate enough to be the lucky winner of this fine machine that was in wonderful condition. It was a red-letter day at our home when the record player arrived. We had one excited and happy little girl when it was wound up and put into operation. There was a good selection of records that came with it and I believe the favourite was “Whispering”; this one was worked fairly hard. The whole family got a lot of enjoyment from this win and Jessie’s problem was solved. It must be mentioned that her early fascination with music resulted in Jessie becoming an accomplished classical pianist in later life.

Halloween was a big night in the life of the youngsters, especially the teenagers. There was an abundance of outhouses in camp because very few homes had the luxury of flush type toilets. The young folk would make it their duty to try and get all the outhouses tipped over before bedtime. Where we lived we had a deluxe two-holer model that was heavy and quite large. The first year in this newer home I decided to guard it from being dumped, but a hard tiring day in the mine proved my undoing. Settling in my easy chair after supper, I fell fast asleep, in the meantime the demolition squad had arrived and my double holer landed on it’s back.

The following year I had a little fun too, I lay in wait for the gang and convinced them that I wanted to help but made a show of stepping around possible traps by the building. Any way, in the end with much suspicious whispering we lay the outhouse gently over on it’s back with no damage. Later that evening, when I was at the main bunkhouse, one of my neighbours asked me if I would help him put his outhouse back up in position and he offered to help me with mine. I told him I would help him but would wait until the next day when the company usually sent a crew around to set all the outhouses upright. We had only gone about fifty paces after setting the neighbours outhouse up, when we heard it go down with a crash for the second time that night.

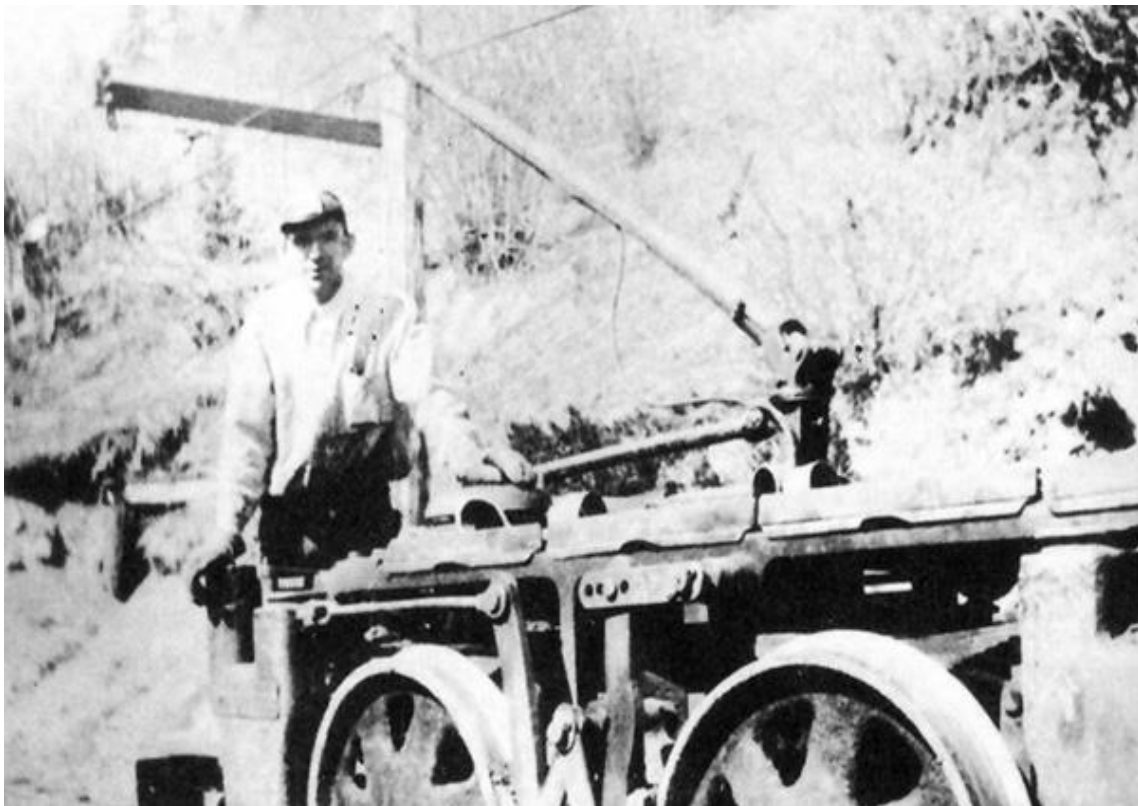
Remembering Halloween has triggered memories of some more men that I worked with. Tommy Slee, Frank McVeigh and Jim Littler were three more firebosses that I was privileged to know. Frank McVeigh shone at some of the entertainments when he would break into song with a rendition of comical tunes. Jim Littler, Tom Vincent and Jack Ovington all possessed first class coal-mining certificates. Jim was a very good organiser and took a great interest in all activities that would benefit the community. His organising skills made him underground manager for many years and he was well liked by the workmen.

The mines in this basin were very gassy and great care had to be taken before underground blasting took place. It was the firebosses responsibility to ensure that there was not an accumulation of explosive gas, CH₄ or carbonated hydrogen as the miners called it. This was a lighter than air gas and would rise to the highest point in the area, which were usually unventilated raises. Carbon Dioxide was the other gas that had to be dealt with underground. It was heavier and settled to the low point or tunnel floor.

The strata in #4 mine made it highly subject to fires caused by spontaneous combustion. As mentioned earlier the great weight of the overburden, caused breakage of the massive collars

in the timber sets so, pressure caused fires to break out sporadically. The fires were found mostly in areas where the coal had been extracted and produced a far more dangerous gas known as CO or carbon monoxide a colourless odourless gas with possible lethal consequences if not detected. This was one of the major problems underground as fires would break out quite frequently and the only effective means of control was to seal them off. Many a miner would go off shift with a massive headache after working on the stopping for one of these fires and not wearing proper breathing apparatus. Underground fires were a major cost to the company, as often the stopping would have to be circumvented with new tunnels to carry out the work in progress.

Another mine was opened later, it was called #5 and was not subject to pressure and gases as #4 but the quality of the coal was not as good. A good sized crew worked at this mine but were disadvantaged because it was a mile further out than #4 and at a lot higher elevation. A long incline was installed to allow the coal to be lowered to the level of the narrow gauge railway for transport to the aerial tramway terminal. Production from this mine took place mainly in the late 1930s.



The author Bob Murray on the narrow gauge electric locomotive – Its total run from the foot of #5 incline to the tram terminal was about three miles.

CHAPTER SIX

The winter of 1927 saw brother Dave leave our village of Lesmahagow, South Lanarkshire, Scotland. The morning he arrived in Blakeburn I thought he would never come to the end of removing layer after layer of sweaters scarfs and vests. Other relatives had warned him that Canada was a cold country and he had made absolutely sure he would be protected from the frost. His stories of the trip he made across the ocean on the Steamship Montrose in the month of February and his following travel by C. P. Railway across Canada kept us all amused for the remainder of the winter.

His wife Mary and their son James joined Dave the following year aboard the Letitia arriving in Nova Scotia in December 1928 In 1929 Dave was working in the Wilson Mine when a serious cable accident caused the loss of all but his thumb and index finger on the right hand, this ended his mining career. It was more than thirty below zero the morning of the accident; I was down with the flu and could not accompany him to the Princeton Hospital where some surgery was done. The final repairs were done in a Vancouver hospital and the Workmen's Compensation Board awarded him a monthly disability stipend of \$25.00. This seemed a pretty ridiculous amount to compensate a man for the loss of his livelihood. Dave was fortunate in gaining employment, on his recovery with Coalmont Collieries in the role of compressor room attendant for #4 Mine.



Dave, Jessie, Bob and Mary Murray – mid 1930s on holiday –Whiterock B.C.

