

Louis Berry Birurakis

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Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

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Louis “Lou” Berry Birurakis

Louis “Lou” Berry Birurakis (b. March 22, 1926) is a native of Liberty, West Virginia in Scotts Run. His parents were Greek immigrants from Crete. His father was a coal miner who was blackballed for his participation in the union and after he was fired, started a business in Scotts Run. Birurakis was a football player at WVU and is an amateur historian and a writer. In the interview, he speaks about his family, growing up in Scotts Run, and his experience on the WVU football team. He also tells a story about his mother’s encounter with Eleanor Roosevelt when she visited Scotts Run.

LB: Louis Birurakis

EH: Emily Hilliard

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EH: So, why don't you tell me your name and when you were born and where you're from.

LB: My name is Louis Berry Birurakis. I was born March 22, 1926 in a little coal camp in Scott's Run that was called Liberty. And it was Liberty because of Liberty fuel company came to that area in 1917 and put in a mine and had some houses for the miners so the area was referred to as Liberty. And there was a sign at the beginning of Liberty indicating such and anyway... I was born in 1926 and grew up in Liberty.

EH: Why don't you tell me about your parents.

LB: My parents came from the island of Crete which is in the Mediterranean and part of Greece...

1:18

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00:00

...in 1920 my dad was informed that they were needing miners in West Virginia and I think at the time it was in the Wheeling area because when he first came over in 1920 after being told that they needed miners, he ended up after landing at Ellis Island, he ended up in Wheeling, West Virginia. And he worked at the mine for 3 years. The Richland Coal Company. And after 3 years, for some reason, the Richland Coal Company closed up and laid everybody off because they didn't have a contract for coal anymore. And my dad was corresponding... during that time my dad was corresponding with some coal miners who had come to Liberty, who had come from Crete also and my corresponding with them, when they found out that my dad was laid off in Wheeling, they informed him that coal miners were needed in Scott's Run. Liberty was one of the mines needing coal miners. So he decided to come to Liberty after getting married, my wife... my mother came over in 1923. My dad had come over in 1920 and worked 3 years and saved some money, and then he asked— he wanted to get married so he wrote to his parents and asked them to find him a wife—basically because he wanted to marry someone who spoke the same language that he spoke. So his parents found a girl that wanted to come... that wanted to get married, but she wanted him to go back to Greece, but he didn't want to do that. So they found another girl who turned out to be my mother. And that's why I'm here. (laughs) And after leaving Wheeling they came to Wheeling—they had one son, my older brother George was born in Wheeling. But after coming to Liberty, I was born in 1926. I think they came to Liberty in 1925. I'm not sure about the exact date, but I was born in '26. And I grew up in Liberty, we had a garden, we had a piece of ground and we had gardens, we had trees—plum trees, apple trees, pear tree, and we had a big garden and we... I think my dad... well, when my mother came over, she came over with my father's sister and after she came over, she also married so my parents and my in-laws were gonna—they wanted to build a house in Liberty, so they bought a piece of ground and they, they lived in a house next door to where I grew up because our house wasn't built yet. Right after they moved to Liberty, my dad and his brother-in-law decided to build a house so they bought a piece of ground that had not been sold right next door to the house they lived in.

04:05

And about that time is when the coal, the crisis between union and non-union miners took place. And I have... I ran across a story during that period where... Frank Christopher who was the superintendent of

the Liberty mine, told the reporter that he had just fired 10 miners not because they wouldn't work but because they were pro-union. And like I said, during that period it was a big, big goings on about union and non-union and when Christopher fired the 10 he also black-balled those 10. In other words, he would write to the coal companies and tell them not to hire these people because they're troublemakers and they were kind of blackballed. So when a coal miner would go to apply for a job, and if they were on that blacklist, blackball list, they wouldn't get hired. And I think my parents, my father and his brother-in-law, were 2 of the 10 that were fired. And as a result, they were blackballed and my father's brother-in-law, knowing he couldn't get another job in the mine, decided to go back to Greece, and he did. He took his... he had a daughter... he took his daughter and wife and went back to Greece, but my parents, my father decided to stay in Scott's Run, and I think basically he wanted to stay in Scott's Run because of WVU. Because he always stressed to the kids to get an education—not to be a coal miner because it was dangerous work, hard work. So he stressed to all of us to get an education so you don't... basically so you don't have to go in the coal mine. And as a result of it by staying in Liberty, we all eventually did go to WVU and graduated. The 5 of us. There was 4 boys and 1 girl. And we all went to WVU and became Mountaineers. (laughs) Anyway...

