

We grew up in a very small mining community, my father didn't work underground because of frail health but my grandfather and many uncles did. It was very harsh. I can remember being very little before the pit baths were established. Men would come home totally black with little round circles around their eyes. I felt very much part of the mining community. What I got from it was that because the job was so dangerous and harsh, you had to escape, there had to be a way out. And as far as I know that way was learning and education. The miners struggled so much, but they founded working men's clubs and they had libraries. That was the only way they could see out of it. I feel that, I actually feel a part of that.

Many people stowed away to America, my husband as well. He liked to drink, he did. He went to Cardiff, he always wanted to travel but because he was tied to the pit he couldn't join the forces so had to stay in the pit. So he thought he'd go to Cardiff to the docks. He liked to look at the ships. He got in with some merchant seamen, they had a good afternoon and he told them he would like to go to America. They told him to come back about 5 o'clock and they would smuggle him on the ship. So he came home. His mother was doing the ironing and said to her "Mam, can I have a clean shirt and some socks" "Ok, boy, where are you going?" "I'm off to America" So she gave it all to him. And he said "Cheerio Mam, I'll write to you when I get there." He went down to the dock, met the gang, they took him to the ship, they pretended to be drunk and walked him on and put him a cupboard and he was in that cupboard for 3 weeks. Oh, he said the seasickness was absolutely horrible. He was there for 3 weeks. All the crew kept quiet. He would come out every now and then. Go back in when the old captain was doing his rounds. They got him off at Brooklyn. Pier 38. Smuggled him past customs. He had no paperwork. He wanted to go to Pittsburgh, as he could join the mines there. He worked his way taking odd jobs. But because he had no paper work he couldn't get a job in the mines so he then had to work his way back down and he was starving. So he gave himself up to a policeman who was doing his patrols "I'm sorry, I'm an illegal immigrant, I boarded this ship and got smuggled across." "Well you look an honest boy" he said. "So I wont arrest you" and gave him directions to the nearest police station. He went there. And he was sent to Ellis Island and they deported him on another merchant ship. He had to shovel his way back, shovelling the coal he had mined back home. When they got to Liverpool they arrested him. He had to go to court. But the people he worked for in America, all those people wrote letters to the police station, every one of them wanted him to stay. But of course he couldn't because he was still tied to the pit. Then my husband had an accident. He was nine months in the hospital. About 1948 it was and he couldn't go back to that job. He was a good worker. He was still recovering when I met him. They offered him a job in the washery (where they washed the coal) and he didn't want to go there with the old men. So he worked in the canteen of a building site. And my mother made me work in the canteen during the holidays. So that's where I met my husband. In fact, the first time I saw my husband he was standing in a dustbin... He was a bargain. So I said, who's that young man in the bin? My mother said he's just come up from south Wales. He's got a bad leg so he's working in the canteen. I was about 13. I started going out with him when I was 14, engaged at 15 and married a few weeks after I was 16. Yeah. Later on my husband had the dust, a lung condition affecting miners, and he fought for years to try and get the compensation for it. It wasn't easy to get. Most of the men who worked with him didn't get compensation, but he wasn't bothered so much about the compensation, he wanted to be acknowledged that he had the dust, but where we lived at the time he had to go into hospital they would always say "do you realise what a state your lungs are in, you should try for compensation" so they backed him up to say that he had the dust. And they sent the paperwork to Cardiff, but it was turned down because the percentage wasn't enough. The last letter he got, a few weeks before he died, he had tried for years, he didn't want the

money, it was the principle, the letter stated that if he had worked another 6 months in the pit he would have got compensation. 6 months short of his time to qualify. He was so angry he burnt all the letters. I wished he hadn't done that because I would have kept going with it.