Dave's wife, Mary was an excellent knitter and seamstress she produced a variety of Indian style sweaters that were sold to several different foreign outlets. Their son Jim went to work in the mines and married Doreen Francis from the neighbouring town of Princeton B.C.

A close neighbour of the Dave Murray's was a unique married lady who will remain unnamed for reasons soon to be evident. During the New Year Season it was common for the locals to travel by foot from house to house to visit and sometimes have a little drink to bring in the year. One of the local lads had imbibed a little too much and by the time he called on the subject's home he was a little tipsy and a little late for visiting. Upon pounding on the door and asking to come in the tipsy one was told by the neighbour lady that her husband was in bed with the flue and she was not opening the door. Not believing her statement the caller shouted out, "I hope your old man dies". The very excitable lady in question called back, "I hope he does, I hope

he does”, which she didn’t mean of course but this unusual person, told the story on herself later. She was the mother of some strapping boys and was trying one time to get one of them to take a dose of castor oil, he was not co-operating. She threatened him with if you won’t take it I will, which she did and told the story many times.

She was a good friend of ours and would often do us the favour of baby - sitting for us if we had a function to attend. We arrived home after one of these sessions and after a cup of tea she still did not seem as anxious to go home as she usually was. My wife mentioned that it was getting quite late and dark out and asked what the problem was. She confessed that she had spent her time reading some old murder mystery magazines and was scared to go out. I of course accompanied her over the trail to her house and said no more about it. Several days later we heard the yarn from one of our neighbours, she had told the story on herself as usual.

The lady in this narrative had a fairly good singing voice but she did excel in highland dancing. Tulameen (Otter) Lake was a favourite spot for Blakeburnites to spend summertime hours, swimming, sunning and enjoying themselves. There was a fairly large raft anchored a short distance from shore with a connecting walkway to the beach. One early evening a few of the young folk that were swimming around the float, coaxed her to do an impromptu highland dance on the raft. She agreed to perform but made two errors, first she was fully clothed and second, she danced too close to the raft edge and tumbled into the lake. Being her good-natured self, she took it all in her stride and enjoyed the excited youngsters rescuing her. Most evenings were spent in singing around a blazing campfire on the beach. The Girl Guide troop from Merritt would often attend these outings and many friendships were established.



Tulameen Lake as it appears now – 2005.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Jim Brown, a fellow townsman from Scotland who boarded with us, related the following story to me. He and his good friend Crawford Paterson decided to take a trip to Vancouver to show Crawford the sights of the big city, as he hadn’t been there. Any one familiar with the location of the Orpheum theatre on Granville Street with its optional exit on Seymour Street will

appreciate the trick Jim was trying to play. They entered the theatre from Granville Street with the streetcar traffic busy clanging down the rails. After the film was over Jim slyly and without saying a word, led Crawford out the Seymour Street exit and Crawford froze in his tracks. Jim asked him if something was wrong and the green lad said he had never seen rails and trolley wires removed so fast in all his life.

Jim then steered him around the block to show him what had happened. Crawford was a good sport and didn't mind the yarn being told on him. Unfortunately, Crawford returned to Scotland and lost his life in a mining accident some time later

Coalmont Collieries maintained a well-run machine shop under the able direction of Bill Markle; his crew of excellent machinists performed some remarkable feats for the company. Bill and his wife had a home on the heights and two daughters Maxine and Hazel, also a son Jack.

The electrical department consisted of Mr. McEachern with linemen Tom Brown, Pat Malone and Albert McLean. They serviced underground electrical works, Trolley line above ground and the power line from Coalmont.

There were several small camps beside the main town site camp in Blakeburn. Namely Lewis Camp, located one half mile down the road to Coalmont, Barne's Camp close to the tram line approximately three quarters of a mile from the loading terminal. The Townsite camp was half a mile up the narrow gauge railway to # 4 mine.

The Rhodes and Gilmour families had homes near the upper portal of # 4 mine; Fred Fielding Mrs. Gilmour's father also lived in that area. Fred worked in the Barnes timber yard between the lower portal and the foot of the railway incline to # 5 mine.



Incline to #5 mine on the narrow gauge rail

The collieries always had a doctor on the payroll, Dr Sheffield was the attendant in the early days, and he lived in Coalmont four miles down the hill but commuted daily. His office was in the first aid building that was staffed by Jack Cartwright and was located between the cookhouse and the company office. The doctor always relished and appreciated a nip of whiskey now and again. After he had attended me at our home for a small injury, I offered him a small shot of brandy, which he accepted and savoured before heading down to Coalmont.

The following day I remarked to my wife that I thought Doc. Sheffield would arrive extra early to examine my injury. True to my prediction he arrived quite early and seemed to be in no hurry to leave. After he seemed to run out of small talk, I finally decided he had suffered long enough and casually asked if he would care for a small nip. He answered his acceptance with a big grin and the exclamation, “ I thought you would never offer”. Not long after this episode he was teaching a first aid course to some of the firebosses and miners. He caught me unawares with a difficult question early into the course, which of course I couldn’t answer. After the class we had a good laugh when he made the comment that a good man shouldn’t have to wait for a shot of brandy.

Otto Barrett comes to mind as one more of the interesting miners in the camp. Otto had the odd mental problem at times and would attend clinics to try and solve his failing. He was an excellent conscientious worker but if anyone called him crazy, he would open up and dump tirade of abuse on his accuser and challenge him to produce papers certifying that he was sane. Of course Otto had received papers attesting to his sanity when he had left his sojourns at the clinics. He was also the person to go to if there was any juicy gossip in the camp as he made it his business to keep abreast of current affairs.

Another very popular and interesting character was Willie Cole, this can be attested to by any who knew him and had listened to his rendition of comical ballads.

He was always sought after to sing some of his songs at any concert or event that was taking place in the cookhouse. He was a member of the Caledonian Club and kept the other members well entertained with his wide variety of amusing songs. Some of his repertoire was only suitable for stag evenings but he always gave a good performance for the audience. One Christmas, Willie did a little too much celebrating before the event and upon his arrival home, Meg his wife, delivered a severe tongue lashing. Willie just laughed it off and produced a bottle of Scotch Whiskey as a Christmas present for her. Meg never took an alcoholic drink in her life and she exerted a fine punishment. She accepted the gift and cashed it away and despite Willie’s entreaties Meg kept it under wraps for a long time. It never seemed to matter under what conditions you came across Willie he would always greet you with a genuine smile. The entire Cole family was musically inclined and provided much entertainment at some of the soirees.

“Smiler” as he was fondly known was a great orator when in his cups on a pay weekend. He could usually be found standing on a table giving a passionate speech in his own native tongue. A few of his countrymen informed us he was upholding the rights of the common man.

Some of the other medical people that served our community over the years were- Drs. Whitworth, Alexander, Coddington and Cannon. Dr. Alexander went on to Vernon Jubilee Hospital and did very well. Dr Cannon moved on to Abbotsford and became well respected in that area.

Chapter Eight



The Brown Wedding at the Cookhouse in Blakeburn July 14,1930

The wedding of Jerry Brown to Lizzie Millar was the highlight of the social calendar for the entire surrounding community. They were both well known to most residents and very popular figures. We were extremely pleased when our youngest daughter, Rena along with her cousin Bernice were asked to be flower girls at the wedding. Jerry had dispatched Bev Robinson by motorcar to pick up the girls to attend the wedding. Rena refused to go because Jerry did not come personally to pick her up. After much cajoling and explaining we finally persuaded her to go. She was well cared for by the bride's sister Nellie Millar, who subsequently tied the nuptial knot with one of our excellent mechanic's, Bob Clare.

Another wedding of note in the Murray clan was that of our niece, Olga Murray to Andy Morris. Andy was a smaller man but one of the better hockey players we ever had on a Blakeburn Team. He was so fast and adept at stick handling there were few players that ever caught him unawares. This wedding was a night well worth remembering as the liquid that cheers was in plentiful supply as were many local musicians.



