

INTERVIEW WITH MAYOMA WEAVER

Fr: Beth Nogay

Nogay: What was it like growing up in a coal town?

Weaver: Well I really didn't grow up in a coal town. We lived about a mile out from it but there was all my friends you know. I had relatives that lived in a coal town and everything. People had good times we had churches all around that young people went to and we had a movie theatre we all went to and had a lot of fun at that and all the young people had parties. I remember my daddy, he loved parties better than anything and he'd tell my two oldest sisters he'd say now you all bake up some cakes and everything and invite your friends in so they can have a party. He'd have a better time than they did.

Nogay: What was it like when you lived in the company town later on?
What was life like?

Weaver: Well the first place we lived in a company house was up at Forton and a lot of the miners was working then. They had just put the mine in and built the camp and you couldn't hardly get a house so we had to move in two rooms of family and they lived in the other two rooms so you might know what that would be how you'd have to pile up. We would have to go out and go around the house to go to the bathroom around on the back that's the way we had to do and we lived there I think a year or two and then we got a house of our own and I remember I got my first washing machine, but it wasn't automatic and my first refrigerator and things like that I had.

Nogay: Can you tell me how miners were paid and what the company store was like?

Weaver: Well I don't know exactly what but I don't think it was over two dollars a day. It wasn't very much. I couldn't tell you some of the men would know more about that.

Nogay: How were they paid?

Weaver: Well you usually didn't have anything to drive you'd have to buy it up in groceries what you had and time pay day come along you didn't have anything to go get. Some of them might draw something but I've seen the time some of them didn't get a penny.

Nogay: You talked about the company store owning people.....

Weaver: Well what I mean you had to go there and buy everything they had everything you needed, groceries, clothes and furniture and naturally you just went there and got it and they checked it through the office and took it off of what you made and it was paid for.

Nogay: What was that like? Did you ever feel the company owned you?

Weaver: Well we never give it a thought everybody got used to it you know everybody traded with them and but they had everything I can remember at Christmas they had everything in the world in the store for the miners children. All kinds of toys and everything.

Nogay: You told me the story about when the people went through in the coal camps and in the type camps. Can you remember that story? Tell me what that looked like. (Coal tipple).

Weaver: Well its just a big building they usually have it up on the side of the mountain and it got a big thing where the coal comes down and the coal come into it and I don't think back in those days they washed their coal but they have to now. It would come down there and it goes through some kind of process and the coal cars backs under it and takes the coal out but whoever lives close to it gets all the dust.

Nogay: Did you get all the dust on you?

Weaver: Oh yeah, we got dirty but we washed and had plenty of soap and water But you had to let the kids get out and play but Forton had nice houses and they still have nice houses up there.

Nogay: What was it like being a miners wife? Did you have to work hard?

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Weaver: Oh yes, I worked hard. I had five children I didn't while I was up there I mean I raised five while I was a miners wife. Yes I had to work hard.

Nogay: You said that there's a story in you family about someone who moved out into the tent colonies. Can you tell me what happened then?

Weaver: That was my husband his family they put them out of their houses. I told you about dumping their furniture.

Nogay: Tell me about that in as much detail as you can. If you had been standing there what would have happened?

Weaver: Well that was before we were married but he'd talk about it and cry. It was sad. He went work when he was either 13 or 14 years old and he went into the mines which they don't allow now at all and his father was...

Nogay: Can you go ahead and start from the beginning about your husband and tell me the story that he told you?

Weaver: There was ten children, he was raised in a big family. His father was a union man. He was trying to get a union where he worked, his father was and My husband, his father, was put out of his house and they took their furniture to the end of town and dumped it and then they moved in with their own workers which the miners call scabs and to this day they do the same thing and I think that the union furnished tents for these men and I don't know exactly how long they had to live in them but anyway there was two of the children born in the tents. His sister she died last week, she had cancer, she was born in the tent and my husband's brother was up to my house night before last he was born in one of the tents and he was telling me about it. They really had it hard I guess they got cold and got hungry and everything while they lived there. You want me to tell you a little joke about something that happened and they moved in these other me to take their jobs the company did and my husband and one of his friends his name was Robert Davis, there was a boy got out and bought a big red rooster or else he caught it and he come to the camp carrying that going to cook it and they ran him down and took his chicken from him. I said there was a lot of us had chicken.

Nogay: Who took the furniture from the homes?

Weaver: Well the company had there own men, I'll tell you what they call them they call them thugs that carried pistols and they'd come in and run the women and children right out of their beds. They wanted a house cause they was going to put their own workers in you see, these men was trying to get a union I don't know if they had one organized or not but I know they was trying to get a union.

Nogay: What did these thugs look like, do you recall?

Weaver: Well they was just ordinary men but they worked for the company and they did what the company told them to.

Nogay: What else did the thugs do? What else was part of their jobs?

