

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Coal Mining Project

Wife of a Coal Miner

O. H. 309

EDITH PEARL WALTER

Interviewed

by

Ellen Daniels

on

May 22, 1978

EDITH PEARL WALTER

Edith Pearl Walter is the daughter of William Labus and Lily Lula Carbet Labus. She attended and graduated from Minerva High School.

Edith lives with her husband Tom Walter at 613 East Chestnut in Lisbon, Ohio. Tom and Edith were married on April 16, 1927 and they do not have any children.

Edith worked as a stenographer before she married Tom. Her only other job that she had was her music lessons which she conducted from her home. She did this for about 50 years. She is approximately 71 years old.

What she contributed to the research of deep coal mines was the expertise of the wife of a miner. She considered mining the same as any other job, with the exception that during the 1930's her husband had trouble having a steady job. The coal mines in the Lisbon area at this time were only seasonable. They worked only during winter months.

She talked about what type of food her husband ate and what type of facilities were available to wash clothes in. She also told when detergent came on the market as a consumer item and she even told the brand name.

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INTERVIEWEE: EDITH PEARL WALTER
INTERVIEWER: Ellen Daniels
SUBJECT: Wife of a Coal Miner
DATE: May 22, 1978

D: This is an interview with Edith Pearl Walter for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project, Coal Mining, by Ellen Daniels at 613 East Chestnut, Lisbon, Ohio, on May 22, 1978, at 5:30 p.m.

What was it like being the wife of a coal miner?

EW: Well, I don't know if it's any different. He went out in the morning,, came back in the afternoon about 3:30, 3:00 sometimes. Of course, I didn't realize, unless he told me, how the work was in there.

D: Did you have to prepare his lunch?

EW: Yes. At that time, he carried a dinner bucket. I used to can a lot of peaches. He could eat peaches without having heartburn. One time he ate pie, but then it got so that it gave him heartburn. Different mines, he could eat different; the air was different in them so that he could eat different things.

D: Did he take sandwiches with him?

EW: Yes, just regular sandwiches. He got along well with sausage sandwiches, he liked them pretty well, and ham sandwiches, things like that. And coffee, he always took his coffee. Pie, cakes, and cookies, stuff like that.

D: Did you have any problems when he came home with his clothes or anything like that?

EW: Well, not really problems, I guess, they were real dirty,

but they came clean. I washed by hand at first. (laughter)

D: You mean on the old washboard?

EW: Yes. When we were first married in 1927, he was working in the mine then, for awhile, and then, of course, that was when the mine closed, right after we had first married. After that, when he went in different mines, the small mines he told you he worked in, I had the miner's clothes then to wash, but that dirt came out pretty good. I had to do it by hand for awhile. We didn't have enough money to buy a washer, or anything, and there were no such things as going uptown and washing them in a laundromat. There were no such things.

D: I assume you had to use a big, huge tub?

EW: A washtub. I had two of them. It just seemed all right then because very few people had electric ones. (laughter)

D: Did you have your own soap, make your own soap, or was it bought?

EW: A few times, my mother used to do it, so I learned how to do it there, and I made it a few times. After awhile, the flakes came out in the store, not too long after we were married. From then on, I bought the flakes or whatever they had, but then it went to powder.

D: Did you have to soak his clothes for long periods of time?

EW: Yes, we used to soak stuff more than they do now. Soak it, pour the water off, and wring them through the wringer. We had a wringer, a hand wringer. (laughter) Didn't have anything to spin them at all. Yes, he took those things off and had a shower, bath, or something before he came up to eat. Those clothes, of course . . . he left those clothes at the mine until he wanted them washed. Didn't you? (talking to husband) Some of them you left there all the time; outside pants he would leave there all the time, and then throw them away when they were worn out or something.

D: Rather than having you clean them?

EW: Yes. Some I'd wash, some I didn't. I never thought of it as any kind of a different job, unless he would come home and tell me he nearly got killed that day or something. (laughter) Naturally, that was a little different.

D: He never told you that he nearly got killed, did he?

EW: Oh yes, more than once. He was riding in a car and it

got away from him, the motor . . . something happened and it got away from him. It went real fast to the end of a hill didn't it? (talking to husband)

- TW: (husband) It came to a turn and jumped the track.
- EW: He hit his head real hard. Thank goodness he had the hard hat on then or he wouldn't be here.
- D: That would be like in a roller coaster wouldn't it?
- EW: It's a wonder he didn't break his neck.
- TW: I've still got the little hard hat. I'm going to keep that.
- D: I assume the hard hat came in about the 1940's?
- TW: A little bit before that, I think.
- EW: I can't remember the date.
- TW: We had them out at Callahan for the people that wanted them; you didn't have to wear them.
- EW: Of course, after they started paying by the month he wasn't home half of the time. He was out there. He had to go out on Sundays, holidays, and everything else. There was no extra overtime or anything. It's different in that way.
- But, otherwise I couldn't see as it was a different kind of job. He would come home, clean up, just like he does now and we would forget about the mines, if nothing happened. He then had to study to be the mine foreman; he had to study a good bit for that. He spent quite a long time studying in the evenings to pass that examination.
- D: In other words, you had to pass an examination to be foreman?
- EW: Oh yes, you had to go; they have them so often. He went to one that was scheduled at Columbus. You pass it and then they send you the papers. You can go anywhere in the state of Ohio and be a mine foreman.
- D: There is an advantage to that if you want to move.
- EW: Yes, he could have gone someplace else, but it was too far away from home, the places that he could have got a job. They could have paid a lot more than they did here. It paid him to stay here because it wasn't

too far away. (laughter)

Anything else you would like to know?