Blakeburn Pipe Band in Merritt about 1928

The small pipe and drum band that was organized in this small coal mining community was well known in the area. The pipers were, Pipe Major Jock

Whitelaw, pipers Bill Docherty, Bill Forsyth and the Millar brothers.

Jim McWhirter ably handled the big drum with side drum accompaniment by Wilf Bryden and Wilf Valentine. This group always led the parade on picnic days and other occasions. The low ceiling in the cookhouse dining room did not lend itself to the best sound for the band on Robbie Burns Night. One local who had his own opinion on pipe bands, when informed that the pipes sounded best outdoors over water, made the comment that outdoors was good, but far enough away so you cant hear them. This was not the feeling of the majority of the community, in fact most of the residents were very proud of our band. Pipe Major Jock Whitelaw was quite an enthusiast as he had been a member of one of the better bands in Scotland. He came to the defence of his beloved pipes on numerous occasions when others would good-naturedly and in a humorous manner complain about the pipes in general. The Whitelaw family were all well known in the community. There were two boys, Jim

and Jock Jr. who were very popular in camp also a daughter Peggy who taught school for several years.



Peggy Whitelaw's picture of her first Blakeburn class - 1937

Bill McKinnon, Steve Freeman and Wilf Bryden staffed the company office, located just below the narrow gauge railway past the doctor's office. Bill had a son named after him so Bill Jr. and Sr. along with myself and Jim Whitelaw went on a fishing trip to Bear Lake. When we arrived, we wished we had picked another lake as the mosquitoes were out in full force and hungry for blood. We were attempting to make few fly casts in spite of the bugs. Bill McKinnon Jr. made a beautiful cast and strike catching Bill Sr. by the right ear lobe. There was some yelling and fur flying before it was finally removed. Eventually the mosquitoes won the battle and we retreated quickly with empty fish creels. The next true fishing story that comes to mind involved new arrivals from Scotland. Our family went to Tulameen Lake for the day along with the Jock Smith and his wife, the newest members of our community. Jock was a very keen fisherman and we couldn't get to the fun any too soon to suit him. We gathered up our rods and equipment, crossed the railway trestle over the lake outlet and proceeded down the railway line along the lake edge. Jock of course was used to fishing waters that did not have coarse fish in them and was unfamiliar with Suckers and Squaw Fish that were abundant in Tulameen Lake. I left him fishing at one spot and went a little further along where I had spotted a large Squawfish near the shore. After a few experimental casts I managed to hook it and pull it within reach. I walked back up the railway line with this huge fish's tail just about dragging on the ground. Jock met me and asked me where I was going I told him I had all the fish I needed and was going back to camp.

He came with me and when we were half way across the trestle I threw the big coarse fish into the lake. Jock looked at me as if I had lost my senses and he said so, after much explaining and telling Jock about coarse lake fish he was finally convinced. Jock was a good-natured sort and we had a good laugh about the whole episode.

A good laugh brings to mind an annual event that took place in our mining camp. The younger ladies had a hockey team the "Scrubs"; they would issue a challenge to the middle-aged men's team the "Dubs" of which I was a member. Like most of this team it was quite an effort just to stay upright. We had lots of fun and did a fairly good job of cleaning the ice. At times the ladies team would be required to wear mens attire and the Dubs would wear ladies wear, complete with makeup, wigs and full flowing dresses. The spectators had a great time watching

the men taking spills and showing off their fancy lingerie. The evening was a great success, judging by the comments heard after the contest, which was enjoyed by young and old.

We had many good times in the winter months, skating and skiing with the children. There was a gentle slope just above the skating rink towards the tramline; this was an ideal run of about 30 or 40 feet, just right for us amateur athletes. About mid-way along the run there was a flat spot that my wife could not negotiate and she would end up with her feet in the air much to the merriment of us all, wife included. The whole family enjoyed these outings and the girls came to be excellent ice skaters

The single men's bunkhouse was a great draw for games of chance during the week but especially on the week – end paydays. There were two ladies in particular who didn't appreciate the breadwinners spending too much time at the poker table. On several occasions they arrived at the door and assisted their mates to leave with well-aimed kicks to their posterior. How did I know all these juicy morsels of camp life? I unfortunately was as bad as some of the miscreants and also spent time gambling when I should have been home more with the family. There is not much can be said in defence of the gambling that took place and the odd family pay lost in the process. Personally I made sure my pay went home before I risked locking horns with "Lady Luck" Eventually an 11:00 P.M. deadline was set so the bunkhouse men could get a good sleep. Jerry Brown was a busy man, as he would regulate the liquor supply to insure the men would be on the job Monday morning. There were few who failed to make it. There was no union to contend with because Coalmont Collieries paid excellent wages during this depression era of the late 1920s and early thirties. Those who mined on a contract basis did very well; the workweek was six days and proved to be lucrative years for our camp



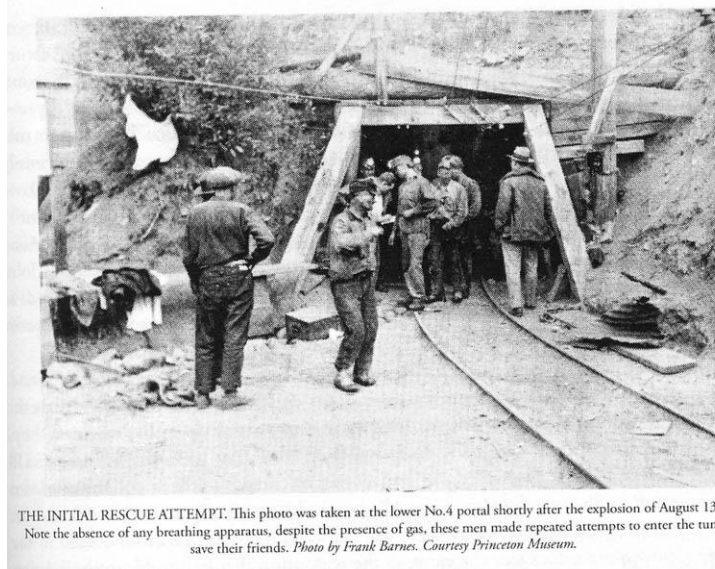
Granite Creek Valley from Shaugnessy Heights

CHAPTER NINE

Disaster strikes the mines and inhabitants of this coal mining community on Lodestone Mountain in the late afternoon of a stormy August 13 – 1930 also known as “Black Wednesday”. A double explosion ripped through # 4 mine at 6:30 P.M., shattering airways and roadways to such an extent that there was no possible way of saving any of the forty-five men that were underground. Some were crushed in massive cave-ins, but most were overcome by carbon monoxide gas that was generated by the explosions.

I was on a camping holiday with my family at Tulameen Lake and had just returned from a day of fishing. Removed my shoes and was beginning to relax when I heard a voice call desperately “MURRAY, FOR GOD’S SAKE, COME QUICK – THE MINE HAS BLOWN UP.” I ran and tried to put my feet into some shoes that were far too small, so I just kept running in my socks for the taxi and Johnny Walker who had been sent to get me up to the mine in record time. A fast stop at my home for proper shoes and work clothing and off to the portal as quickly as possible. Entering with fellow miners who had already started the operation, it soon became clear that rescue efforts would be a hopeless task. Hundreds of “caves” or to those not familiar with that expression – places where the tunnel roof had collapsed from the force of the explosions inside the mine. There were many miners now trying to get to the entombed men but were being overcome by deadly fumes. That first night was a nightmare and so it remained for many days to come when it was realized that all hope was gone.

Too much can’t be said for those who volunteered to help with the attempted rescue, some of them had never ever been inside a mine in their lives. Despite the many failings of the human race, it was heart warming to see how they all responded with no regard for their own personal safety in an effort to save their fellow man. Many rescue teams in the area answered the call for help but the caved conditions of the roadways did not allow them to enter.