Weaver: Well I can't remember too much what else they did do but that's been a long time ago I was just a little girl but things like they done in other counties they'd kill people and they done everything I can remember when I was a little girl during the miners march I think I must have been about 5 or 6 years old but I can remember it and they had small planes spotting the miners that was on the march and they'd fly over and I always liked to get out and sweep the yard and I'd get out and sweep and we'd hear the planes a coming over and my mother would get us all in the house. If they saw you with a broom they'd think it was a gun and they'd shoot you. And she'd get us all in the house afraid we would get shot you know. I can remember my daddy, the union would send him food back... remember the big pieces of bacon and dried fruits and I said well you buy a piece of bacon like that now it would really cost you something wouldn't it? A whole side of bacon. Oh I don't know it was a bad time back then but all the miners worked and helped one another and these miners ... a lot of people would wake up in the mornings and their porches would be full of miners laying there sleeping where they was on the march and my mother and my two eldest sisters they cooked and prepared food and my daddy carried it to the miners to help feed them. They had a lot of help while they was out marching there was lots of sympathizers and my daddy was a real devout union man until the day he died.

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Nogay: What would the men have looked like. Do you remember that? What did the miners look like when they were marching?

Weaver: Well they just put on what they had on I reckon an marched just everyday clothes, what they had.

Nogay: How did the people feel about the miners marching were they afraid of them were they in support of them?

Weaver: Well nobody was a friend of the coal miners but you know the people that the operators had under their thumb you know they were.

Nogay: Did you ever see anybody get killed?

Weaver: No I never did and never want to.

Nogay: Did you ever see any of the bullets or get fired upon or know anyone who did.

Weaver: No. But I can tell you this about my husband's father, he was in the march and they tried... see all the law was on the coal operators side even down to the governor and everything else was on their side they didn't sympathize much with the coal miner and they would get my husband out when he was just a little ole boy and try to find out where his father was but he'd been trained to tell them he didn't know. And he never would tell where his daddy was. They was trying to catch him you know. But he wouldn't tell them. He's told that lots of times how they would come and ask him and then I think after they sort of lost out on their big battly on Blair Mountain had returned home without a contract or anything. Then work was bad and my husband and his father they walked the roads trying to find work and he said they liked to starved to death and said one day a lady gave them a loaf of bread and that is what they had to eat, they was about to starve to death, trying to find work it was just that rough and it stayed that way until Roosevelt got in there.

Nogay: What was it like to live in the company towns? Did they tell you how to vote or who to vote for?

Weaver: No they didn't do that. They didn't tell you how to vote or anythin

you paid you rent and took care of the house and they checked it through the office and you didn't have to go and pay it and they took care of the lights and everything they took care of all of that I mean it was checked off your rent. Your power and they had water in the house that all went in with the rent. It wasn't very much though, the rent wasn't bad. Of course there was a lot of time that people didn't have it to pay.

Nogay: What would the company do if they thought the men were trying to form a union?

Weaver: Oh they'd fire you if they thought...if they found out in the mines they'd fire you. You didn't have a job and you didn't have anything to back you up then either.

Nogay: What else would they do? Would they take your furniture?

Weaver: Yes if you didn't have it paid for they'd take it.

Nogay: Would they blackball you? Can you tell some of the things they would do so the union wouldn't grow?

Weaver: Well now I don't know if the company would blackball anybody but now the union has done that to some of the men I know that, you know, when they done things that they shouldn't. Not too long ago I know of one they did.

Nogay: What else do you remember about growing up in the coal fields?

Weaver: Oh we had good times, when I was just a little girl, we had good times. We had parties and we had things like bean stringings and apple peelings and all the young people would gather and we would have the best time that ever was.

Nogay: What do you remember about the hard times?

Weaver: Oh the hard times was when we had to scrub floors and do everything by hand. Scrub on the washboard and we'd take our clothes down to the river and we'd boil them in lye water and use lye water and homemade soap then we'd take them out and rinse them in the river, wring them

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out, take them back and hang them on the fence. We had a house full of clothes that we'd hang on the fence. Hardly anybody had a clothes line we'd just hang them on the fence. We had good times and we had bad times.

Nogay: Tell me again about when you first moved into the company house and two families lived in one ... one family lived in two rooms and the other family lived in two rooms...

Weaver: Yeah we had too we couldn't get a house.

Nogay: Tell me again what that was like.

Weaver: Well it was awful. These people we moved in with was our friends and they let us have two rooms to help us out until we could get a house and my husband and my friend they worked on night shift, they'd work all night long and they'd come in the next morning and men would be so tired that I've seen my friend lay down in his kitchen floor and he'd be so tired they couldn't get him up all day. He lay there and sleep all daylong in the floor. They'd just be wore out when they'd come in and it was hard because we was crowded you know but we was used to making out and doing the best we could do.

Nogay: What are the stories the people have told you about the fight at Blair Mountain?

Weaver: Well I don't know too much about that. Only what I have heard and read, Ivan White, I guess you all know Ivan White, he worked in Washington, D.C. for a while and he was my friend and he sent me the whole history of it, of the miners and all the march and everything I guess somebody it might have been Mike he might have it.

Nogay: I just wanted to know some of the stories you might of heard about that time when they were trying to put the union in and the memories you have about that.

Weaver: Well they tried everything in the book.