

Page 1

DOROTHY ESTANEOUS (FLEMING) Tape #1046  
May 7, 1980 Interviewer: Effie Amicarella  
COLUMBINE MINE MASSACRE

We're going to talk a little bit today about the Columbine Mine and as you knew it and about your father and various things that you saw and experienced at the Columbine Mine.

Well, I wasn't at the mine on the day of the strike. I was in school. And after my father was killed, there was something said about machine guns being used - that all the miners were killed by machine guns. But I was told that Dad was one of the first ones killed at the mine and he was killed with a hand gun. One of the leaders of the militia apparently walked up to the miners and ordered them off the property. They refused to go. Dad was one of the leaders. He must have said something to him and angered the man. Anyway, he pulled a handgun and he shot my father once in each side of the chest. And he apparently had dum-dum bullets in the gun. And when they exploded, they blew the back off - my father's back off. I remember at the funeral that Dad was so low in his coffin. Even though they had put some sort of cotton or padding or something, still he was abnormally low in the coffin. And that's about all I can remember, really - I was only six at the time.

I know you've heard many things of who did the shooting and who was responsible. Would you care to tell us anything about that? The name that I heard that was mentioned was Sheratt and that's all that I remember was a man by the name of Sheratt had done the actual shooting. And then after that, after Daddy had fallen, someone threw a flag over him, I understand, to keep him from being ----- . And then they opened up on the rest of the miners with machine guns. Five men were killed that day besides my father.

It was quite a tragedy; how did it affect your family then? Oh, we were left without any means of support at the time and it was just difficult to get along in the '30s, in 1927 and through the '30s but we managed; as people do, we got through.

Do you have any pictures of your father that you'd care to share with us? I don't have any at all.

I wonder if you had heard what the trouble was between the miners and why they were striking? For higher wages; they couldn't live on what they were getting, the miners were so badly paid. Not only that, they didn't work a whole year at a time. They could never manage to save money to get through the summer. They were always going into debt trying to live from one month to the next. In the winter time when they needed coal, there was work. In the summer time, when they didn't need coal, there was no work. What did your father do in the summer time then? He always seemed to manage to get a job somewhere as a miner, in some respect, somehow. Or he would just live with relatives or lots of time, they would get credit to get through. They managed, the way all the

miners did at the time.

Did you live in the Columbine Mine then or did you live ---?  
We lived here in Lafayette. I was trying to remember - we had come to Lafayette the year before and Dad had been working in the mines up at Oak Creek, Colorado. And we had come down to Lafayette and we had been here, oh, I would say, about a year when the strike happened.

Did you know any of the other miners? No, I didn't. In fact, some of them apparently had no families here at all. I don't know who they were or where they came from. Well, there were quite a few Bulgarians and Greeks who lived in a boarding house at the Columbine at the time. I think that's where most of them were from because I don't remember any other miner with a family in that six. Now, I remember a lot of people that were gassed there - the Evans family - Dad rode to work with Mr. Evans and his two sons. And then the neighbor there - I am trying to think who else was there that day but I can't recall. But they did use gas (tear gas) on the people? Yes, I heard that 50 people were gassed that day after the shooting.

Do you have anything else that you could tell? No, I don't really remember anything else right at this point. I wasn't prepared for the interview so I don't have anything. I probably could recall a lot more - little incidents - but not off hand.

Thank you very much for doing this for us. Thank you for the opportunity.

(Later in the tape):

It was understood he had a family other than I. How many? There were six of us. I don't suppose you received anything in the way of - from the miners then? For a while, we received something from the union. But that didn't last too long - I don't know what happened; it disintegrated. Most of them paid for two years in the union like that. Then, it was just get along the best we could. We managed one way or another. I don't really recall exactly how, but we got there.