THE INITIAL RESCUE ATTEMPT. This photo was taken at the lower No.4 portal shortly after the explosion of August 13, 1930. Note the absence of any breathing apparatus, despite the presence of gas, these men made repeated attempts to enter the tunnel to save their friends. Photo by Frank Barnes. Courtesy Princeton Museum.

Initial rescue attempt immediately after the explosion (F. Barnes photo)

The second day after the explosion rescue operations were becoming even grimmer as the men were being overcome in such large numbers. The attending doctors gave orders that a halt would have to be called, as they couldn’t cope with the large number of workers being

overcome. When they recovered, they would want to get right back to the rescue operation. During that second day I remember one case in particular, Bill Frew's heart had actually stopped but was revived by the pullmotor and heart massage and the first thing he wanted to do was get back in the mine. When a person was overcome with gas, the doctors insisted they not be allowed to sit down as the patient would just want to lie down and go to sleep which could have serious results. This required that each victim of exposure had to have two men to keep him walking.

I dreaded coming out of the mine as I was sure to see a good old friend of mine who had two sons underground when the explosion took place, he would be waiting for a sign that there were some survivors. I didn't have the heart to tell him that any person with mining experience knew that there was no hope of anyone surviving the deadly gases.

The remaining work was to clear the debris and recover the bodies of the victims, which was a task of stupendous magnitude. Progress was very slow but gradually the roadways were cleared and thirty-nine of the forty-five bodies were brought to the surface. The mines inspectors had issued orders that no one be allowed to go into the deep portion of the mine where the remaining six bodies were and was now under a large body of water. One of those six was a fire boss named Jock Smith and a special friend of mine. The rumour that Jock had fired a blast where gas had accumulated and caused the explosions was making the rounds of the camp. Knowing Jock, I felt sure that he would not take any unnecessary chances. Those of us who made inspections after the explosions travelled in pairs. My partner was another fire boss: Wilf Valentine and many places we had to travel were under water, sometimes several feet deep. In one level the water was too deep for Wilf to go through, although we were both wearing hip boots. I was much taller so I had to take my partner on my back and take him through to a drier area.

Jock Smith with five others was at the lowest point in the mine and now a foot or two under water. Despite the fact that we were forbidden to enter the area, we decided to do just that, as we knew it was safe and we had safety lamps for gas testing. We proceeded cautiously along this level through the water and found what we had hoped for. Hanging on a nail on a timber were Jock's cap bag, battery and cable which was all the proof necessary to prove that he wasn't firing any shots when the explosions took place. We discovered later that Jock and the crew had built a stopping for protection but it was to no avail. This area was allowed to fill with water resulting in a pump being installed later to pump the water out and recover the bodies after six weeks of pumping. This, in my opinion was an error of judgement on the part of the mines branch in charge; those remaining six bodies could have been recovered weeks earlier.

Among those who lost their lives were some of the best built, muscular men you could wish to see. Many had come from different countries and had left their wives and families in their native land. It was a grim and sad experience to see those fine men cut down in the prime of their lives. A relief fund was organised for the wives and relatives of those lost and donations poured in from all over the province which helped to care for those in need for a number of years.

Many articles were written on this disaster; unfortunately most had erroneous or completely false statements. One placed the only survivor, John Pochello at the 1500-foot level when the mine blew, which was incorrect. To explain, the coal trains were hauled out a rock tunnel 1200 feet to the main track and on to the tramline terminal in camp. From the mine entry the track was on a slight downhill grade and it was necessary to use what were called shoes to act

as a brake. The number of shoes required was usually about one shoe for every ten cars of coal on the trip.



A Trip of empties between the mine and the tramline terminal

John Pochello worked at the top of the slope underground; he also went out with the loaded train and placed the shoes before walking back in the tunnel. It was during this time and when he was halfway in that the explosion occurred, the rock nature of the entry saved him from losing his life but he suffered serious head injuries that he never fully recovered from. Another write up had the wrong number of miners losing their lives. The correct information of course was forty- five dead and, one survivor. Some reporters had the mines closing, never to reopen again, the mines opened after the explosion and the operation finally came to an end in April of 1940. The pallor of gloom that descended on the town remained for a few years but despite the fact that the loss was felt deeply by many, life must go on and the mines were restored to full production. Greater precautions were taken to try and prevent a re-occurrence; rock dusting of many areas was introduced to prevent the coal dust from being air borne.

A team of top mining men was sent in to make a thorough investigation as to the cause of the disaster. I was on several occasions deputized to guide them through the mine and airways. Many of these passages were in dangerous condition due to collapsed roofs and broken timber sets. Some of these men were not used to that arduous style of travel, crawling through narrow holes and traversing flooded areas, they were happy to again see the light of day.



MEMORIAL TO THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE EXPLOSION
LOCATED IN THE GRAVEYARD AT PRINCETON B.C.

There had been a severe electrical storm that evening, the final verdict of the investigating team was that a bolt of lightning had been conducted into the mine igniting a large body of gas in a worked out area. That may have been the cause, but it left us minus forty-five fine men and saddened relatives.

Worthy of mention was the Mathison Brothers, Bill and Alan who ran the grocery store in Coalmont. Though they had never worked in a coal mine they were a big help in the rescue attempt and worked like old timers. Fire boss Jack Davis took part in the rescue and he had miner's certificates that allowed him to act as underground manager,

The time I am writing about was in the 1930s right in the middle of the depression years when good paying jobs were almost non-existent. We had many applicants for jobs but if they were not seasoned miners they didn't last. One young chap got as far as the top of the slope at 1500 left level underground. When he heard that there were still bodies under the water deeper down, the poor lad was terrified and couldn't get out quick enough. He turned his lamp in at the lamp cabin and we never heard of him again.

CHAPTER TEN

A little back tracking on the time line here. An important event took place in the Bob Murray home in the early morning hours of December 24th/1929 when our only son Bob was born. Our three young girls must have known something about the upcoming event because at the first sound of a cry there were three pairs of feet pattering through the house and the all shouting “ a baby, “ a baby”. Their initial question was, is it a boy? When they discovered they had a baby brother there was much merriment and three happy girls. Dr. Whitworth who lived in camp was replacing Dr Sheffield who lived in Coalmont at this time and he was in attendance with Mrs. J. Hunter the mid-wife.

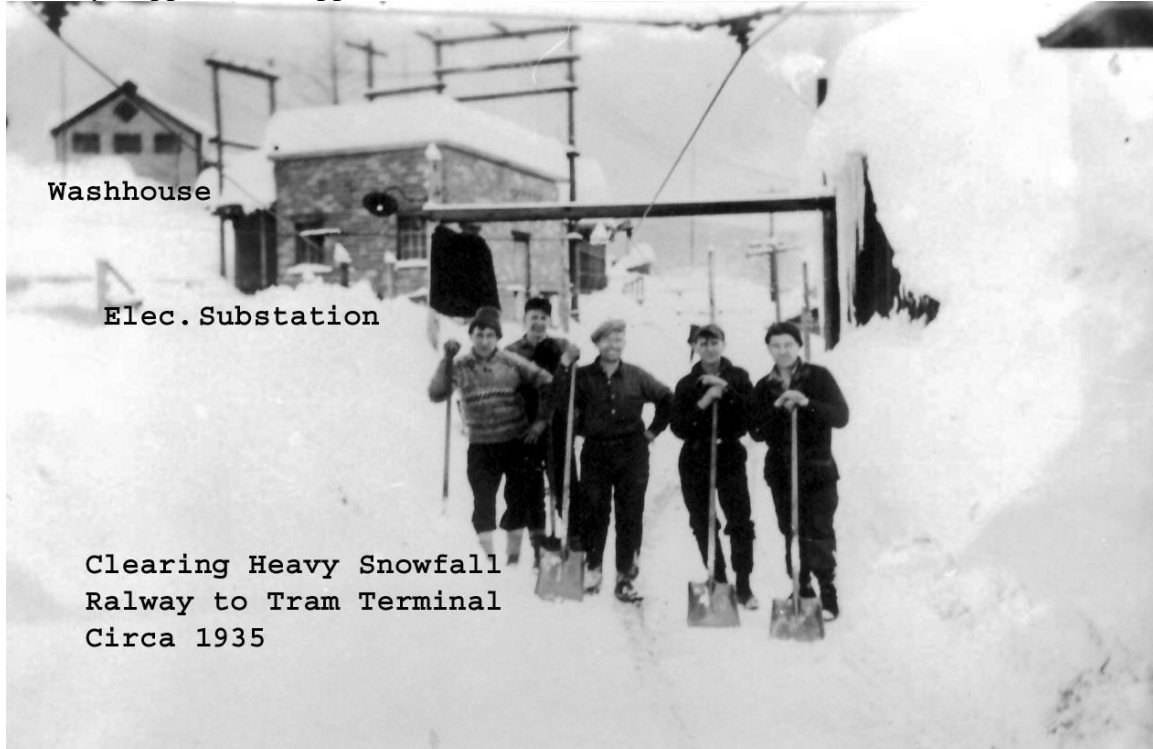
Later that morning while sitting by the pot bellied stove in the sitting room, our youngest girl Rena (Bunty) came into the room. It was customary for her to climb up on my knee, but this morning she sat on a chair at the far end of the room. On my inquiry as to why she was sitting there she said “ I’m not the baby anymore Daddy”, I assured her that she was for a time yet.

