

SD SIDE ONE

Q. Well, Mrs. SD, you were brought up, in which part of the country?

A. Oh, well, originally we came from Campbeltown, and then in 1926, I was a young woman by then, and my father came to work in Cobbinshaw, South Cobbinshaw Farm, and there were still some families of the Old Tarbrax mining area still living there and that is where I met John first. Well, of course, Tarbrax had.....

Q. Now, that is John Lightbody?

A. That's right, and Tarbrax Oil Works, of course, had shut down by then, and the families moved to West Calder, and much later.....in 1940, I had kept in touch with him off and on, for many years.....and we got married and came to live in West Calder. Well, he was working at the West.....somewhere about.....West.....no, it wasn't West Mains.....was coal, it was somewhere up there, and then he was transferred to Burngrange, and it was supposed to be a great pit, Burngrange, it was the cat's pyjamas you know, as far as safety and everything else was concerned, and things.....well, it was during the war, and things were going quite well and everybody was quite happy, and then on the 10th January 1947, there was this big explosion! Fifteen men entombed there, it was really a terrible disaster for Burn... for West Calder, and the district, and as I say, well, he went out on the Friday on the backshift.

Q. What time would that be?

A. Oh, that would be what, maybe I think that they started about three, and he would leave the house about two o'clock, on a Friday. Friday night, when the sirens had gone, my children were young, and my oldest daughter had just started the school, and the other one would be about three, and I never thought anything about it! You know, I never sort of thought it was the pit! And, he should have been home about 11

o'clock, and a neighbour and another friend came to the door, to say that there had been an accident. The whole weekend I just sort of lived in hope that.....my brother-in-law and my father came through, he was at Stow at that time, he was an old man, he came through and it was a case of everybody going to the pithead, and there was no news.. and it was the Tuesday morning before they brought them out, and there was that Rescue Brigade, you know, from Coatbridge, and everybody was so kind, and so worried. And of course they were all gone at that time, but thankfully, I don't think that they would do much suffering. Somebody said.....well, of course, the death certificate was marked carbon monoxide poisoning, and somebody said, you see, that they didn't think that they would really suffer very much. When they did bring them home, they were unmarked, they were so peaceful looking, and that was one thing that we felt, well, at least they didn't suffer, you know! But, there was all the trauma of that and the worry of inquiries and men coming, there was Mr. Nellies, I think it was, was the Union man, and Mr. Crichton and everybody.....and all the ministers of every denomination, everybody was so kind, but I think that it took an awful long time before it just struck home what had really happened, you know!

Q. And what age was John then?

A. He was forty one, when he died.....I mean, we had only been married six years too, it seemed such an awful tragedy, and yet there were others..... there was.....I don't know many men from Seafield, because I think that Seafield must have been either shut down, and they transferred the men, but there was fifteen men in all then, that were killed. And I think that the Scottish Oils would get such a shock as well, because it was supposed to be such a safe pit, but whether it was a build up of gas or not, well.....we don't know!

Q. Yes. That would more than likely come out in the inquiry.

A. Yes! Yes!

Q. Because of that accident?

A. Of course, there had been a fire, you see, and for a while they were thinking of just closing the bit and just leaving the bodies down. But very fortunately they didn't have to do that! We got the bodies home which was a blessing!

Q. So you were pleased about that?

A. Oh, very pleased about that, because it would have been an awful thought, the thought of them just being entombed there, but I quite understand that if it was going to cause more death and disaster, that they couldn't have done anything else but seal it off.

Q. So, there would be a Rescue Squad, go in and bring your husband out?

A. Aye.....

Q. Along with the others?

A. Aye, they brought them out, I think that they were nearly all together but there was one man a good bit away from the rest, and then they took them over to Westwood, I think, before taking them home. They weren't brought straight from the pit! They would be taken.....aye, they must have been taken over there and the undertaker sent for there, because they brought them home after all that had been done.

Q. And what help did you get from the Scottish Oils?

A. Oh, the Scottish Oils were very good! They paid the funeral expenses, they set up.....now, I don't know whether it would be.....we got workmen's compensation, which was administered through the Sheriff Court, it wasn't a great deal of money but I suppose that it would be all that was given at the time, and then this.....

