

**Tius Tutty,  
Codfish and Handpick Mining**





I'm 93. I was born the 5th of August, 1880. A mile from Louisbourg. Lorraine. They call it Lorraine Road, you know. That's between Lorraine and Louisbourg.

My father fished. That was it. Fish and, well, catch rabbits in the winter, whatever you could in the fall. Tough goin sometimes. Yes, I can remember right back to 3 years old. Old fashioned woodstove, an old Waterloo--big oven on it, you know, low and a neck coming up from the stove and a big round oven on top. Most all softwood there, wasn't very much hardwood.

I'd say I'd be about 10 years old the first time I went fishing. I went with two old men. And they made a little hardwood board, about that wide, you know? And a little like a shingling axe. And every fish I'd catch I'd have to cut a piece off of the tail. Well they took them and cleaned them and salted them and dried then and sent them to Halifax, and in the fall when the returns come back I had \$12.39 when we settled. For my summer's work. Pretty good, wasn't it? And I used to be so terrible seasick. Oh, my. But, no, I wouldn't quit. It was all right when there was a good breeze on, but when it was calm, the heavy roll--especially off Louisbourg there.

We moved to Louisbourg after my father was drowned. Ten years old I was fishing. Codfish, haddock, stuff like that. With a hook and line--they never used a jig like they do today. They had some bait on the hooks but with a jig they don't use no bait. We used squid and different things, you'd jig the squid. Get them right in the harbour. Queer little thing like a lead jig with little hooks allaround it. And they'd grab that, you know, They don't bite it. Just grab it. Those suckers they have on. Sometimes would get two of them at a time with that. Cut them up in small pieces. Use them for bait. Use herring--fresh herring for bait. With nets for herring, It was in the fall generally when you'd get the squid; Oh, coming on the fall. You'd generally use fresh herring for bait in through the summer. Just a line with two hooks--one part would be a little shorter than the other and there'd be two hooks on it, see? About a foot long from the mainline. Handline. Hooks were just called codhooks. You'd put your line over the side and just hold it. You'd let your line down till you'd touch the bottom; then you'd pull it up a piece--say about half a fathom or around there. Sometimes you'd move it. Sometimes it wouldn't be down long enough the fish 'd grab it. Oh sometimes you'd get some pretty big ones.

At that time there was lots of fish. Not like today. We'd get boats coming in --even when I was fishing with those two old fellows--you'd be loaded down with fish. But it was nothing for then, you know, no price. The value was nothin, ha ha. And they didn't sell fresh. They dried then. Clean then ashore. Had what they'd call a stage, you know? A building. Come out on the wharf. Clean then there and all the gurry'd go in the harbour. And split them. Take the bone out. Then salt them. Lay them head and tail in the barrel--big molasses punchions. You had a little scoop and you'd fill that and shake the salt over the fish. It would make its own pickle then after a while. Then they'd take it and they'd wash it out, see? Generally water right out of the harbour. And then they'd dry them. They didn't press them, The only thing they done when they'd make then up, at night, they used to use what they called friggets. Pile them up. One on top of the other.

Sometimes they used to put a piece of canvas over then and sometimes they didn't. If it cone to rain or anything like that. And when the be out they'd spread them all out on those flakes, you know, keep them off of the ground--flakes made of little poles, out of the woods. They'd lay it flesh up, but then if the sun was too hot they'd turn then over, back up. When the sun was just right they left them face up. A good sunny day, nice little breeze, you know. Not 'too hot, no. You'll have to turn them over, you'll burn the fish. Turn them brown, you know. If it look like rain you'd gather them up--friggets. That's what the old fellows used to call it anyway. A frigget of fish--when they'd have so many piled up, see? They went by the quintal, so many pounds to a quintal.

Then I went to sea. I was 11 years old. On an old schooner. I was cook. Went from Louisbourg to Halifax to Yarmouth to Bridgewater, Liverpool--carrying coal, carrying coal. Then when I was 14 I went into the mines. My mother and all the rest of the family they'd after moved to the coal, mine --so I came to the coal mine. At Bridgeport. Gone and forgotten long ago. Between Glace Bay and Dominion. I worked four years there and I worked six months up in Dominion.