That year there was no children’s Christmas party but there was a hard working committee delivering the children’s presents, because a childhood disease epidemic was rampant in camp. They had been provided with a company wagon and a driver, when they arrived at our place we found that they had made a real Christmas gesture and picked up a present for the baby at Coalmont. It was a very frosty evening and the committee members were in a happy mood as they ere picking up a little liquid cheer on the trip around camp. When they went outside, our 51/2 year old daughter Margaret looked out the side of the window curtain and was amazed when she saw Santa Claus take of his face and light a cigarette. It was common knowledge around and about that some of the boys ended the trip in the bed of the wagon where the presents had been. The children were quite disappointed that year to have no traditional Christmas Party at the company cookhouse, which was the highlight of their winter season.

There were many problems to contend with in the long winter months at the 4000-foot elevation. Heavy snows were quite common and on many occasions the empty coal cars were loaded with snow from their trip by tramline and rail back to the mine, they would have to be shovelled out. The rail line of course would also have to be cleared from the heavy snows. I recall one of these falls that began on a Sunday night during our Caledonian Club meeting and we went home in about one foot of snow, but by morning and work time it was almost impassable. I made my way to the lamp cabin and picked up my underground lamp and did the normal check in and by this time I was feeling the effort needed to get through the deep snow. I started out up the track bucking about 21/2 feet of snow, it was hard going but I saw the traces of someone ahead of me. I overtook the miner who was sitting in the snow, he greeted me with, “ it’s all yours”, so I broke trail for the last ¼ mile. The snow was too deep for the mine to operate and the men had to return home. A small slide trapped temporarily some miners on the way home they were up to the armpits but easily dug out. We had two electric locies hooked on the same snowplough, as it was still snowing heavily. I operated one unit and Tom Brow ran the other, we had a problem keeping the line cleared as the day wore on. The continuing snowfall coupled with slides coming off the steep banks had the snow piled over six feet deep in places. The trestle at the town site was used as a drop off point for ploughed snow as it would drop into the small gully between the railway ties.

On our next full power sweep down the line we were pushing a large snow load and we spotted somebody at the edge of the track, we could see we wouldn’t hit him so we kept going because it

would be difficult to get going again if we stopped. Baldy was caught with a large body of snow and all we could see was an object disappearing over the snow-bank. We continued in to camp and returned immediately with a long rope which was tied around 230 pound Baldy and he was hauled up the bank, very cold but none the worse for his experience. Baldy was a driver in # 4, had he only stepped to the opposite side of the track he would have been in the clear.



Looking back over the years, many noteworthy incidents took place, one such occurred on an unusually hot summer day when our young Bob and a friend found a book of paper matches. Needless to say, boys being boys, they soon had the hillside behind our house going up in a blazing inferno. This created a fairly serious problem as the houses in camp were

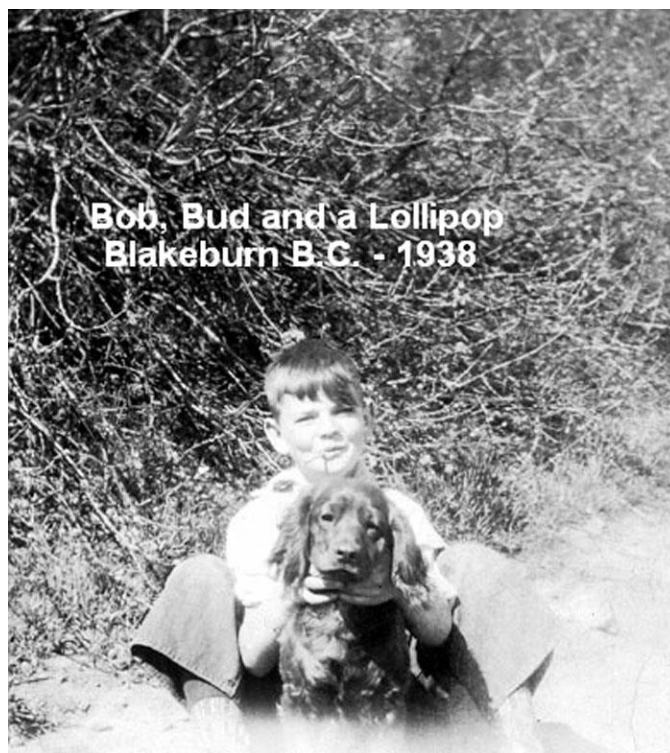
quite widely separated with tinder dry bush and scrub timber filling the voids. Fortunately the women formed a bucket brigade and got the blaze under control before the day shift arrived home. When I entered our home my wife told Bob to tell Dad what happened to day. Bob was sitting on his stool with a dejected look on his face. With a little prompting from me he looked up from under a worried brow and confessed that he and his friend had been playing with matches they had found and set the bush on fire. Well we had better phone the police in Coalmont and I did so but rang my own party line number and supposedly explained the whole situation to the policeman. Bob was sitting unhappily on his own little stool waiting for the policeman to come and take him to jail when Rena came in from school, seeing he didn't look so good she asked "What's wrong Sonny." "I'm going to jail Bunt for setting the bush on fire". (Sonny and Bunt were nicknames for these two) I of course let all the girls in on the secret phone call. I took a seat in my favourite chair and Bob soon pulled his stool beside me and started the questions on what jail was like. I painted a fairly grim picture of where he would sleep and what the meals were like. Bob was now getting pretty worried about his future and even though his sisters new it was all fake they were just as concerned and when dinner was on the table no one wanted to eat. I asked Bob to promise never to play with matches again, to which he readily agreed and I went through the phoney phone call routine again and cancelled the policeman's visit. Soon every one was smiling and digging in to dinner with their usual gusto. For years after, whenever Bob came across some matches, he would immediately hand them over to his mom or I.

The Caledonian Club about this time was arranging a stag party to take place on Okanagan Lake. We started off on a Friday evening by car for Penticton, there were twelve stalwarts in the group and Jerry Brown being a non-drinker was in charge of the affair.

When we arrived in Penticton we prepared to board the booked steamer that was sitting ready and waiting for our departure for a trip up the lake to Vernon. We were to sleep overnight on the ship and had brought a barrel of bottled beer in anticipation but were told we couldn't bring the barrel on board, only the bottles. A suitcase brigade was soon organised, much to the delight of an old timer sitting on the pier watching the proceedings he drank about four bottles that were given him by the packers and was sound asleep in the warm summer evening when we finished.

