

TAPE #9FRANK AND EDWINA LIDDICOAT

Recorded: February 1979

Reference: The Gold Mines and Life in the County.

My father was killed less than a year after that picture was taken.

(What was life in the mines like?)

Edwina---Well, I'll tell you how I saw it. It was dake in the morning, five o'clock in the morning, and he'd come home at five and it was dark then. Go to work in the dark, come home in the dark, and it was dark in the mines too. And I saw his father being lowered into the mine; it was like being lowered into a grave and I cried. My ~~FATHER~~ father worked in the mines too; he was shift boss. But he was injured and didn't go back to work anymore.

Frank---My father, when we first moved here, had eight horses. he had people splitting a lot of laggin, if you know what laggin are. (No.)

There're cut out of red fur, and its 6 feet long and two inches thick. And its 6 inches wide. And they used it in the mines, in the timbering. They'd put the main timbers up and the cap on, and then this lagging over it so it wouldn't slip or cave in. Dad went from here with four horses and a wagon and go up home (near Fiddletown) by Daffodil Hill up above Lockwood Station. There's a well and a spring still there and some good apples. Anyway, we went in there, and went about 6 or 8 miles past that to get this timber and it was a two day trip. He go up and load and come back as far as McLaughlins.

He'd stay there all night. I rode with him a few times. That's what my Dad did; haul lagging over to the Onita. Then, after that, he had these horses and the sprinkle wagon that he ran from Amador to Jackson. Ran it every night. I'd go with him a lot of times. They were dirt roads then. Anyway, after he got through with that we went up home and cut a lot of timber, 16 feet long and we had to peel em. Him and my cousin went together to haul these logs, and they had eight horses. And my cousin was drivin these eight horses, hauling these logs, and I was up in the mountains. I had one horse, and I was up there. Well, my cousin was hauling these logs to The Central or the Argonaut; I don't remember. Anyway, on this one trip he made the delivery and come home---lived above Fiddletown---on the Jeff French place, and he rented a big barn from French. Well, he come home, drunk I think, and he put up the team. He had a lantern and left it in the barn. Well, somehow the barn caught on fire and burned up the eight horses. That was one of our fires! Two of the houses we had here burned down (Sutter Creek); we had three fires in three years. Lost everything we had. And when the horses burned up, it ruined my father, ya better believe it! We worked a year in the mill up there, and then my Dad came down here. We built our house, right here, and then my Father got a job in the mine. He was a miner before. He was taking care of the tailings out where Allen lives now---that was tailings for the Central Eureka---he took care of all that. He worked a couple of years at that. We had a flood gate down here, and he used to go down there, any kind of weather,; well, he'd go across that flood gate, walk up and over the hill and to the tailings dam.

Well, they were having trouble at the mine and his cousin asked him to work as a shifter---which he did. He worked at that until he was killed.

(What's a shifter?)

A shift boss. That's how come I went to work in the mines.

We worked nine hour shifts.

(How big is a skip? Is it like an elevator?)

NO. It's all iron. It's about 3x3x10 feet long. And it's got four wheels that it rides on the incline on. And when they bring the skip up loaded, it turns over and dumps. Then it goes back on the tracks and down the shaft.

(How did the men get down?)

In the skip. They passed a law outlawing it, because at one time they had a little one in under the big one. If something happened, and that lower skip run off of the tracks, the other one would come down and kill some of them men. And this happened. Anyway, that one you couldn't dump. They called it the dinky. But they hauled the men down on it. They'd crowd em in. About twenty at a whack, I think it was. Ten or more in the skip, and the rest in the dinky. I was a skip tender; I rode the bale---outside. You had to cross a couple of wires and ring the bell up to the engine house.

Anyway, this one time, this guy was drilling a raise from the waste chute up around. This guy was just about to break through, and the foreman said, Pete, you're gettin close. Blow it right; don't blow the timbers out of the shaft. Well, Pete shouted, never mind, Don't worry, I fix! Well, he must of loaded them things to the hilt, cause he knocked a full set of timbers out of the main shaft and all these wires were hanging loose. My bell wires were busted,

and I was takin a load of men down. Well, with all them timbers busted the skip was bashing around; I don't know why anyone didn't get killed! Well, I happened to hit the wire before I ran out of it. I was all tore up below and I just happened to hit it right and stopped the skip. And the big skip wasn't five feet from the dinky with all them men on it! That's when they made that law. Well, then I rang the skip up, and I wasn't where I was supposed to go. The engineer, he didn't know, all he could go by was my signals. Telephone wire was knocked out so I couldn't call him---man, you talk about a mix-up! Well, we got all the men off the skip and the dinky and let them climb down. Then I got the skip and dinky up to the next station and called the engineer and told him what was the matter. This happened on the 4800 level of the Central. And they were gonna sink to 6000.