The mine was down then, she was only what they called the narrow works, only worked in the winter, see? And the rest of the mine it'd be down. Well, the first job I did was tend the rapper. Instead of using wires and signal wires like they use today in the mine, used to use a thing with a hammer. You

pull on this and there was a plate and this thing would go down on the plate and give the raps. So many raps for a smash or whatever was on. Say there was a smash on, boxes off of the road--then if the-mine knocked off they'd give you 6 raps from the pit bottom, bottom of the shaft --and you'd give 6 raps to the next fellow, and he'd give it--messages. There was no telephone then. And then I went driving after that, that's a horse and boxes about as long as from here to the wall.

Then I left there and went to Dominion, worked up there --6 months or 8 months --and I left there and I come down to Caledonia Mine. And that's where I finished up at. A long time. Around 50 years, I guess. And that's the first mine there was ever a telephone put in. I was tending what they call the landing, putting on the full boxes and taking off the empty ones, off of the main haulage, see? And when that was done I shipped then the east side of Caledonia, that was going under the ocean --and there was a telephone on that landing. They didn't think a telephone would work underground, you know.

But it did. Most of the time, you know, I worked at the coal face, mining coal. We done handpick work and we done machine work. You just mine the coal with the handpick and load it with the pan shovel. You had to dig her down. You have her up pretty near as high as them curtains there. You'd lay on your side, like this, put a little soft coal, minings, under your shoulder--and you'd get in so far.

Course when you'd get it opening out you'd be in on your knees. Then you'd get in so far you'd have to get down on your side, see? You're underneath the wall of coal. Picking away, picking away. You didn't brace that wall. Not with the handpicks. But with the machine they did. Put what they call a sprag. You'd go in round about five feet I guess, just as far as you could reach in. Then you'd back out, bore and shoot --blow it all up. That was in rooms.

In pillars you had to sprag your coal. If you are mining out what they call pillar work, well there's a room out on both sides of you. This is a pillar, You'd have to sprag that when you'd be in under that. In case there'd be any loose coal on the face would fall. Sprag was made of wood. You mined on a bench you know--left a bench of coal about so high. You mined no that. You'd dig a hole in that and put your sprag in and a wedge in over it, see?

You had a handpick and pan shovel an auger for boring your hole shooting it--had a little thing called a breast auger. You put that up to sake a little hole first. Then you'd take a bar they called the stand bar --you'd drive that in the hole. Then you had a thread bar--and you put your augers onto that. Then you turn it. You'd bore it and then you'd fill it up with powder, shoot it. Shoot it your self. You didn't have to call a shotfire--not then, when they had the handpick tike that. Shooting your own coal, yeah. You had all loose powder then, see? Ad you had a stick about that long and it had like a piece of pipe on it --call that a castepowder was in a can. You take it up on your arm like that and pour the powder in there, Put it in, you know, shoot it in--put it in with your stenner they called it, piece of copper on the end of it--you'd push it back and then you'd stem it up --then you'd put what they called a needle. There was copper on the end of the needle, copper so that it wouldn't make a spark--and you'd run that in underneath, under your powder. When you had it all stemmed up you pulled the needle out and at that time you used what they called squibbs--powder done up in paper, you know? You'd open up the end of it and tear a little piece off and you'd stick that in the hole. It would go right in the hole where you pulled the needle out. And you'd light it--with your lamp. Then you'd take off. You'd duck

down. There was always an opening you could run to, because they had places for air to travel, you know? You'd sing out, "Fire!"

There'd be only two men in the place anyhow. Only two men working together. You had a pair in another room and another pair in another room and on like that. You wait a few moments after that goes off in case there'd be some coal loose that'd fall and then after the smoke would drive out you'd go up and start loading your coal. Just shovel it, load it up, with a pan shovel. Any coal hanging, you take her down and load her in boxes. A driver--fellow with a horse--would haul the coal. Bring in an empty and he'd take the full one out. They'd go to the pit bottom, rope haulage. They'd put them on the haulage there. They call it a grab. Then it was hoist to the surface.

I drove for a while. There was a stable in the mine, and a stableman. Used to send the hay down, all that. Stableman used to clan them and look after them and harness them. All you had to do was go in and take them out, down to the landing or wherever you worked. They had shafts with a kind of bow on it, and a queer like a shackle on the end. Then a bolt like an eyebolt is fit on the box--end you'd put that shackle over that and you'd put a bolt down through it. When he didn't have a box on the driver held the shafts up and drove his horse along, cause they'd be dragging. You generally stood in the box, you know, when you were driving. That's the empty box. And when you were coming back to the landing you were on the front of the box--drive the horse. They used to load the manure and shift it to the surface. they had a place outside of the bankhead, they called it, they used to dump it over there. Oh, Lord, quite a lot. Oh, yes. And different ones died down there. Got killed, too. There was horses got killed. Runaway boxes.

