

VITO AND FILOMENA BONACCI

An Interview by Wanda McDonough

Wanda McDonough Oral History Project

Tape No. 16

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ORAL/TAPED HISTORY INTERVIEW
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Interviewee: Vito and Filomena Bonacci Helper, Ut.
Name Address Tel

Interviewer: Wanda McDonough
Name

Interview: 8-18-93 St Anthony's Rectory, Helper, Ut.
Date Place

I willingly contribute my testimony recorded on 8-18
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historical research.

Vito Bonacci
Interviewee Filomena Bonacci
Wanda McDonough
Interviewer

WM: This is a recording of an interview with Vito and Filomena Bonacci. It was made in St. Anthony's Church Rectory in Helper, August 18, 1993. The interviewer is Wanda McDonough. All right, Vito, you tell us your name, where you were born, how old you are.

VB: My name is Vito Bonacci. V-I-T-O. Born in Italy.

WM: What town? What part?

VB: Detalatuga[sp?].

WM: Spell it.

VB: Detalatuga, it's--

VB: A county seat, like a county seat. But the town where I was born, it's the county seat. But then it got a bigger name. They call them "casa nova," "new house."

WM: Is this in Calabria, down south?

VB: Yes. It's down south, yes. My Dad's name was Dominic Bonacci. My mother was Filomena Bonacci. Well, it was Scauldo[sp?]. But over there they don't change their names like they do here. So my mother was Filomena Scauldo. And I had three brothers.

FB: You were born when?

VB: Nineteen oh one.

FB: November what?

VB: November 5th.

FB: Okay.

WM: Nineteen one, right. And your parents, well, of course, I guess they were born in Italy.

VB: Oh, yes.

WM: Why did they come here? To the United States?

VB: Well, they didn't come here. I come here.

WM: Why?

VB: My dad used to come here, work two or three years, then go back. And the last time he came, then I came over here. And I was going to go back, but I didn't. I stayed. One way, what kept me here, my family. Because if I had enough in my head to move before I get a family, I would wind up in

Italy. But I waited too long. Then when I had my family, I'd leave my family to go, see.

But, like I said, I was working in Kenilworth. I started in Kenilworth. I don't know if Stanley (Litizzette) told you that or not. But I worked in Kenilworth the first time, taking care of the super's house and yard.

FB: He was a gardener.

VB: He built a house on top of a little hill or whatever; it was nothing but garbage. So I had to clean it all out, and pull the rugs out, and put up drapes, and stuff like that. And I tell you, for \$2.50 a day, eight hours' work. And I couldn't find a place to stay at the house. I had to go to what they call a boardinghouse. And I wasn't making enough money to pay at the boardinghouse. So I had to walk from Kenilworth down here to Helper. And in the morning go back and work all day long, walking.

WM: Walk?

VB: Walk.

WM: I've only been to Kenilworth once, but it's way up on a hill.

VB: That's quite a ways, you know, especially going up because it's hard to get up that. Never had no choice. I wasn't making enough money to stay in the boardinghouse. [Pause]

WM: So you walked down to Helper. Then where did you stay there?

VB: I had an uncle over here, and I stayed with him, you know. And then after that, finally, I got a job on a tippie, you know, where they dump the coal.

VB: And I finally found a two-room house up there, and I was batching, and I tell you! I had to do my own cooking and everything in this two-room house. And I stayed there for quite a while. Then pretty soon the tension got kind of rough over the union. In fact, I got mixed up with the unions that were organizing, too. The way it is, where I come from--because I come from Pennsylvania, not direct from Italy; I stopped in Pennsylvania, and then from Pennsylvania I came here.

WM: What did you do in Pennsylvania?

VB: In Pennsylvania, first I stayed with an uncle of mine on a farm, for about three months. Finally, I told him, I said,

"I didn't come here to stay on a farm. I came here to make money somehow."

WM: So you came to a coal mine to make money?

VB: No. I didn't go right over there. My uncle, it turned out his uncle found me a job over there on that mining camp. There used to be a mining camp, you know, and they had the coke ovens where they were making the coke. And you know when they make the coke, they make steel out of it. His uncle, his son, his stepson, was the owner of the place. And he gave me a job--my dad, too, who was with me then--screening the ashes.

FB: They have to clean the slurry, whatever they call it, you know.

VB: Right. You know, when they put the coke in these coke ovens, it cooks. When you pull it out, it comes out in big sticks like this, you know, like sticks of wood. That's the way it comes out.

VB: But then you've got the ashes. Took the ashes and piled it all in a pile over there. But then you've got little pieces on the field.

WM: Like those dumps out at Garfield?

VB: Yes, yes.

VB: And we would screen the ashes and take them in small cokes. And they used to use them for the blacksmith shops to make heat because it was hotter than coal.

WM: Did you go to school at all while you were there?

VB: No, no school.