06:54

EH: And you played football!

LB: Yes, I became a Mountaineer in 1944 during the war, during the second World War, some of the regular players were drafted. The coach was drafted. So Coach Rogers who had been assistant coach, took over the job as head coach. And while he was coaching I was going to... after graduating from University High, which didn't have football, I enrolled at WVU like my dad had tried to tell us to do, go to school... Anyway, I enrolled in WVU that summer and during that summer term Coach Rogers being short of potential players, asked that other people who weren't on the team to try out to see if they could make the team. And a Friend of mine and I basically, my friend wanted to try out so he asked me to go with him—he didn't want to go by himself. So I was fairly...sports-minded. I was sports-minded—baseball, football, running, doing a lot of running—I decided to try out also. So he and I went to the coach's office at the old stadium, which was just above Beechurst Avenue—it's not there anymore. And he asked the coach about trying out—he told him he had played for Fairmont High School, and the coach said definitely, go down and get your uniform and go out on the field. And he said, well can my friend go out, referring to me, and the coach assuming that I had played high school ball too maybe, I don't know, but he said yeah, take him down too. So we went down and went to the stadium, went down and got checked out, shoulder pads, knee pads, all the equipment, head gear, and he helped me get the gear on because I didn't know how to put the pads on and everything. And we went out and basically it was conditioning, so there was a lot of running and pull-ups and jump-ups and getting in shape. And I was in good shape because I had been doing a lot of running at home and playing football with a tin can—Carnation can—that was our football.

EH: (laughs) Was it full of...

LB: Because we didn't have a real football. (laughs)

EH: Was it full of milk?

LB: It was... oh no, no... it was empty. It was empty. It had 2 little holes on top where when you poured in your coffee, anyway... but it made a good football. Sometimes we would wrap it with black tape because there was a lot of black tape in Scott's Run—the coal mines had use of tape connecting electricity, electrical wires and everything. So there was a lot of black tape in Scott's Run, and we would wrap the can with tape so it wouldn't hurt as much if you got hit in the head with it. But that was our football and you could pass it, you could lateral, you just couldn't kick it very well. So anyway, after getting on the

field and running and running and throwing blocks and tackles, the coach kind of noticed that my running was good because when we ran 100-yard dash, I was usually first, number 1 for the lineman. When he would line up the linemen and we'd take off, I'd usually be the first one to cross the 100-yard line. Anyway... and so after... when we were getting ready to play Pitt, our first game, a team was selected for the offense— and I have the article that was in the paper— and the team was picked for defense. And I was selected to play left tackle on a defensive team. So after running a few plays, the coach would call the plays. He would get in the huddle and call the plays. And eventually they tried to run off my position. So when the ball was snapped, I got through the line and I tackled the ball carrier as soon as he got the ball from the quarterback, and put him down behind the line of scrimmage. And the coach was kinda upset because he thought they should be able to handle me and make an opening and come through. But I went through the line and got him behind the line of scrimmage, and he yelled out, "There's a guy never played any football and you guys can't block 'em? Block him?" Because those—the offensive line had played high school ball and had got scholarships, so he thought they should handle me. Well, he got in the huddle, and I kind of assumed that they might try again, so they did and I did the same thing— I got through the line, got the ball carrier behind the line of scrimmage, and the coach was upset and he had a baseball hat on. He took his hat off and threw it on the ground and said a couple... cuss words (laughs) which he shouldn't have said, but anyway... he said "there's a guy never played any football and you guys can't block him?" And he said "Bi-u-rakis, he says, if you play like that you will never miss a game."