Q. Would you like to say.....can you remember how.....

A. Well, I got seven hundred pounds, four hundred pounds for myself and three hundred pounds for the children, and that was administered through the Sheriff Court, then, and it was well.....when I married again, mine.....my.....no, would I be right there.....no, that would go on, that would be paid out until the children were sixteen, it was paid out on a quarterly.....

Q. And how many children had you?

A. I had two daughters! One was five and she had just started the school, and the other one was about three! Well, then the Scottish Oils set up a fund, and we got about, what, I just don't remember the amount, it was about thirty shillings a week for the widow and so much for the children. After I married again, of course, mine was stopped, but the children's went on, until they were sixteen! But, I suppose at the time, it was quite a generous settlement, you know. Some people had thought on fighting it through common law, but then I think that they were advised not to, just to take what the Scottish Oils had given, but.. I mean, at that time, I don't suppose that you thought of the pros and cons of, was it enough or not, you had lost your husband and your children's father, your breadwinner, you just sort of accepted things as they came, you know.

Q. Yes, so it must have been a real hard time for you after that?

A. Well, it was.....you had a bit of a.....

Q. Was it a struggle?

A. It was a struggle! You had two children and you were trying to do your best, and at that time.....well, nowadays, women can get children into the nursery, and go back to work, these things didn't happen the same!

You struggled on, and then of course, I married again, and I had quite a good marriage and it's not the same, but you had.....you made a new life for yourself and my husband was a widower with one son, and we each.....it was a help for each of us, because it gave my children a home, and it gave his son a home, you see, and I suppose things turned out, not so bad, but Burngrange is a thing you never forget! Nor the 10th of January! These things always come up in your mind!

Q. Can you remember what you were actually doing when you got the.....?

A. Well, I was in bed! Because, as they say, I had heard the sirens go at half past nine, but.....I didn't connect it with the pit disaster, and it would be maybe eleven o'clock.....as I say, he used to come home about eleven, and generally I went to bed.....I left some supper ready and I would get up and maybe heat it up when he came in. When a neighbour and a friend came to tell me that there had been an accident.

Q. And did you know then that John was involved?

A. Oh well, we knew that he wasn't home and that there was so many out, that you were just sort of living in hope that.....and waiting on what was to happen, and as I say, my father came and my brother-in-law came, and everybody came and was with you and they went to find out any news, but it was the Tuesday morning.....we lived all weekend, not knowing what was happening.

Q. So, there was always hope was there, up till then?

A. Yes, there was a hope.....well, I hoped, I don't know whether anybody else ever gave up hope, I don't think that they would, you kept on hoping that there would be a miracle, until the word got round, maybe say the Monday that they were talking of sealing off the pit, but fortunately, as I say, they managed to get the bodies out, and they got them all out! But of course, they were all beyond help when they did get them out! So, that was really that, and as I say, well, you just

had to sort of pick up the threads, and get on with your life, but it's something that you never forget! You know!

Q. That would be quite a struggle for you?

A. Oh, it was quite a struggle! And the thought, that, your children so young, had lost a father, and it was so difficult to explain to them at that tender age, what had happened and I don't think that they really took it in, but my brother-in-law and his wife in Carstairs took them away to Carstairs at the time, so that spared them all the trauma of people coming.....you know, how youngsters would ask questions, and want to know, and it saved you a lot of sort of worry, extra worry, in explaining to young children, you did explain to them and they didn't take it in, but they weren't there to see all the things that went on at the time.

Q. And did they ask you any awkward questions when.....

A. Well, no.....

Q. They came back.....?

A. Well, no.....you had to explain to them that their father had been killed.....in the accident and I suppose that they did accept it. I remember telling them that, about this accident, and Mary, the older one said "But the man will let Daddy out", you know, they just didn't understand that they couldn't get out! But I think that they were just too young to take it in, the seriousness of it you know.

Q. In a way, would you think that that was quite fortunate as far as your children were concerned, the age that they were?