VB: And then one day, here comes one guy. I just--I don't know. Maybe because I was dumb. But he was called Johnny Boy; he was from England. And he was my foreman. And they had an old mine over there that had been closed for nobody knows how many years. They were going to open that up again. And told me, he said, "If you come work for me, you'll make a little more money." Because screening that coke I was making \$5 a day. So I went with him over there. I didn't know anything about mines. So I was over there, and it was a big wall of coal is what it was, a very big wall that was all I could see. And the rest of it was empty, you know. And he gave me a drill, is what they call it--I think it was four feet long. He put it up on the stand for me and everything.

That's all I had to do, just drill a hole in that coal. I didn't know that there was nothing behind. So when that driller went through, I went with it. My face at that time, the coal _____ didn't have to watch, but it knocked me down.

WM: How old were you then?

VB: Oh, I was about 20 years old. That stuff that's coming out of there, they call it Black Dan. If he wasn't there, I would've been a dead duck. Because I couldn't get up. But he knew, and he grabbed me and pulled me outside. And what was amazing, you know, here in Utah, never had no unions. But over there they had the United Mine Workers Union.

VB: And to work in the mine, or any coal camps at all, first you join the union. Then you go ask for a job. That's what I know. But, I say, all together it must have been about two hours that I had my card _____. I never work back there anymore. Because I got scared that time, I didn't want to have anything to do with the mines anymore. Then I got to be one of the oldest ones--I still am--the oldest United Mine Workers man in the states of Utah, Wyoming, and Arizona.

WM: You still belong to it?

VB: I still belong. Yes, District 22. Two, three states.

WM: Utah, Arizona, and where?

VB: Wyoming, yes. Three states. I am the oldest. I don't think I'm the oldest in age myself.

WM: But you worked in the mines--belonged to the miners' union the longest.

VB: But I belonged to the union that long, you see.

VB: In fact, the last Labor Day we had here in Helper--that must have been three or four years ago--they gave me a plaque because I was the oldest man there. And I don't know. That plaque went to Washington that I worked for. I had this plaque, United Mine Workers--I had a plaque to be the oldest Knights of Columbus member in Carbon County. And I had those two plaques. I had to send them to Washington. In fact, I had to make a trellis how we tied the tomatoes when we planted a garden.

FB: He ties his tomatoes up. The historical. During Columbus, that was a big one. They took all his stuff on Columbus Day because he had to give a speech.

VB: Did you get it back?

FB: Not yet. They said it would take two years before we'd get it back.

VB: I think by next year we might get it back. I had a hole, you know. I did it myself when I was working in the shop out of a shovel.

FB: Out of this shovel.

VB: And I had it sent out in tubes. I don't know what the reason was.

WM: I hope you get it back.

FB: I'm hoping, too, because they've got my mother's pictures and his mother's pictures.

VB: And then I have some religious pictures. And as I said earlier, I had my oldest brother's picture because he grew up in the old country.

WM: To Washington?

FB: Yes.

WM: What are they doing with them?

FB: They're going all over the States.

VB: I think they brought in ____.

FB: No, the last place they went was in California. I don't know which place. And then they give us the letter if we wanted to go down there, you know. It's going to go from state to state. It'll take two years before we get all that back.

VB: I don't know what that does. Nobody explained what it was for.

FB: I even gave a bedspread my mother had made, you know.

FB: We wonder what they're doing with this.

WM: I hope you get it back.

FB: Well, they insured it, you know. But I don't want the insurance. I want my stuff back.

FB: And he got from the Pope, you know, when they worked on this

house here. Then they sent it in, and they sent him--the Pope sent him--a certificate that they'd worked on the church. And they got that.

WM: You got all kinds of awards. Will you hang them up on your walls?

VB: Yes. That's what I'm going to do. Here's the house. Me and another guy built this house.

WM: Oh, that's yours. Mr. Litizzette sent them over.

FB: That's yours?

WM: Yes. He said he would. Thank you very much. This is some of his stuff that he had. I'd like pictures of all your awards. But if they're back in Washington, I can't get them. Well, let's go on.

FB: You were talking about when you were back _____. You were aiming to stay here.

VB: This parish here used to belong to Price.

WM: You were a mission.

VB: When they made it a parish, then they sent a priest from Price. His name was Father Francis Lamothe. He stayed here for a while. The Knights of Columbus built him a room under the church there, in the basement there. He stayed in that for a while. Then he decided to build this house. And me and another fellow a couple of years younger than me, we started working on this. In those days we never had machinery to dig the basement like they do today

VB: No. They just had the bulldozer that made a big hole over there. Then we had to come in with the pick and shovel to straighten it. When they tried to dig to put in the filling in there, under the office over here, in that corner of the office over there, _____ we found cans, coal, and trash. But they couldn't find anything solid. And I figured we couldn't put this house on top of that. We had decided one guy went down to the bottom and dug and put it in a bucket. The other guy stayed on top to dump it. Finally, one day, Father Lamonte, he said, "You guys better come in and gave something to eat with us." So we had a lunch. Then we told him we just can't find anything solid. What are we going to do? He said, "Don't ask me. I don't understand anything about filling a hole."