The trip to Vernon was not too involved, just the ordinary hi-jinks and jokes that take place on a stag outing. We had a meal in Vernon and returned via steamer to Penticton. A fairly amusing and lubricated evening was the upshot of our last night. The jokes and pranks continued on some of the group. One fellow was convinced that his car was smashed up in an accident. This was made to look real with phoney splints and bandages on some of the men. His reaction to this charade was appreciated by all but the car owner. We soon laid his fears to rest and confessed to the trickery, which left him much relieved.

We arrived back in Blakeburn on Sunday evening after a hectic time, needless to say, that was our first and last stag party. Some of the boys were several days getting over the effects of the outing and no sympathy coming from the women folk.



We decided to get a puppy for the family, as we were all fond of animals. One of our friends was trying to give away some pups from the last litter her female had. I made the selection of the runt of the litter but he turned out to be a real little beauty and was a favourite and much loved by us all. Unfortunately this little fellow was run over by a truck. We all missed him terribly but continued to own many cocker spaniels during our stay there. The smartest one that moved to Vancouver with us was "Buddy"

On the subject of dogs in camp, there developed a problem with some of them marking the post at the top of the bunkhouse stairs as theirs. Some problem solver came up with the idea to dissuade man's best friend from using the bunkhouse as a fire hydrant. A sheet of metal was wrapped on the post and another nailed to the floor under it but not contacting it. A non-lethal electrical current was applied to the two plates and when Mr. Dog attempted to relieve himself he would get a shock that he didn't forget. Nobody could ever recall seeing the same dog back at the post for seconds. Our dog followed me down one evening and must have gotten the treatment because he would never go closer than about fifty feet to the bunkhouse after that night.

The roads and highways in the area left a lot to be desired in the early twenties they were just dirt or gravel and only one car wide. The road to Princeton was the worst that I had ever encountered. There were several places where the passenger would see nothing out the window except the river a thousand feet or so below you. When a car was coming toward you it required backing up to the nearest cutout that would allow the two cars to pass. We met a carload of Americans on the dangerous Peterson Hill on one trip and there was quite a bit of trouble involved in getting the vehicles past one another. The American driver vowed he would send his car home by rail. He had my full sympathy, as the road didn't appeal to me at all.

Considering the dangerous condition of the road, there were not too many accidents. The worst I recall happened when Victor Marochi was injured seriously in the mine and was taken to

the Princeton Hospital. Brother Rudolph Marochi with a lad named Kornfield and another chap I can't recall followed in a second car. The road was shrouded in a heavy fog and the vehicle went over the bank going up Peterson Hill. Three were killed; Rudolph, young Kornfield and another were dead at the scene. When the ambulance arrived in Princeton, Victor had succumbed to his injuries. They were all well known members of the community and were sadly missed.

Some years later the Peterson Hill section was abandoned for a diversion route and the road was widened. This was a great boon to the many from Blakeburn and local camps that motored to Princeton for shopping, to see a movie and have a meal out.



This was the highest point on the twelve miles between Coalmont and Princeton. The signs advertise Burr Motors in Princeton. 2980 feet above sea level and 292 curves.

CHAPTER 11

Jim Brown, a lad from our hometown in Scotland boarded with us for a while and young Bob, Jim and I used to walk a trail from the schoolhouses down to the Coalmont road. There was a large outcrop of rock where the trail met the road and Brownie decided to put a coin or two in his hand, pick up a rock and throw it at the face of the outcrop. Of course there was a noticeable jingling sound and Bob Junior would be a few cents richer. We would then be asked quite often to go for a walk to the “Money Rock” as it became known to most of the young fry in camp. Groups of them would often be seen pelting that “Money Rock” to no avail.

The lower reaches of # 4 mine were under a lot of pressure from the overburden once the coal had been removed. This resulted in a large fire taking place in this lower area and it had to be abandoned, sealed off and flooded with water. The largest electric pump in the mine had to be moved out of the mine to a spot beside Blakeburn Creek 600 feet below the mouth of the mine. The water was pumped from the creek down the slope and into the burning area through the stopping in a 4 inch line. The area had to be completely filled with water and left for a certain time before it could be reopened.

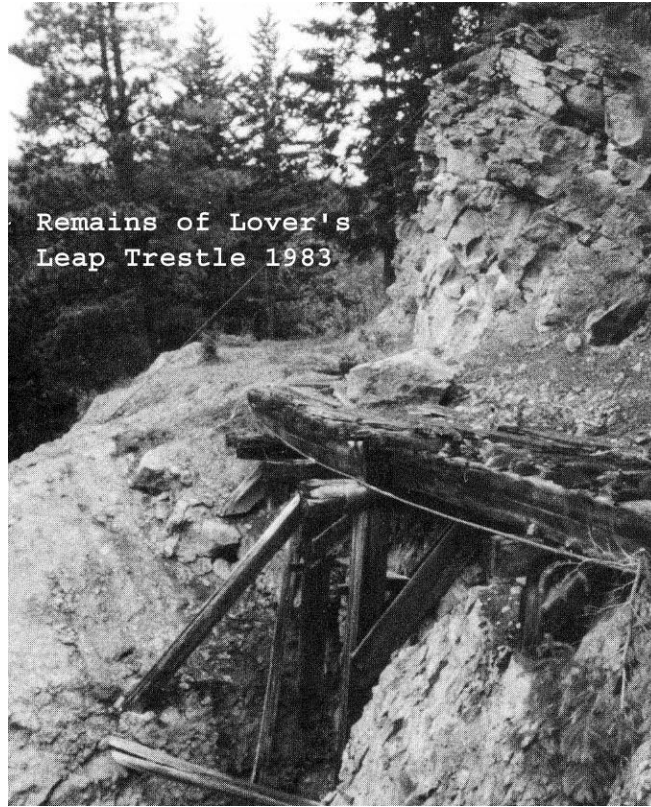
This operation proved to be very difficult, winter was upon us and the line would freeze up and have to be thawed out. Spring arrived with more problems; surface thaw water was flooding the upper operating portion of the mine and the whole operation had to be reversed. Pump put back into the mine to pump water out of the operating area, this proved to be very costly to the company.

Eventually the time arrived to dewater and reopen the lower area, the stopping had to be removed and as the water receded, the roadways were repaired. This was a slow process and it took some time before the mine was back in full production. The Wilson Tunnel was getting worked out with the result that the miners had to be assigned to # 4 and # 5 pits.

On a rainy evening that spring when the snow was still on the ground, the motorman was pulling a large trip of empties to the mine. For an unknown reason the Locie left the track at a rocky canyon, known as lover’s leap, the full trip of empty cars followed it.



Wreck at Lover's Leap - 1935



Photos – Mary Hancox

The complete trip, Electric Locie and coal cars ended up in the bottom of the rocky canyon. The motorman escaped injury luckily but salvage operations took several weeks and the mines were idled. Being strongly constructed the Locie only required minor repairs and was soon back in service. Some coal cars were made usable again but the majority were left in the canyon. Most of the miners were on contract work and a shortage of cars meant a shortage on the paycheque. Salvaging some cars and building many new ones kept the machine shop on their toes for the next while. Some of the crew in 1935 were George Sherriff, Bob Clare, Bill Oxley, Dave Oxley and Jack Markel.



With the passage of time and as our family grew older, we began to discover some startling revelations in connection with the tramline. It seems it was common practice for the teenage element in camp, boys and girls to climb the tramline towers and get into an empty bucket for a ride. They would abandon their vehicle closer to camp but not in sight of anyone and climb down the tower they had chosen as the ride end. This could have had serious consequences but they were young and nimble and no accidents took place. When we were told of these shenanigans in later years, it gave us an uncomfortable feeling thinking of what could have happened. My daughters, Jessie, Margaret and Rena, other than normal sibling rivalry around home never caused us any great problems. Their best friends in camp were, Pat Gilmour, Ada Littler, Joan and Norma Caulfield, Ellen Barrass, Peggy Bonora and many others that don't come to mind presently.