A. Yes, I suppose that it was and yet had they been teenagers, maybe I would have relied on them more!

Q. They could have probably given you more support?

- A. More support! Yes! But they were too young to understand, which was better than if they had maybe been nine or ten, which was the sort of in between stage, you know, but well, they've always spoken about their father, and it's been kept fresh in their memory:, you know, and all that! But.....
- Q. Did you ever feel when John worked down the mine, that it was a dangerous job?
- A. Oh, I always felt that! Because, as I say, well, I didn't come from a mining community, but I suppose that the fear was always there, oh yes, it was always there! If he was late in coming home, you panicked, you just thought, oh, I hope nothing has happened.....oh, yes, you lived with that worry at the back of your mind all the time! And I suppose when it came to the crunch, you just thought, I've been afraid of this all along and now, it has happened! You see, that's just.... I suppose every woman who's married to a man that has a hazardous occupation, feels the very same! Men.....fishermen.....men that take their life in their hands as they go out, their womenfolk must have that feeling all along.
- Q. And that is something that only a wife can experience?
- A. Oh yes! Yes! If you know that your husband is in a very dangerous job, it doesn't matter what job, it is, you are bound to live with that fear at the back of your mind, and if they were late, it worries you, and this terrible sense of relief comes over you when you find out that you've been worrying unnecessarily!
- Q. That is only natural!
- A. Yes! Well, I think that's really all that I can tell you about the disaster!

Q. That's fine!

A. It does.....even after all these years, it sort of.....rake up, when you feel it! Even forty years on! You find that the old wound hasn't completely healed, it can be re-opened quite easily. Even just to talk about it!

Q. And you spoke before we started the tape, about people that you did know, in Tarbrax.....who would have worked when Tarbrax was operational?

A. Oh, aye, well at Cobbinshaw and Tarbrax there were still families.... there was a family, Robertson, the Robertsons, and I think that they would come to West Calder too, I've no doubt, most of them are all gone, but they worked, and there were the Lightbody's.....and I.....there weren't so many people left in Cobbinshaw, and most of the people about Tarbrax had by that time, had began to sort of come away, some of them went to Forth, Douglas, anywhere where there was a mining community, and when Tarbrax shut down they sort of scattered away..... there was a family, Ritchie, they were..... the wife was a Lightbody, they went first to Douglas Water.....or Douglas, some direction, I don't know if it was Douglas Water, or Douglas, in the mining areas and then they came back to Forth later on, but they scattered away from Tarbrax to the other mining areas, you know, when Tarbrax shut down, but there were still a few people left about Tarbrax in 1926 to '28, and of course there was the big Tarbrax bing, there, and there was a railway, it wasn't used.....it would be a single line railway, now I don't know whether it would be the.....what they termed..... the pugs that ran on that railway, you know, taking the shale back and forward, it wasn't in use then, but the rails were down and you could walk along the railway from Cobbinshaw to Tarbrax, and round about there, you see.

Q. Did you know of any miners who were working in the mines and pits just after the disaster that they would give up working because of that, the dangers?

- A. Well, I don't know if there was so many of them, there were a lot of them, maybe, would liked to have given up, but then other jobs would be difficult maybe to come by, and I suppose once a miner, always a miner.....it would be in their blood, you know, handed down from father to son, but I'm sure that there would be a few would have liked to have given it up, but what could they do, but go back, even although the fear would be in their minds, you know, but.....I think that would just be how they all felt about.....
- Q. And I would suppose that if that was the only type of work that they could do.....
- A. That they had known.....yes, they couldn't adjust to another job, just so easily.....and other jobs maybe wouldn't be there..... they knew that their job was a trade, a profession, let's say, to them, and they could do it from A to Z, but could they have done anything else! And were they maybe too old to start anew, maybe the younger men, would leave more readily, because they could make a new living there, at something else.
- Q. Now, John, how long did he work in the mines?
- A. Oh, he would work in the mines from when he left the school, because I presume that he would be at Tarbrax, he must have worked at Tarbrax from maybe when he left the school, and then he would come down to West Calder.
- Q. And where did John live at that time?
- A. They lived in Cobbinshaw at that time, you see!
- Q. Lived in Cobbinshaw.....but he would work in Tarbrax.
- A. He would work in Tarbrax, oh aye, they all went, you know, those who worked in Tarbrax went over to Tarbrax from Cobbinshaw, and they walked

along this railway as I told you, and he would work there until Tarbrax shut down, and it would be about 1925 or so, and they they came down to, I think that it was Twenty Six, it's shut down, it was along by Polbeth I think! They would come to work there, and.....sort of moved about from the one pit to the other, round about here, and I don't know when Burngrange was sunk, which they talk about, but it was a comparatively new pit, and was supposed to have all the safety devices, but it would be just one of those unforeseen accidents that.....happened.