VB: That's all. He said, "Whatever you guys do, I'm satisfied."

So I told the other guy, the only thing we can do--we both were working in Kenilworth--we go over there and talk the superintendent into letting us have a bunch of those rails in the mine that they used, small rails like the railroad, you know. We brought a truckful of them down here. And we put them criss-cross, and filled them with cement, then press mortar around, and fill it up with cement, and build the house on top of that, and that house will never crack. You'll never see any cracks on this house. But there are cracks in the church because it was not done in the church.

WM: I hope you didn't carry them down from Kenilworth. You must have had a truck or something.

VB: I had a truck. I had a truck. We worked with this other-- In fact, with the basement, _____, you know. And me and this guy, then we hired the church garage guys. Hired one guy to be kind of a boss, like. If we needed anything, he'd figure out what we were going to have and go get it. And that's all we had. We built this house here. And when we got through, in fact the bishop came down, and he said they built it honest; it's all right.

WM: Which bishop was it?

FB: Bishop (Duane G.) Hunt.

FB: No, Bishop (Joseph Lennox) Federal, I think it was.

VB: No, Bishop Hunt, I think.

VB: Yes. Because the way I remember it, was when we were building the house over here, one of the big shots was named Hunt, who was in charge.

FB: Folsom and Hunt.

VB: But, as I said, he wasn't related with--

VB: And then we built this house over here. When he came down, the first thing he asked us, "How much did that cost?" We told him. "This house cost \$13,700." And he said, "We built one just like that in Salt Lake, except for that little decoration on the outside. But it's built just like this." And he said, "You know, it cost \$65,000. How did you guys do it?" Well, we did it because all the labor was free. Everything was free. And lots of times a lot of stuff, instead of having to go buy it, maybe somebody got it, you know. Used to go up to the camp up there and talk to the super. And they'd let us have a piece of lumber here and there. You know, stuff like that.

FB: They had a guy that laid the bricks.

VB: Oh, we had a bricklayer. Then we found one guy to put the shingles. Because the two of us, me and Mike, we were scared to go way up there and put those in. We got Joe _____ from Price. He was a member of the Knights of Columbus there, and he went up there and put the shingles on the top there.

WM: I understand you're a charter member of the Knights of Columbus.

VB: I think I'm the only one left.

WM: Yes. Mr. Litizzette gave me--

VB: Stanley (Litizzete) would know about it.

WM: --something with your name on it as a charter member.

VB: He be asking me all the time to go. But I've kept it just like I did with the union. I joined it, and I never quit it. I pay my dues all the time.

FB: Stanley's dad was one of the charter members, too.

VB: Oh, Stanley's dad--

FB: My uncle organized it, you know.

WM: Why did you organize the Knights of Columbus in the beginning?

VB: The way we did it, the priest we had, he was in Price. But he was in charge of both churches in those days.

WM: Who was it? Father (Msgr. Alfred F.) Giovannoni?

VB: Father Giovannoni. And he got a letter from the Ku Klux Klan that they wanted him out of Carbon County. And he was scared, and he told us about it, you know. He didn't say to do anything. But he told us what happened. "You know," he said, "I'm kind of scared." The Ku Klux Klan was getting pretty strong here, see. So finally Vic Litizzette, Stanley's dad; and her uncle, name of Frank Bonacci(?), he was a union organizer; and (Rinetti or Capitolo?), he's from Salt Lake, but he had a restaurant in Price; we got together and said, well, let's organize the Knights of Columbus. And that's how it came about. We had a run-in with a big clash, you know.

WM: So it was to counteract the Ku Klux Klan.

VB: Yes.

FB: They used to come, and they used to--

VB: What they used to do was they'd go and burn crosses over here _____. And put a cross and burn it at night, you know. So we organized. We used to make a circle and go ahead and burn it.

WM: Why a circle?

FB: I don't know. They just thought of that. [Laughter]

VB: I was working in Kenilworth then. At that time I was on the tipple. And I'd done a lot of damage on the cars because they used to use waste full of oil on the axle so they don't get hot, you know. Now they've got bearings and so on, and you need to oil it. And I used to pull the waste full of oil. Then they'd get a tomato can and fill it up, and make a big circle _____ and put fire to it.

WM: Sounds like a bunch of kids playing. [Laughter]

FB: I wasn't married to him then.

VB: But I tell you the truth, you know. They got scared.

WM: They moved out?

VB: Because down here what they call the _____ between here and Price, on the lake side over there, they had built a big platform made out of cement, and that's where they used to meet. And we used to go spying over there all the time.

WM: Did they wear those white robes?

VB: Yes, they did.

WM: And the masks?

VB: The masks. They were scary to look at.