Now there was a driver he wasn't killed but he got hurt pretty bad--he never got over it. He was going up what they call a headway. And a fellow that was working in this headway--had a box and had no sprag, only had something under the wheels. And when they started chucking the coal in, before they got about half-full she took off. The driver was going up this headway and the box come down and hit the horse. Killed the horse and broke the driver, pretty bad. He was in the box.



Gordon MacGregor

If you see the seam. The actual seam it runs in reeds although it's pressed together-- well the art of handpick mining if you or I went down right now we'd hammer our arms off and we'd perhaps get a scuttle full of coal. An old handpick miner he'd tap it like that He'd lie on his side He'd have to lie under a cut of coal. He'd dig a trench in the bottom of the seam. There could be perhaps seven feet above him And he'd work his way in until all you could see sticking out from under the mining as they called it was his heels Solid coal was above him He was taking a chance of being crushed Out the good miners would timber themselves --put timber up. And they'd just pick away.

When the Gardiner Mine out here flooded I was tunnel director we were driving a tunnel blasting out of solid one. They sent me up to open the only slope that had worked before 1870. We went in the old French Slope the old East Slope. It was all handpick mining. And as true as I'm here you see that wall there it was just as straight and just as smooth as that. They took pride in their work those handpick men. We had a little lamp something like a teapot hooked in your cap. A little spout on it. And a wick in it, seal oil, yes, I had my light go out in the mine. Different times.

Dark? Well you couldn't be any darker. You'd just try to get a light. With the old oil lamp they carried matches, and the next thing they got was the closed light--it had a plug and a kind of a lip come out on both sides of it and a plug in it. That's the way it was locked. And if you got in the dark with that you'd have to walk as far as from here up to darn near where my son is living up there, to the landing to get a light. And you'd be going along like this, and rubbing your foot against the rail--unless the driver come in. Well then you'd send your lamps out with with the driver. If you just made a move with them, they'd go out. They were no good. But the last light they got, there was no trouble to light that -- there'd be something around like your battery. But the old oil lamp, yes, that was open flame.

But there never was an explosion caused through that. Out there was an explosion in Caledonia, about four years before I started. It was 8 men killed. A pumpsman was looking after the water--water pumps to pump it into a sump and then a big pump would pump it to the surface--- and the pump was froze and he lit some waste and it was burning and it seems that the smoke from it got back into a dead end, blind end --and of course when it was reported that there was trouble down below to the manager --his name was Johnson--he went down and instead of going around where the pump was he opened a slide, a little trap slide in the stoppings and stuck his open light in and when he did she went up. 8 men killed. They found his lamp--used to carry it with their finger through the hook--and they found the lamp, his finger still in the hook.

Oh, I've had a lot of accidents. There's no questions about it. If there was some thing to get I got it. I remember I wasn't feeling too good, my eyes bothered me. lost the sight of my eye since, in the coal mine, so I went to Sydney to work in the fire station for the coal company there, at the piers. You may remember when the building was there, just between the steel plant and the piers. I was there about 6 years -I guess. All nightshift, all backshift too.

I used to have to put the water a board the ships, you know, when they'd come in. The pipes run out on the pier for water. And you hook on your hose and put it aboard the ship, fill up her tank. So this time I went out--it was New Year's Eve--I forget the name of

the boat now, coal company boat--put the hose aboard of her, give her water. So I said, When you're through, pull the hose ashore will you? So they pulled the boat off from the wharf. And let the hose drop overboard, see? And where the slack used to come down from the chutes, it froze icicles on it. And I got a hold and was pulling about like that and I lost my balance and over I goes overboard. And there was ice all around, and those piers are about 40 feet high--and look that was low tide and twice that high up I couldn't see nothing else but the ice.

There was weights that come down from the chutes at the pier. And I tried with my gloves on but I couldn't stick. So took my glove off--bit it off--and I put my hand on the weight. And I did the same with the other one. Steel weights. My two hands. I'll bet you I was there all of a half hour or more, sticking to the steel weights. I sung out a hundred tines. Fellow by the name of Billy MacPhee, Second Engineer, happened to cone out of the engine room and he heard me. The boat was off oh quite a distance--so they started the winches up and pulled her in and put the gangplank out and cone ashore and one fellow come down --he slid down on a wire rope--he put the rope under my arms and they pulled me up.

