

Walnut Run Coalmine

Byrnesville, Barnesboro, Northern Cambria, Cambria County, Pennsylvania

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wednesday, march 25, 2009

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William Henry Byrnes and a grandchild.

Walnut Run
by Karen McCormick

Today, when we speak of mines, we think of the large mechanized mines like Barnes and Tucker and Greenwich Collieries. My grandfather, William Byrnes, who is now 82, in the late 1940's operated Walnut Run, a small coal mine in the upper end of Spangler.

My grandfather readied Walnut Run Mine by himself. He put in 15 sets of timber using a buddy jack; then he hired three other men. The miners dug cuts under the coal with a pick. Then they detonated powder to blow out the coal. This was D-vein coal, about four feet high. They picked the boney out of it and put it in a gob. Then they loaded coal into the cars by shoveling it into a narrow slit between the top of the car and the roof.

Each miner loaded three or four cars a day. A mule, kept in a barn at the mine, pulled the coal cars in and out. When the mule went into the mine, Grandpa attached a lamp to its collar so that it could see. My grandfather went to the mine at 6:00 to feed the mule and get it ready for work at 7:00.

Some of the coal was trucked to the Delta mine in Byrnesville where it was loaded into railroad cars. Some was sold as house coal. At that time, coal cost five dollars for two tons delivered and shoveled into the home coal bin. One advantage of the coal mine was that it always gave grandfather a job to support his family. My grandfather was grateful for this.

The major problem was federal regulations. Having to improve the mine to keep up to the standards was difficult. It took everything Grandfather Byrnes could do to keep his mine working as long as he did. Gradually, meeting standards became too expensive, and Grandpa had to shut down. Grandpa felt the federal agents were wrong. He says, "They think they're saving your life when they take away your living."

Second cousin Karen McCormick wrote this essay for *Out of the Dark 2: Mining Folk*. Northern Cambria High School, 1977. The book is the second in a series of student works that include poetry, essays, and interviews.

Uncle Bill was my great uncle Bill, the brother of my grandfather Edward R. Byrnes. I've written about teasing and good hearted kidding around as maybe being in the genes so I have to tell you a story concerning Uncle Bill. It was at the wake of my grandfather. I remember the house of my grandparents there in Byrnesville as being full of women and food. When someone died everyone would bring food to the home of the deceased after the funeral. Grandad died in May of 1966 and the weather was nice so the men were all sitting around outside.

Everyone was having a good time telling jokes, smoking cigarettes and laughing. For many the sadness of the event was left at St. Bernard's Cemetery in Hastings. I remember seeing Uncle Bill take a small glass bottle out of his pocket, screw the white plastic top off, take a sip, put the cover back on, and place it back in his pocket. I was interested and asked him what he was drinking. Uncle Bill proceeded to tell me of the operation he had to have. Seems they had to extract his salivary glands. The clear liquid I saw was artificial saliva he had to take so his mouth wouldn't dry out.

Posted by [Edward Byrnes](#) at 10:50 | [No comments](#)

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