WM: Well, what did the Knights of Columbus wear? You didn't have those fancy uniforms, did you?

VB: No, no. We never had no uniforms.

FB: But they made a few fights for the church, see.

WM: Yes.

FB: They'd go against them, fighting for the church. And they got scared, I guess, because the church was getting pretty big then.

VB: We were going to _____ because you'd talk to people, you know, about what was happening, and what we figured they were doing all the time, and they'd come with us, see.

WM: What was the makeup of the Klan?

VB: I don't know what they were, but they didn't like--

WM: They didn't like the Catholics, I know.

VB: They didn't like the Catholics, they didn't like the Jews, they didn't like the Negroes.

FB: They didn't like nobody. They didn't like the Italians either.

VB: They were a bunch, I guess, that was figuring to run the country by themselves, I guess. I don't know. I tell you. You'd look at them when they were sitting together on the platform over there, and we'd stay behind the bushes and watch them. They made all kinds of noise that would scare the heck out of you, you know. I don't know what the hell they figured.

WM: How old were you then?

VB: Oh, I was about 24 or 25.

FB: Oh no, you weren't then. You were younger than that. Because you got married when you were 25, and it was all gone.

VB: Well, I'm getting so that--like I told you I'm 92 years old now--I don't remember what I had for breakfast this morning. [Laughter]

WM: Let's let you give your background now, Fil. And then I'd like to ask you more about the mines in a minute or two. Give us your name, your maiden name, all your parents' names.

FB: My name is Filomena Bonacci--Filomena Fazio Bonacci. I was born in Sunnyside. And then when I was six years old, we moved to Spring Glen. My dad bought a farm there and moved to Spring Glen, and I've been there ever since. Mother had nine children, three boys and six girls. We were all raised here, and we're all settled here.

WM: Did you go to school here?

FB: Yes, I went to school. I went to school in Spring Glen, and I went to Carbon High for two years.

WM: You never went to the Notre Dame School?

FB: No. They didn't have Notre Dame then. Then I got married, so I didn't go to school.

WM: What was medical care like in the mining camps? Did you have a doctor?

FB: Yes. We had a doctor. He was paid by the company. Where we were in Kenilworth, we had a good doctor. He was compassionate to the people, and he did everything for us.

WM: What was his name?

FB: Dr. Robinson. What was his first name?

VB: I can't think of his first name.

FB: Oh, he was a good doctor.

VB: He came to Kenilworth when he came out of school.

VB: He stayed until they closed Kenilworth.

WM: I've only been to Kenilworth since it was a ruins. But I guess it must have been quite a town at one time.

VB: Oh, Kenilworth was one of the best camps, mining camps, in Carbon County.

WM: There's a lot of stone masonry up there. Were the Italians stone masons?

FB: Most of it was that Mr. Sappi[sp?] and Mr. Gelani[sp?]. Now, I don't know whether he's done anything--

VB: He didn't do anything else in Kenilworth. Gelani was down around here in Hiawatha. He built the bridge, that they put his name on it, over the great big wash. Go from Helper to Hiawatha, the big wash over the _____ bridge. I remember now, when he got through, he made big money. In those days, you know, two, three thousand dollars was big money. Of course now it's not big money.

VB: They gave him a good bonus, you know, when he got through. The president gave him. He never did say how much anyway.

But he was the kind of a guy that-- I don't know. He was no church guy. And he went to the old country because his family was in the old country. He went over there. And when he got over there, he had to go through one town over there where they were raising oranges. Because where we come from, they don't raise any oranges. We're a little ways from the ocean. But he went to this place they call Nicaastro. And they filled up a wagon that had four horses loaded with oranges. And took three _____ in order for people to have oranges. I see oranges for miles and miles _____ people _____

FB: Was that Gelani?

VB: Old Man Gelani. He was a good stone mason. He made houses that are still up. In _____ over here, they cut the rocks all the same, just like blocks, you know. All the same.

WM: Yes. I noticed that. Well, I was in Hiawatha last year on a tour, and there was a lot of that stonework over there and at Kenilworth, too.

FB: He worked over there. He did that, too.

VB: In Kenilworth it was Sappi, Vic Sappi. And he did all of the rough wall on the outside, all over, down, down, all over. Then they built the shop, and it was a very big shop.

WM: Was Kenilworth a company town? I mean, did you have to live in company housing?

FB: Yes. At the time they named it, Independent Coal Company, that's it. The superintendent's dad owned the Kenilworth, didn't he?

VB: It was his mine. Its name was Independent Coal & Coke. Because they bought a piece of land and screened the land. But the thing is, that coal was good enough to _____ made coke out of it. But they tried, and it didn't work out because instead of making coke, it burned out. So they gave up that. And Old Man Thompson, he was the owner, and Thompson had one daughter. She married this guy from Canada.