Of course my fingers were sore after, stuck right on the frost, kind of burned me, They give me about that much rum. And they said Okay you little bugger take it off for home. I lived only a short ways away. I started up the hill but my legs got stiff--kind of froze.

I'll tell you how I lost the sight of my eye, We were boring a hole, working at the coal face then--and the drill wasn't working. This was a power drill and there's a hole through those drills for blowing air in there for to blow the dust, the borings out--and it was sticking. It was only a brand new drill and the hole wasn't open enough to blow the air. We used to have to pull it back like that for to clear it. And a piece of stuff from the drill--whether it was a piece of shell off the drill or whether it was a piece of cement--hit me in the eye. And the shotfire was waiting for us to finish up to shoot the coal--at that time we had shotfires--the shotfire had to help my buddy finish boring and shoot the coal down, finish the box. I had to go and lay down. My eye was painin' boy like blazes. Well then after I got up and washed it seemed to ease up and it didn't bother me too much, Boy I got up the next morning it pained terrible.

So my wife was living then--and it was a great remedy in them days to keep down inflammation to put cold tea leaves. You night have heard tell of it. Put the tea leaves on the eye and that kind of keep the pain down. It got a little better so I went to Dr. MacLennan in Sydney. He couldn't find nothing but the sight was split--whatever was in there penetrated right through, split the sight.

And I had this hand smashed. I was working at the coal face alone that day; my buddy wasn't out so I was alone--so the manager came in, said the face wasn't very good, pretty shaky. I said the Overman told me the place was all right. He said, Your o pinion's as good as the overman's. He said, How many boxes you got? And I said, Two. He said, There's a pair of men going to sweep the colliery--I'll give you a shift with your two boxes, go up and sweep. You can bugger around after that. Pretty good fellow. So anyhow, you laid the road out--and I had this hand on the rail like that, the gauge--you know what a gauge is on a railroad, an arm goes across like that. And I was pushing the rail out on this side and down come a timber loose in the way. I said to one of the fellows, This timber's loose, come knock it out. He knocked the timber out. And the roof

just looked as good as that. And I had my hand on the rail. And down come this little pot--they call it a pot--it's thick in the middle and thin on the edge--right through my hand. That's how I got that.

But I was very fortunate in a way. Cause I had that skull fracture. A fall of coal. I don't know yet how I got the skull fracture. We were trying to get a crosscut for a measuring for the opening, you know? There were two pair of us in this pillar. So I said, You fellow - go and have a bite to eat, have a lunch, and I'll make the box. And I was loading away and walked around the box to the other side, and a big piece of the roof come down. That's all I remember. And when they took me to the surface the doctor claimed that I couldn't live to get to the hospital. I was bleeding that much. St. Joseph was just built a short time, Old Dr. MacKean was there at the time. And the nurses was trying to get my clothes off--a nurse told me this after--he said, Take your time, you'll soon be able to get the clothes off easily. Never thought I'd recover. They had a horse ambulance at the time, no car. And I lost quite a lot of blood. And there was a fellow used to be a kind of a watchman around the colliery there --Angus MacAulay--and he went up in the ambulance with this man. And every time he'd see me say, My God I can't believe it's you. got over it. I was pretty near 6 months in the hospital. The doctor told my wife, 'Neil if he does work it will be a very very light job. Well I went back to the coal face again. Yes, sir, that's as true as I'm sitting in this chair. And the manager said to me, Look I don't think I should let you go. I said, Look, Mr. MacDonald, I got to make a living and there's no other place to go. I said, I'm not a coward. If I die down there well I'll die down there.

And then shortly after, before I was pensioned off, I got my knee ripped open. I was on ventilation work that time--putting up what's called a brattish, to carry the air to the face where the men are working. I went to pull this piece of coal down and a fellow got to picking and pulled this same piece of coal --down on my knee--boy right to the bone. And I guess no more than about 6 months after that, didn't I get my ankle broken? Still, I'm going to try to make the hundred.

I took care of myself when I was young. I worked hard. But I never abused myself through drink or anything. I took a little you know. Always be home and get in bed. But, yes, a lot of accidents. Maybe I should have kept fishing. I don't know now how I'm living. I really don't.