D: I'm trying to think. You mentioned he got paid once a month, did you ever go pick up the paycheck?

EW: No, not there. He always brought the paychecks home. But, I was always the one that handled it as far as that was concerned. (laughter) He didn't have any time.

TW: Do you know that I never made out a check in my life because she made them all?

EW: I handled everything. Of course, he is doing it now; I had a stroke and I can't get out and around as much, so he does everything.

D: Can you think of anything to add?

EW: I was just thinking when you said that you wanted to interview me, I wouldn't know what there would be to say that was different.

He was always pretty tired at night, probably more tired than the average man in the ordinary job, that was one thing that was different.

D: You didn't have any problems with finances, of course, during the 1930's, because he was working in the coal mines?

EW: After 1937, because before that we did. He was working in some mines. He was working a couple of times for himself, but he wasn't making too much money. You forgot to mention that, that you were working in a couple of places for yourself, with partners. (talking to husband) They were small mines. People were just doing anything they could to get by. Maybe you wouldn't know, you are too young. (laughter) We got married in 1927. The Depression happened about three years later, 1929 actually, but about 1930 was when it hit us. From then until 1937 we had a time; some of it was in small mines where you just made enough to get by.

TW: We bought a house in between there too, believe it or not.

EW: We bought a house-land contract for ten dollars a month. (laughter) We had a little house up on the hill, up here, on Pleasant View, the one that the Conns are in. Do you know the Conns?

D: Yes.

TW: Of course, it's all built now. You wouldn't know it.

EW: It wasn't very big, just a little four-room house, when we had it. We got our start that way.

D: That's good.

TW: We didn't pay anything in the summer, but in the winter we'd catch up again.

EW: He was like a schoolteacher three months of the summer he didn't make any money unless he had another job, another type of job of some sort. Then it started up again, the latter part of August maybe, and it was all right through the whole winter.

D: So the banks were kind of used to that, and the places where you dealt went along until fall?

EW: Oh yes, they knew what a coal miner has to go through. They went along with us. Everybody seemed to, and we got through. I must say that things are a lot better now. We're retired now. (laughter)

D: Can you think of anything else you would like to add?

EW: No, if you would have given me some time I might have thought of some things.

D: If you happen to think of anything else, I will still have the recording for another week or so.

EW: No, I can't think of anything else I want to say. I had nothing against his work as far as that is concerned. Some people might have, with that sort of job, but I never did. He was mining when I met him. He was in that Callahan he told you about out there, when I met him. I knew he was a miner all along. So, that didn't concern me in any way. He wanted me to go in the mine one time and see what it was like and I suppose if I had done that I would have had a different viewpoint. I wouldn't go in it because I didn't want to see what it was like and I would have worried myself sick maybe if I had. (laughter) If I would have actually seen the inside, I would have worried. I think of it quite often. I would think of it, but I didn't worry too much, only once in awhile when he would say something about loose slate or something. I would say, "Well, I hope it stays up," and make a wish.

TW: Yes, that was my job too, I had to take care of all the loose slate.

EW: I don't know, miners, when they work for years, they

feel safe, I think. You go right back in. He always did, even when they had falls. They become so used to it. It's a job and they become used to it and they just don't think of it unless they hear the slate crack real loud; then they think of it. He has told me of dreaming about hearing the slate crack. If they are working in a place where it is kind of bad, he would dream about it.

TW: They used to have machines in there. The place would cave in and catch our machinery and stuff up at the face and then we'd dig it out. There was only one way out and you'd have to watch that and that would worry me to death until we got the slate loaded out. We had machine loaders then, pan lines, like the coal chute. You bolt them together. You go up in a room that shook, and then it would fall in. Oh, we've had four or five of them do that. You would bring the pan line along where it fell and start loading that out until they got the machinery all out again. We did that a lot of times. My job was to watch the post and everything back where it caved in, while they were working. It was a lot of worry.

EW: But what job doesn't have worry?

D: That's true.

TW: We could tell just when that thing was going to fall. They'd sink so much of it in the clay bottom (the posts) and then as soon as the posts would move a certain amount, that was it.

EW: He wasn't schooled for anything else. He hadn't learned anything like another trade of any kind then. Now he is a machinist, but he wasn't then, way back in those years. You couldn't get a job. He tried to get jobs with other things at times, but there was no work then. Now that he is old and retired, he can get a machinist job anywhere. (laughter)

TW Yes, and I can fix a radio too or television, which we didn't have during that time. I don't do that now.

EW: Yes, he can fix radios and televisions now. Were you in the mines when you went to that school? (talking to husband)

TW: Yes, in 1950.

EW: That's right. I didn't see him too much then around that time. He was busy with one thing after another, his work, and then hobbies or something afterwards. I just didn't see him too much. Now he's around most of the time.

END OF INTERVIEW