VB: And he was in the army then. When he came to Kenilworth, he was discharged from--he was a captain in the army in Canada. And he came to Kenilworth. When he came to Kenilworth, everybody was afraid they would lose their jobs, you know. They said he was going to treat us like the soldiers. But he wasn't that way. He was a good man. And I worked for him. Well, in fact, after we had a strike in 1922, you know, we were not on strike in Sunnyside. And we lost the strike after seven months.

WM: Was that the strike where this Mother Jones came out? She was some woman that went around supporting the strikers.

VB: There were talking about--I don't know the name--but they were talking about some woman who was really strong union.

WM: Mother Jones. I've only heard her called Mother Jones.

VB: What it was in those days, you see, we couldn't get a hold. Nobody knew that because the Church was 100 percent against. And after seven months, in fact, I had a guy that I told my story to him two, three times. He was chief electrician in Kenilworth, you know. But he came from _____ someplace. And he was talking about down in Emery County, you know, in those days, was at least 99 percent Mormons.

WM: Oh, yes. They settled that on their own.

VB: On those farms, you know. And he said one time--some of the guys didn't like it--but he said, "You know, Emery County people never did ever see a dollar bill--I looked--until 1922. They'd seen no dollar bills and _____. In fact, before the '22 strike, there was not even a soul from Emery County working in the coal mines. They were on the farms over there. They came in here, and what did they come here for? To break the strike. They broke the strike in seven months, and we lost. And then the next day they didn't move anymore because they liked the money."

Then I heard that, you know. I had that little farm in Spring Glen. Some neighbors over there, we were talking one time, and they said, "By golly! They call themselves farmers. Then they have to go work in the mine to pay the tax. You call those farmers?" A lot of guys took that as a joke. A lot of guys didn't take it at all, and they got kind of mad, you know. Well, a lot of jobs at that time.

WM: Mr. Litizzette said to ask you about a Mike Molinaro? Who was he?

VB: Me and him built the house.

VB: He's in California now. He had a home here.

FB: He was a carpenter.

VB: But he was a carpenter from the old country, and he was a good one. In fact, well, if it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have been any good at all. Because I never learned to be a carpenter. In the old country, I had this brother, I told you, that was teaching me to work. He was what they call a

furniture-maker. That guy, he made furniture that was real first-class stuff.

WM: Cabinetmaker.

VB: And he wanted me to learn with him, and I would like that, have the life. But I got a little bit out of it. Then this guy, this Mike Molinaro, when he builds a house over here, I help him on his house. My house, I brought it down from Sunnyside in sections. And me and him, we put it together.

WM: In sections! Nowadays, they just pick it up and put it on something and pull it along.

VB: In those days you used to put them on _____. My house--it's a five-room house--we put it on the _____ with four pieces, one _____.

FB: Oh, yes. But, see, you moved it. That's why you cut it off the corners. They didn't do that when you build them.

VB: No. But when we got it from Sunnyside.

FB: But when you moved it from Sunnyside.

VB: Then we went over there to lay a trailer right up against the wall and slapped those pieces on top. Then bring them down here and put them back together.

WM: Is it a good house?

FB: It's a pretty good one. It's a good house--it was the house that the superintendents used.

WM: It probably is pretty nice then. Do you have a garden?

FB: A little garden. But this year nothing grew.

WM: I know. This has not been a good year in Utah for gardens. Everybody's having trouble.

FB: We had a few beans, and the windstorm came and just pushed them around and pulled them up.

WM: Ruined my tomatoes. I don't have a ripe tomato yet.

VB: We don't either.

FB: And my cucumbers.... Of course we were late getting ours out. My son said, "Mom, it's too early. You know it freezes in May." So we planted almost the first of June.

FB: My son didn't want me to plant anything because he said, "You'll go out and work, and then you'll be sick." So we didn't. We planted them late.

WM: You didn't stay in the mines long enough to have another accident then?

VB: Oh, no, no, no.

WM: That finished you up. So you didn't ever pick up this lung ailment.

FB: No. Yes, he's got the lung thing--

VB: I've got what they call black lung. I guess anybody worked in the mines in those days, they got the black lung.

FB: He was working in the tipple. Oh, I lived close there after we got married. You'd set the table, and you had to hurry up and eat or you'd have to clean the slack off of your table. It was terrible. That's where he got his slack. And then he went in the mine awhile, too. He went into the mine about four years before he quit.

VB: What happened, like I say, I had an accident. Kenilworth bought Castle Gate, see; and instead of working both mines together, what they did, the two union presidents got together and gave the inside guys seniority and the outside guys, like I was--working in the shop and in the tipple--no seniority. So I--They brought me into Castle Gate as using the torch to cut the steel, you know. They wanted to put a piece of machinery in the tipple. And they got me in, and another guy to do the welding, and I'd do the cutting. When we got through with that, they just laid us off. And we came to find out that these two guys got together and gave the inside guys enough seniority so that they'd go over there and work, and us guys no seniority. So I stayed for quite a while. And then finally I wrote to Washington, to the big office, and they sent a couple of guys over here, and they put us back to work. But I had to go in the mine. I was too young to pick up my pension, and I was too old to look for another job. And I didn't know what to do

FB: So he was flat down on his back for six months with arthritis. Then he got feeling better, and went back in the mine. One night he came home, and he didn't have no shoes, and his shoulders were all banged up. I said, "What's the matter?" "A bounce came and it--"

VB: Not a bounce, a rock.