Blakeburn Girls Club 1934

Ellen Barrass, Jessie Murray, Velma Kipp (Cuthbertson), Ruth Whitlam, Vera Whitlam, Suzanne Oxley, Edith Cuthbertson, Ada Littler, Peggy Bonora, Rena Murray, Margaret Murray.

N.B. Girl shown as Rena is Louise Valance. They called it the Lafalot Club
 Ada's Dad Jim was underground mine manager for some time. Pat Gilmour's Dad was also well known and both his sons Willard and Lloyd played hockey on Blakeburn teams. Lloyd went on to become a fine referee in the National Hockey League, I always considered him to be one of the fairest ever, having watched him many times in later years prior to writing this
 The Caulfield family were also well known, Norman was the purchasing agent for Coalmont Collieries, being employed in this position for many years. The company store was in the able hands of Miss Mary McKay and Mary Barnes looked after the post office. The Barnes family

was very active in community affairs as well as running the large Barnes logging operation that supplied the mines timber needs.

The Barnes Timber Yard was beside the narrow gauge railway between # 4 mine portal and the foot of the incline to # 5 mine.

One year as Burns Night drew near the manager of the Princeton Brewery was given a complimentary ticket to the event. The brewery had in past times been very generous with their product at various company functions. No exception on this occasion he brought a good amount of liquid refreshment, with the result that after the supper and the dancing was supposed to begin there were few men folk in evidence. They were all found in a nearby private home where the gift from the brewery was stored. The Master of Ceremonies for the evening, Jim Littler had to coax the men to come back to the dance where there were some very unhappy wives. Dance attendees were treated to watching Al Angstead and Mary Barnes dance a polka, they performed as if they were professionals.

Willie Cole our local comedian, though not as good a dancer as he was a singer, strutted around with his ever-present smile and a style all his own. Al Angstead was a great favourite in camp driving the company wagon and delivering groceries, coal or any other commodity required.

There were two more Angsteads, George and Sol, brothers of Al.

Raymond Kostenberger was another miner that impressed me with his kindness and generosity. He asked me to take his place at a game of poker one evening when he was called away. There was only about \$2.00 left of his stake and figured I would be out of the game shortly. Lady Luck smiled on me and I wound up with over \$50.00. I went to his room and handed him the winnings he wanted me to keep half but I refused, he wasn't too pleased but showed his appreciation in many other ways.

When I first arrived in Blakeburn, I was impressed with the pretty girls in the Oxley family, also with their swimming ability. Their brother Dave was a fine lad and also a popular member of the community. Who will ever forget the barn boss Dave Dorcy, a familiar figure around camp for many years. The care he gave the horses used both inside and outside the mine was second to none. All the towns' folk new him from his very noticeable American drawl.

Pete Comai and Stan Cunningham worked underground as partners and were known to be a pair of the largest producers and money earners. While Pete was thrifty and put a little aside for a rainy day but was always generous with his friends. Stan was the opposite; a big happy - go- lucky, free spending lad who took every day as it came and it was hard to find a man with a bigger heart. A group of girls were raising money for a function at school and Stan told them he "didn't have enough money to buy leggings for a mosquito" but come back payday. They did and were not disappointed for Stan gave them a very generous donation. I made the mistake one time of accepting an invitation from Pete and Stan to go on a fishing trip with them; they were both tough and woods wise. I managed to keep up with them but was never so glad to see home in my life. Another interesting escapade took place with a fellow by the name of Louis DelPuppo who was boarding with our family during the early years of our stay in Blakeburn. Louis invited my brother Dave and I to go with him for a Sunday morning winter stroll before breakfast. Louis had proper footwear and was toting his rifle and we just had ordinary low cut

oxfords. Louis kept going farther a field than either Dave or I expected and by the time we returned, breakfast was long over and we were exhausted miserable and soaking wet from the knees down. During this trek we had helped carry a fresh killed deer for the hunters we met up with were tired and the snow was fairly deep. Dave managed to take a fall in the snow with the deer on top of him so that ended his packing efforts and he took off for camp alone. We finally got together again after some calling back and forth and arrived back home in the late afternoon.

Blakeburn, as we look back on it had beautiful mountain scenery with an abundance of different areas to visit. Crater Lake was one of the favourite places in the summer for the children to hike in to. It was quite a small lake but a quick cooling dip in its rock-lined shores was refreshing. Not too many organized activities in those days so the young people would take their lunch and make a day of their own style of entertainment. There were many trails suitable for hiking and one of the most popular was Lodestone Mountain. Norman Caulfield had a cabin on the mountain; our girls told us of their experiences on forays there.



Lodestone Lake. September 4, 1983.



Near Lodestone Lake
L to R: Walter Pacey, Reg Mottishaw, Stan Cunningham, Tommy Ralston, Ollie Ness.
Courtesy Wilf Valentine

Almost any direction you took would supply an interesting time; all who were interested in the old gold mining operations at Granite Creek made many trips. The prospectors had installed a labour saving highline that spanned the creek; it had a light carriage attached and provided a system of winching supplies across the creek. The hard work of toting the goods into the canyon and up the other side was avoided.

We all enjoyed watching the miners performing these feats and would spend quite a bit of time when we were lucky enough to arrive when the supplies were being moved, eventually it fell into disuse and in time it became inoperable.



Remains of the gold miner's tram over the north Fork of Granite Creek

We made many trips down to the creek to visit the prospectors or spend the day fishing and sometimes a small gold nugget would turn up, as they seemed to for my brother Dave.

This is rugged country in the valley of Granite Creek a man and his wife were trying to eke out an existence here in the earlier times. They built a cabin on one side of a rock face, that winter snow fall was extremely heavy, a slide came down burying them and swept their cabin into the creek unfortunately they both lost their lives. I do not know the names of the people involved, just heard the story from old timers.

The remainder of this chapter contains stories and anecdotes of a not very flattering nature; although no names are used it is just as well to leave these reminiscences in the past. (This note is by the author's son Robert D, Murray who is transcribing the manuscript of memories of years past.)

Chapter 12

One of our near neighbours in Blakeburn was the Frank Bond family; I worked with Frank for some time before we both became firebosses. There were three boys in the family, Frank Jr., Bob and Jim, also two girls Norma and Neen. Their home was along a mountain path about a five-minute walk from our house, it was also close to my brother Dave's home.

The Walkers were residents for many years with a family of four sons, Johnny, Jim, George and Bob also two daughters Sadie and Primrose. The father was a fireboss for many years. While mentioning hard workingmen at Coalmont Collieries we mustn't forget Jimmy Pringle or Paddy? the company wagon driver in the early years. He was a member of the Caledonian Club in spite of being a son of the old sod. To bring a tear to paddy's eye you only had to sing a sentimental Irish ballad. He was a real happy fellow and was very popular with the all the folks in camp.

A very likeable partner I had in the twenties was Pete Hunter, a very capable miner and good friend, Pete left the mines in the late twenties and made a name for himself at the Powell River Pulp Mill where he finished his working life successfully and retired there.

Visiting sports teams were always welcomed and given a meal at the company cookhouse. These matches always had a good following of spectators and other than the change room at the ice rink there was no place for them to go. In time the Caledonian Club obtained the use of a small hall that would be opened up for the benefit of the visitors.

Otter or Tulameen Lake, as it was called by the Blakeburn residents who spent a lot of time in the summer camping there was an ideal spot for children. It had a beautiful sandy beach and the water was shallow for quite a way out. Mr. John Hosie had a small store there and a row of changing booths on the shore. He also had a number of cabins that he rented out to the summer visitors for a nominal fee.