The Argonaut had a cable that was a mile long! Up here in the Central they had two cables break. And from the 1600 level of the old Eureka they had a drift that went from one to the other on that level. Joe Lawrence was working on that, and they were cleaning it out between the two mines. I had to go up there at the end of my shift and empty that shute at the 1600 level. I was alone, and got off at this level and rang it away. (The skip) It got up to about 800 and the god damn cable broke. Down she come! Skip and all. I had a horseshoe in my pocket, I guess. No communication at all. They knew what happened cause the cable fell down outside the shaft. I started out and old Joe Lawrence with me. Took him three hours, I think. I climbed out that 1600 feet in 22 minutes. But poor, old Joe. He was fat and it took him three hours.

Hell, I got out, changed my clothes and went home before he ever got out! Anyway they got Nelson Highler to go up with an acetylene torch, and they had to cut that dinky loose from the main skip. It was loaded with rock, and when it come loose it knocked out three or four set of timber in the shaft. They were hugh, old logs and they were petrified.

They didn't run the mine for two weeks---had to repair everything. Now to the other cable that broke. I had been riding on it and knew it was no good. So I wouldn't ride on it anymore---only when I had to. When I went home I'd take the other. But old Frazer and some others were on the bad one when the cable jumped the reel---it didn't break this time---and dropped down four or five feet in the shaft. It threw all of them off of the skip. But it didn't kill any of them.

Another time there were three or four on it and it broke. Killed every one of them. The old Eureka had that, and Joe Maroni's brother in law was one of them that got killed. I don't know why they didn't examine these cables! They were supposed to, but they didn't. They'd just leave em till they broke.

It was the fault of the management. And those cables cost a lot of money.

Another close shave I had---I was working in the shaft and we was going to this repair this station on the 4500 level. Over a period there was a lot of rock in the chute when we started to repair it.

Well, this muck had built up on this plank, and it was out over the chute. I don't know why I done it, but all this muck was over it and back on the timber. Anyway, I walked out on that dog gone plank

and it wasn't nailed down. I picked all the dirt off it, and it went down the shoot, and it wasn't nailed! I'll tell you, if I'd been standing on it.

And another time---I was up in the stope that time. I climbed up in this raise that had plugged up. And they didn't know it down below. I went up in it to put a piece of dynamite in and break it up. I couldn't hear what they were hollering about down below, but while I was climbing up, the sediment that was on the sills fell down and nearly filled the drift up. And I didn't know it. I never heard that fine rock going down. Well, I couldn't get out, so I got up in the hanging wall of the raise, and got in back of the timbers. No, I remember, they opened the chute door and got all this muck down in the drift, and I got out. That's the only way you could clear em---blast!

Edwina---Have you a story to tell about the rats!

Frank---Yeah, I had a pet rat! That little bugger, whenever I'd eat my lunch he'd come out on the station and he'd be there. That went on until he was grown. Some damn Mexican or Spanish killed him. Man, I was so damn mad at that guy! The rat was just like a pet; he'd come over and eat with me. Sometimes ~~xxxxxx~~ those damn rats would come out and bite you on the ear if you was sleeping! There were lots of them. You know, if the mine was gonna cave in them rats would run out. The miners would watch the rats, and if the rats ran out, something was the matter.

(Did they have mules working in the mines?)

They got rid of them just about the time I started to work.

(How did they get them into the mine?)

They put em in the skip! They'd run it out on the level, and lead

him in it and plank it over. They reversed it when they come in to the station. Those ststions are as big as this house! The mules pulled the cars then. After they left the men had to pull em! ...Had a wind storm sox bad once it blew the skips right off of the tracks! That was up at the Central...

I worked in the Argonaut, Kennedy, the Central and South Eureka.

I been down in the mine in Amador, the Keystone.

Edwina---I lived on Lombard and Fillmore (San Francisco). And I used to walk to work at Pine and Steiner for the phone company.