FB: A rock came down and took the shoe right off of his foot. He had it tore right off. It missed his head.

VB: See, the roof was like this here. Nice and flat, you know. Then every four feet we'd drill a hole over there, and we'd put a plate of iron like this and a wooden block like this. That was supposed to hold the roof up in case, you know. And I said all the time, I said, How do they know that? Up on top there it's a solid rock to hold that thing. I was scared one time.

VB: My buddy, see, he was one of two new guys came outside, both guys from outside. My buddy, he was a barber on the outside of what he was, and he was kind of a lazy guy, didn't like to work. And bolting the roof over there, you've got to work. You've got to carry those bolts up on top of the hill, through mud, like water and everything. So I told him, "You stay on the machine and drill the holes, and I'll take care of the parts." I told him just where to put the holes and everything. And I used to go and spot it from below here. And the way I run, under one of the other bosses, we had a big problem. They knew that I know that I'm going to stay up there, you know. Nothing to hold on to help me. While I was running, something hit my heel. It didn't hurt my foot. When I got close to where the machine was, I look over there, and I had no heel on the shoe. Pulled it right out.

FB: You should have seen that.

VB: I looked back, and there was a big rock, that big, four feet square.

WM: Boy, you're lucky that didn't hit anything else.

VB: If I was that much back, it would have been right on top of me.

FB: I went to the doctor. I just had to go to the doctor all the time. He was getting kind of leery. And he had to have that arthritis, and he wasn't too agile on, you know, his feet. So then I told him, I said, "Should I tell Vito to quit?" He says, "No, no, no. Whatever you do, don't tell him to quit."

FB: He said, "You don't let him quit. Let him quit by himself." And that was in '63, wasn't it? Then he said, "Because if he quits, and, you know, you're young, and you've got those kids." He said, "You're going to have to find a job someplace. And if it goes hard on him, he'll blame you." So I just kept my mouth shut. So one night about two months after that, he came home, he said, "I'm going to quit." And I said, "Oh, thank God!" Then he quit.

WM: But when you had this accident, did the company--I hope they at least bought you a pair of new shoes.

FB: They did. They bought him shoes.

VB: The boss was a nice man. He was a big Mormon, but he was a nice man. I told him, I said--they were talking all the time about laying a bunch of guys off. I said, "Well, if they laid me off, I'd want to get out." He said, "I can't lay you off because you've got too much seniority." "Well, that don't matter. You don't have to worry. You just lay me off." "Well," he said, "I cannot do that." So one night, it was the midnight shift in the mine, and we were sitting on top of a piece of machinery eating our lunch, and he said, "You guys be careful. I've gotta go outside, get some stuff and bring it in." When he got outside the mine, we were getting our lamps to put on our heads. He called on the telephone, and I answered the telephone. He said, "I understand we're going to have a layoff tomorrow." I said, "Put my name on the list." "Oh, no," he said, "I still can't do it." "Oh, yes, you do it," I said. "You put my name on the list, and nobody can say, boo. If I want to get laid off, nobody can keep me in here."

VB: So that's what I done. I just got scared, see. I figured I'd just as well get out while I'm alive instead of taking me out when I'm dead. Oh, I tell you! I was scared every minute I was in the mine. A lot of people, oh, they treat it like a church. But not to me.

FB: But that year after he got laid off, it was kind of hard because he was getting--the union was paying you what? How much did we get? A hundred dollars a month. That's all we were getting. And he couldn't draw Social Security because he was young, you know. And so then what he did-- We went on a hundred dollars a month. I got a job, you know, and helped out.

WM: What did you do?

FB: I was working for the mines, mind you. Down in Price they have a tamping company, they call it. They make--I don't know if you know what dummies are? They make--

FB: Made little bags like with--they'd make them, I think, they were six inches and eight inches. Little tiny ones. You'd go over there, and you tamped them--they called it tamping. You'd go over them with machinery and put those little black bags on there, and use your feet, and they'd fill up with dirt, and then you'd squeeze them and put them in a little tray they had there. You had to put 40 of those bags in one,

and then you put them in a big bag, and seal it, and put it out. They sent those back to them. They used to use them to shoot the coal out and dirt.

WM: To do what?

FB: Shoot the coal with them. They'd make drills, then they put the powder in there, and then they'd--

WM: Shoot the coal?

VB: Yes. What they used to do--

WM: I don't understand this shoot the coal.