Bernice, Margaret, Rena and Jessie Murray at Tulameen –
August 1938

One summer in the late 1920s our family had set up the tent and were ready to spend a couple weeks having a relaxing time, unfortunately we were not experts in the camping business and the tent was in the wrong place. The following day the rain started so we took cover in the tent just as the rain came down heavily accompanied with thunder, lightning and a strong wind. The floor of the tent was soon awash with rainwater and also a terrified young St. Bernard pup had made our tent his idea of a safe place to be, it didn't matter to the children as they liked dogs and we were all well soaked by this time. Mr. Hosie rented a cabin to us and we moved in and soon dried out when the sun reappeared and warmed everything up again. Cooking was done on an old kitchen range that sat out in the open beside the cabin and every morning our landlord Mr. Hosie would knock on the door to announce the kettle was boiling, it was just his nature to be accommodating, he was a real nice fellow.

There was a large building near the lakeshore that was used to store ice blocks cut from the lake, sawdust was the storage medium, blocks were shipped by rail to customers at Vancouver. The Shuberts were a pioneer family that lived in the Tulameen area early on and owned the store. Mrs. Shubert could be seen every morning, towel over shoulder and heading for the lake for her daily swim, she was one of the first white children in the area.

Harry Lowe resided in the Tulameen district for many years; he was a pioneer who had varied interests. Dick Ward was also a long time resident. He owned a small house that he rented to us one summer. The lake was not known for its ease of catching a trout but Dick could always go out and return with a fair catch. The Forsyths were well known, most of them had their homes in Princeton but Dave had a home in Tulameen where he lived with his wife, nee Nancy Shubert. Dave worked at the mine as did Jock and Bill who I mentioned earlier as being a member of the Caledonian Pipe Band.

There were a number of workers who travelled the road up the hill from Coalmont daily; the following are those that I recall presently. Dr. Sheffield, Tom Bysouth a fireboss that was not mentioned previously, Bill Hughes and I know there were quite a few more. The Holmes family were pioneers in the Coalmont region, Hughie drove taxi to the camp for many years. Jim Smart the Coalmont postmaster was a well-known figure along with his son Walter. Bill McKay worked at the tippie I believe at the terminus of the tramline. I wish I could remember more of the area residents; there were many more that I came into contact with over the years.

Coalmont was the starting point for travel on the Canadian Pacific Railway east or west. If Vancouver was your destination, a scenic and thrilling ride through the Coquihalla Pass with its many trestles high above the canyons and creeks would capture your interest. Vagrants and those just looking for work during the depression years used the freight trains on the Coquihalla route extensively. One freight carrying a large number of free riders took a plunge into a deep canyon, there were many deaths but the exact count was never established.

Partway between Coalmont and Tulameen the pioneer Rabbit family owned a nice piece of land and ran a ranch there. The only member I knew well was Paddy. He being the player at bat at a ballgame in Tulameen when he lost his grip on the bat and it struck our Margaret on the forehead.

A doctor couldn't be found but fortunately a medical student who had just passed medical school and was awaiting his certificate came up to Blakeburn with us and did a good job of patching our girl up. Margaret ended up with a severe headache and a scar for life. Paddy, of course was really sorry and concerned but we were all relieved at the outcome because it could have been much worse.

Two oriental gentlemen worked for the company for many years. Chung Foo was the larger and more energetic of the two, he attended to the heating of the school, chopping wood for the bosses and looking after the office. The children all got along well with him; a particular asset of his was the ability to swear in English. Sing was the sparer built one but a very good laundry man. He kept chickens as an added source of revenue and sold them to residents. One time he became very puzzled as the chicken count was not as high as it should be. Sing eventually caught the thief who shall remain nameless, a report was made and the miscreant paid for the missing birds.

A smooth talking salesman said he wanted to start a band with the local students, all the parents including me thought this was a grand idea. Before long he had sold enough instruments to form a band but as soon as he collected for them he took off and left every one in the lurch. No band, no leader nor anyone to teach the students. Myself along with quite a few other parents were stuck with the instruments, which were sold at a loss.

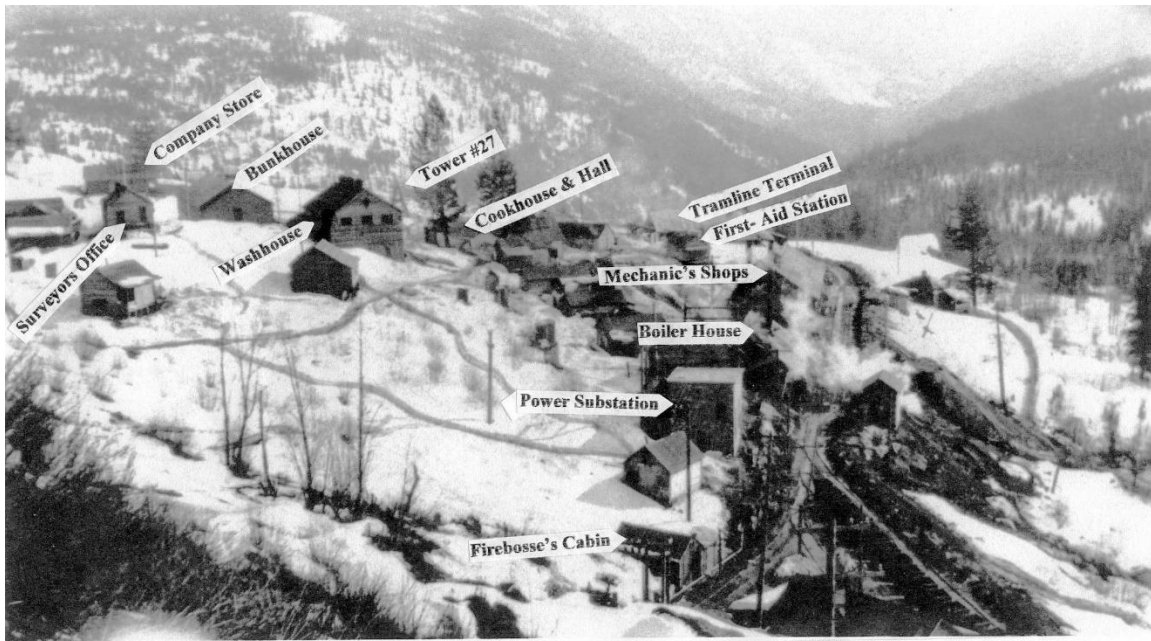
A few more outstanding acquaintances come to mind; namely the Joe Graham family, Winston Pilling and family at Lewis camp; the Beliaks son Mike was a very able member of the hockey team. The Edwards family had Dave and Glen on the same team and they had two younger siblings, Billy and Bobby. I knew Billy a lot better than Bobby; he was very entertaining with some of his ideas and escapades from a lad not yet in school.

There was a large group of Blakeburnites that had come from Vancouver Island, Jimmy Webster mine foreman, known to the children as "Uncle Dud". He was very popular with them. To continue; Happy Hackwood, Tommy Lee, Adam Bell a footballer of some renown in his younger days, two others on the local squad were a lad named Craig and Tom Brown. Tom's father Bill was a mine foreman on the island but worked at Blakeburn in different positions. Bill's wife Nan was a real typical Scot who never lost her accent and had many intriguing old-fashioned sayings. Stewart Brown, another son taught at Blakeburn for several years

Epilogue by Robert D. Murray, son of Robert S. Murray.

Sadly Dad quit writing about Blakeburn sometime later, although he did write for the Merritt Herald and the Merrittonian when he was working for the Forestry Department. This is a rewrite of the manuscript he left on Blakeburn; there were many stories and recollections of mining and nature incidents that I haven't included.

This is the meat of the notes my Dad left, in 1940 the family moved to Vancouver when the mines closed. They were there during the second war years, then moved to Merritt B.C. in 1945 and remained there until 1971. Mom and Dad moved back to Richmond B.C. and retired there.



Blakeburn 1926 – Picture Taken From Above Wilson Portal

BLAKEBURN TO - DAY



The path leading into the foreground is the remains of the road called the “Barn Hill” it led up to some homes, the Catholic Church, the schools and the ice rink. The company store stood just beyond where the roads meet – to the right. Mullins coal chutes and the location of the Barnes Store and gas pumps were opposite toward the mountains. Tram terminal was to the right side of the photo behind the largest clump of trees.