Q. And where was John working when you first met him?

A. Oh, he was in West Calder by that time, but his parents were still in Cobbinshaw and.....

Q. What was he doing? At West Calder?

A. He would be in the pit, he would be in Twenty Six, likely! But his parents were still living in Cobbinshaw, you see, and he came..... I think, now there were people Robertson, you know, had worked in Tarbrax belonged to Cobbinshaw, but they had a house over by Tenants March, and I think that he stayed with them, during the week, and came home to his parents at the weekend, at that time, and then his father and mother got a house in West Calder. After that.....

Q. So he stayed in West Calder when you met him?

A. Well, they were in Cobbinshaw when I met him first.....

Q. When you met him first?

A. But he had always worked in West Calder from ever I knew him, and as I say, when his parents died, he had to take lodgings, you see, and he had always been West Calder really, from maybe about 1925 or 1926, until he was killed, you see!

Q. And where did you set up house when you first got married?

A. In Stewart Street, in West Calder, you know where the old folks home is, there were houses down there, and then after a few years we came down, and lived in the building just further up the street..... there's a building of four houses, and we came there, and I lived there for quite a while. Even after I got married I was there, and then I came down here, some years later. And of course, I'm on my own now, again! But that's just how life goes on, isn't it!

Q. That is it! Can you remember about the housing? In these days, what facilities you had?

A. Well, when I set up home first in West Calder, we hadn't very.....it was building.....oh, they were good enough houses in a way, but very little in the way of mod cons, you had.....a room, you had a two apartment, you had the sink in the kitchen, and you had no hot water, you had either got to have a geyser or heat your water and.....

Q. You did have gas?

A. Oh yes, we had gas, coal fires and gas, but you.....you, as I say, you had a geyser, a gas geyser above your sink, and that gave you hot water, you had outside washing houses, that you had to fill up an old tub, and oh, yes, the amenities were not just so good then.

Q. Would that be a wooden tub or a metal one?

A. Aye, it was a wooden tub! You had the boiler that you lit the fire underneath, and then you had the wooden tub, and.....

Q. Was it the old range that you had?

A. Aye, it was the old range and a coal fire with an old range.....but

somehow in these days, well everybody had that, and you just got on with it!

Q. Did you spend a lot of time blackleading?

A. Yes, and you had all the metal bits to polish and as I say, that was the way of life then, everybody did the same thing!

Q. So, it was accepted?

A. It was accepted! I don't think that I would like to go back to it, but.....that was what everybody lived like that then.....and people were.....I don't know, they were quite happy with their lot, and there was a lot of good neighbourliness about, that there isn't nowadays!

Q. Did you find that the neighbours were a big help to you?

A. Oh, yes, very, very good!

Q. Yes!

A. The neighbours were very kind! Everybody was kind, as I say, the Scottish Oils officials did their best, the neighbours were a great help, my friends were good, as I say, ministers of every denomination came to see you, oh no, it was.....it was a village disaster, and everybody helped everybody else, you know! Oh, no, people were very, very kind, you've got to go through a thing like that to realise just how kind people are!

Q. I don't suppose that anybody that this.....disaster or anything like that had happened to.....can really go through what you were going through? They wouldn't understand!

A. Anybody who hasn't? No.....

Q. You can say what you felt, but in a way, they just wouldn't understand fully?

A. They don't fully understand but they give of their best but they give comfort and they give sympathy, which is a great standby when you are in a position, it must have been terrible for anyone..... there was nobody in this community, but anyone that had no sympathy, no moral support, no help, it would be a terrible thing to go through it on your own, you would need to just be a super person to be able to do it!

Q. Were you quite religious in these days?

A. Oh yes! I'm still quite religious, I go to church, and we were brought up like that, and John was.....and I always went to church and..... that, I suppose that gives you a.....gives you something to hold on to, I don't say maybe that it is everything but I don't know, it gives you just that something that helps you to come through things like that!

Q. So, you felt that it was a help?

A. Oh, it was a help definitely!

Q. Now, your social life, when you first got married, what was your..... your pastimes.....?

A. Well.....we went, at that time, there was always whist drives, and..

Q. And who would organise these? Were they run by the church, or were they.....?

A. Well, some of them were run by the church, they were run by the masons and there was always a sort of village community, you know, it was nothing hilarious but there were always a few nights out, you got to these things and.....it sort of broke any monotony, but I wouldn't say, that it was.....it was just really a village entertainment..... which, we all enjoyed it at that time, we were quite happy with it, you know.