VB: They drilled holes on the coal in those days--not now, in those days. They drilled holes on the coal with a big rock. Fill it up with dynamite. Then they put that dirt--the dummies she called them--and tamp them tight.

FB: When they'd blast--

VB: When they blast, the coal comes down.
Now they cut the coal, see. In those days they'd shoot it out.

FB: ...a thousand dummies a day. You'd get 200 bags, and those 200 bags each had 40 little dummies in it. Then you'd fill them, and then they'd carry them out and bring them up to the mines.

WM: Where were you? Where did you do the work? Right outside the mines?

FB: They had a tamping shed. _____ had a tamping thing over there where I tamped. I worked there for eight years.

WM: Where?

FB: Tamping. It's in Price.

FB: And I worked there for eight years. I think that's why I lost my _____.

WM: You really weren't working near the mine?

FB: No, no, no.

FB: And that's how I helped out. And I had my kid in the seminary, you know, my youngest kid in the seminary.

WM: What do the Knights of Columbus do now?

FB: It's almost dead.

VB: I tell you. This new generation--

VB: In fact, the last meeting we had, you know, I got up and told them _____. Well, you know, every year they have a convention, a state convention, in Salt Lake and sometimes in Ogden, all around the state, they come to have a convention, and from all of the states together. And this year the guy who was what they call the Grand Knight, the head man, _____, he wasn't a Grand Knight elected; he was appointed. _____ was a Grand Knight, he wanted to quit. So he told this guy, you're going to be a Grand Knight, I'm going to be a Deputy Grand Knight. Then he wanted somebody to go to the convention. He went and got a hold of a guy that was living with a woman--they weren't married--

I said, "You know, that's against the rules of the Knights of Columbus. It's against the rules of the Church." And the Knights of Columbus are supposed to be the pillars of the Church, you know.

FB: They used to do quite a bit before.

VB: Oh, quite a bit of work before! I tell you! We used to have the carnival every year.

WM: In Helper or Price?

VB: In Helper. Well, it started in Price. The first two carnivals we had in Price. But it wasn't like it is lately, you know. They were giving prizes, but no cash, you know, no money. And we started on prizes _____. Mrs. Litizzette, Stanley's mother, she was one of the main workers. In fact, I never had no car, and they used to give me rides to go down over there and help her. They had the carnival. Then Price used to take the money; Helper nothing. Finally she said, "Why do we have to have a carnival in Price? Let's move it up to Helper." So that's when they moved it up over here. And me and this Mike Molinaro worked together. We built the booths.

And when we were up over here, the children never had enough chairs, they never had enough tables. We had to build those tables and chairs. And a stand to put all that play stuff over there. And then these guys did all that work, me and Mike Molinaro. We did that. And I don't know exactly the days, but at least 30 years, we never bought a nail. Because we used to pull the nails. And this Mike Molinaro would take

them home, in the wintertime go down in the basement and straighten them up.

FB: Straighten them up.

VB: In thirty years we never bought a stick of lumber. And I tell you, to have a carnival in them days, we had to work for about two weeks like a mule. Because we had to use planks, big planks, to make seats out of it. We had to make a stand to put the planks on top to sit down on it. And no place to keep them _____. When the term was over, you had to bring them back in the garage behind here. And then we had to bring them back when we built them again.

WM: When did you have the carnival? Was it to celebrate the Fourth of July or anything?

VB: No, it was just for money profit.

FB: For the church. It helped the church.

VB: It helped the church, you know. And we used to make big money, too.

FB: With the first two carnivals, they gave a car. The first year Dominic and--the king and queen, you know-- You had to sell all those books, you know. Who sold the most would get to be king and queen.

FB: Yes. [Laughter] I worked my butt off going and selling them, to give my son a chance to be up there. But he was so disappointed. He didn't want to.

VB: They used to make pretty good money, though. There's no other way the church is going to get the money from the people who don't help out. I tell you, there are a lot of people who think that you be a good Catholic if you just go sit down in the Mass and that's all. You've got to work, too, and help the churches.

VB: Monsignor (Edward F.) Dowling--you ever hear of him?

WM: Monsignor Dowling? He gave me instructions when I joined the Church. He married me and my husband. I love him dearly.

FB: Well, he married my son, too.

VB: He was a parish priest over here 16 years. And I'll tell you. He was a good man.

WM: Oh, I know.

VB: But he was rough. When he wanted to be rough, he was rough. He used to give me hell, I'll tell you.

VB: He'd just holler at you. But about this land with this convent--the nuns don't call it a convent anymore. What is it, a center?

FB: Parish Center.

VB: Parish Center would be convent up here. He used to want to build on it, you know. They bought this land, a big piece of land up there. So he told me, "You be in charge." The land -- wide open, is growing weeds. Apple trees, peach trees, and stuff like that. He said, "You're in charge of taking care of it." And I tell you, that was work and work. Finally one day I said-- He had a sister in Provo. He used to see his sister in Provo.

VB: I said-- At that time he wasn't monsignor yet. I think he was a priest here. "Father," I said, "when you go to Provo, why don't you try to see if we'd be able to get one of those farmer's tractor, one of the big ones. Then I'd be able to cut the weeds, you know. Just with a pick and shovel, it's too much for me." And he said, "What do you think you are, a farmer?" And that's all he thought.

WM: Speaking of him marrying your son, what were-- I've been to Greek weddings. They are great big week-long celebrations. What are Italian weddings like? Do you celebrate like that for a long time?

FB: No. I don't know if they did in Italy. Our family never did. We'd just have a regular--give a reception, you know. Get married in church and have a reception. But he converted his wife, too. And I think Monsignor Dowling was the one that baptized her into the--baptized Sue--because he married them.

VB: But he was all business.

WM: No, he wasn't. Because--I've told it before--but my first baby died; she only lived a few minutes or so. And I just about didn't. When I came to enough to know what was happening, there was Monsignor Dowling sitting at the side of my bed waiting to talk to me. So he wasn't all business.

VB: Oh, no.

FB: Oh, boy! You are-- I thought he was when my mother was dying. I'll never forget him. I pray for him every night.

VB: When he first came down here, we had Price to be right on the carnivals and everything. Some people bought the stuff-- some donated and some bought the stuff and it was taken down in the basement here. And we used to go down and bring a box full of stuff, and he'd follow us down there. Up and down, up and down the steps. And I knew it was quite a few steps, because I built them. And one day he told me, he said, "You know why I'm like that?" He said, "My dad had a store in Ogden."

VB: He gave credit and gave credit, and he went broke.

FB: He said he didn't trust people.

WM: My dad did, too. Mother would scold him: "You shouldn't give so much credit." Well.... You know. They never paid him back.

VB: Well, that's what he used to say all the time.

FB: That's what he said, you know.

VB: "You've got to watch," he said.

FB: He said he had to go work-- He had to go and work on the railroad then to make a living and pay the debts he had, you know. I don't blame him there, you know.

VB: But when we got that convent up there, the sisters used to go home in the summertime. We had four sisters. And he told me, he said, "From now on, until the sisters come back, when you come out of the mine, I want you to go to the convent and look and see that everything is in shape." And I said, "Well, even in the bedrooms?" "Yes," he said, "all the rooms you've got to go to." So that's what I used to do. Come from Castle Gate, went over there, looked in all those rooms. I went one night. It was at night, you know. And I could hear a lot of noise. I looked around, I couldn't find nothing. Pretty soon I went to where they used to have the bedrooms used by the kids. And the water was running, and it was making a helluva noise, you know. I figured I better try clean everything up. But I couldn't close it. I didn't know what to do. It was full speed. So I ran down over here, and he was sitting over here in the kitchen. We had another little priest over here then, (Cornelius E.) Reardon. And I told him about it. And he said, "Well, go see Pete ____." I said, "Pete ____'s not a plumber; he's an electrician." He said, "You go see Pete ____." That's when he got kinda--
YOU GO SEE PETE ____!

Well, Pete ____ was bowling down at the bowling alley. So his wife told me, "When he comes home, I'll tell him."

Well, in the meantime, I got on my truck and said, I'm going to go back up and see what's going to happen on that. I went up there, and I say, now, I'll either break it or fix it. I never had no tools of any kind. I just had a big old wrench for the tires on the truck. So I hit the pipe, and the water stopped. I went back down here, and I told him about it. And he looked at me, and he said, "You know I feel like throwing you out of this window?" [Laughter] But I said, maybe he's got to call somebody, you know, to fix it. Why, it's fixed, you know. In fact, I was doing it 13-1/2 years, inside and out, took care of outside and inside. And that's a job. That place up there, it's a big place. And it had a great big boiler, coal-burning boiler, and they couldn't keep it warm. Because those guys when they built the thing there, they didn't put a cold-air thermostat right through the house. And so if you don't have any cold air returning to the rooms, you don't get no heat.

VB: And the sisters used to call me all the time. They'd say, "We're freezing to death!" What could I do? I didn't know nothing. I'd go over there and keep putting coal in that. Finally, about three years after we were here, they went to gas. And I still didn't know what the hell the score was. And the guy that put in the furnace, the gas furnace, he called me. He said, "Come here. I want to show you something." He showed me. He said, "Tell me where the coal returns." I said, "I've never seen any. I didn't _____. I don't know." _____ no coal returned, see. He said, "Sure there's going to be no heat. Haven't got anything to push the heat up!" So he told me, "You tell the sisters to keep all the doors open all the time so the heat can go around everywhere."

WM: Well, I've got to get to Mrs. Salice's.

VB: Okay.

WM: We've talked longer than I expected to. But, it was so interesting, I just enjoyed it so much. So thank you very much.

[End of Interview]