- Q. So, these memories, you'll treasure quite a lot?
- A. Oh you do, you never forget, there's always something.....they're always at the back of your mind and I think as you get older, you think more about it, you haven't so much.....you've maybe more spare time, and you think more of these things then, you know!
- Q. Well, that's very right! Would you like to say anything further about anything else?
- A. No, I think that I have said everything.....
- Q. Well, thank you very much, you know, that's very good!

END OF TAPE

Transcript	SD
Industrial Information	We originally came from Campbeltown, and then as a young woman by then, my father came to work in Cobbinshaw.
Tarbrax Closed	Tarbrax Oil Works had shut down by then, and the families moved to West Calder.
Marriage	I kept in touch with John Lightbody and we got married and came to live in West Calder.
Burngrange	My husband was transferred to Burngrange. It was supposed to be a great pit. It was during the war and things were

going quite happy.

Disaster

On the 10th January, 1947, there was a big explosion. Fifteen men were entombed there, it was really a terrible disaster for West Calder and district. I think it started about three o'clock on Friday. A neighbour came to my door to say there had been an accident. The whole weekend I just lived in hope. It was Tuesday morning before they brought them out.

Rescue Brigade

The Rescue Brigade came from Coatbridge.

Carbon Monoxide
Poisoning

I don't think there was too much suffering. The death certificate said it was carbon monoxide poisoning, so they would not have suffered. When they did bring them home, they were unmarked and they were so peaceful looking, and at least they didn't suffer. But there was the trauma and worry of inquiries. The ministers from every denomination, everybody was so kind, but I think that it took an awful long time before it just struck home what had really happened.

Transferred From
Seafield

There were others killed, but I don't know many men who were transferred from Seafield when it shut down and they

transferred the men, but there was fifteen men in all killed.

I think Scottish Oils got such a shock as well, because it was supposed to be such a safe pit.

Cause of the Accident to be Established

The real cause of the accident would more than likely come out at the inquiry, because it would have been awful the thought of being entombed there, but if it was going to cause more death and disaster, that they couldn't have done anything else but seal it off.

Cost of Funerals

Scottish Oils were very good they paid the funeral expenses.

Workmen's Compensation

Scottish Oils set up workman's compensation, which was administered through the Sheriff Court.

Amount Paid

It wasn't a great deal of money, I think I got seven hundred pounds for myself and three hundred pounds for my children.

Domestic Life

It was quite a struggle trying to bring up two children, nowadays women can get children into nursery, and go back to work.

Re-married

I married again, but it was not the same, but you had to make a new life for yourself. My second husband was a widower with one son. It was

quite a struggle and the thought that your children, so young, had lost a father.

Danger

I always felt it was dangerous, because I didn't come from a mining community. You always dreaded if he was late in coming home in case something had happened at the mine.

Families From Tarbrax

I knew quite a few families at Cobbinshaw and Tarbrax, but I have no doubt most of them are all gone.

John's Home

At that time John lived in Cobbinshaw, but he worked in Tarbrax until it shut down.

John's First Job

John was still in West Calder, but his parents were still in Cobbinshaw.

Our First House

When we first got married we lived in a house in Stewart Street, West Calder. They were very good houses, but little in the way of moderns. It was a two apartment and you had a sink in the kitchen.

Hot Water

There was no hot water, you had either got to have a geyser or heat your water.

Gas

We had gas, and a gas geyser above your sink and that gave you hot water.

Washing Houses

We had outside washhouses with wooden tubs. We had a boiler

that you lit a fire underneath.

Old Range

It was the old range and a coal fire. You had all the metal bits to polish, but that was the way of life then.

Social Life
Neighbours

The neighbours were very kind. At the time of the accident they were a great help, as well as my friends. As I said ministers of every denomination came to see us.

Social Life

It was a village disaster, and everybody helped everybody else. But they don't fully understand, but they give of their best in the way of sympathy which is a great comfort.

Religion

I am still quite religious, I go to church. It gives you something to hold on to. I don't say that is everything but it gives you something to help you come through things.

Whist Drives

When I first got married, there was always the Whist drives. Some of them were run by the church. It was nothing hilarious but it was always a night out and it broke the monotony.

Happy Memories

You never forget the happy memories, there always at the back of your mind and I think as you get older you think more of these 'good times in the past.

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