13:13

So I eventually got a scholarship 'cause I started to pay for my tuition and other ball carriers said, why are you doing that, you're on the team! You shouldn't have to." So he went to the coach and talked to him, and the coach realizing that I hadn't had a scholarship, pulled me aside and signed me up and he said, "You do have a scholarship." And I moved into the men's dorm eventually—not right away, but eventually. And so I had a scholarship even though I hadn't played any high school ball. And that was my beginning. It turned out we had a pretty good season, we won 5 and lost 3 and tied 1. And one of the games was with Penn State at Penn State, and we beat 'em 28-27 because both teams scored 4 touchdowns but they missed one of their extra points and we got all 4 of our extra points, so we beat 'em 28-27. And anyway, then I went to service in '45 and I served in the US Army. The required, requirement... required time to serve and I came back and after I came back I was invited to go to camp again and I made the team. I continued my scholarship and I played in '48, '49, and '50. In '48 we had a successful season and we ended up in the Sun Bowl in El Paso, Texas. And we beat El Paso, we beat the University of Texas-El Paso 21-12, I think it was, anyway. And then we played, after the Sun Bowl, we agreed to play that school 2 more years, once in Morgantown, and once in Texas. And they came up in '49 and we played 'em in '50 in Texas and that's when a big snow hit— the 3-foot snowfall that covered West Virginia. And we were supposed to fly back and we couldn't 'cause the Pittsburgh airport was covered with snow. So we had to stay in El Paso one more day and then we came home by flying over West Virginia and landing in Washington, D.C. and then coming home on a train, which brought us from Washington to Grafton and eventually to Morgantown. And we got off at Morgantown and went home. And I graduated in '51. In '50 I was in the Education Department in 1950 as my school... teacher's... teacher's training course I taught at University High and my job at University High was coaching the wrestling team. And in 1950, the wrestling team when we went to the tournament at the end of the season, we went to Weston, spent one night, and wrestled 2 evenings and then came home and during that period 3 of the wrestlers from University High won state championships, so we came home with 3 champions, which was great. Anyway...

EH: I'm gonna close this door 'cause they're a little loud. I don't know if that helped.

17:12

LB: Okay. And well, after coming home from Weston, the principal at University High, Mr. Colebank (sp?) kind of congratulated me and the team for the 3 championships and he recommended that I sign up to teach in Mon County. And I think he was thinking about possibly asking for some assistance in coaching and he asked me to sign up. And I did. After I graduated, I went to the Board of Education, I put my application in and asked for an appointment, and for some reason, I don't know why but I think it was because of my name, Birurakis, I was turned down, because when I went to the Board office and the assistant superintendent or whoever it was that met me didn't even put a hand out to shake hands. And he invited me in and when I told my story, he kinda I don't know how to describe it, but he kind of stunned me because he came right out and said, "You will never teach in this county." And that flabbergasted me because I couldn't understand why he would make a remark like that. But anyway, he kinda emphasized that I would never work in this county and I couldn't figure out why but I kinda think it was because of my name because when I graduated from Osage Junior High, I was using the name Berry, B-E-R-R-Y and I used Berry from the 1st grade all the way through high school years. During my senior year of high school, the family decided to change the last name, Berry, back to something similar to the original name, Vidurakis (sp?), so we came up with Birurakis. So when I graduated from Junior High, I was a Berry, and when I graduated from University High, I was Birurakis. And I kinda think maybe that's what made the decision of "you'll never coach," or teach in this county.

EH: Because you were Greek?

LB: Yeah. Basically. I think that's what it was. But I did eventually—since I couldn't get a job, I had an opportunity to work as an ironworker. A union ironworker. So I did follow-up being an ironworker and being an ironworker, I did a lot of construction work, like building the new coliseum, the new stadium, the PRT, all the bridges that cross the river in this county, and other bridges in other counties. I did a lot of construction work. But while doing construction work at a power house at Albright (sp?) I got a letter from a fellow Mountaineer who was coaching at Point Pleasant and he said they were hiring a new coach at Point Pleasant, and he wanted me to put my application in and he recommended that I possibly change my name back to Berry because he said in Point Pleasant there were no Greeks and no Italians and no... whatever. (laughs) But I wouldn't do it. I didn't send the application in because I didn't think I'd stand a chance of getting a job anyway. Then later they did hire a coach who was not... he was not qualified actually. He got an emergency teacher's certificate to teach in West Virginia. And they hired him. And but eventually when they tried to get a coach for Hannan High School, no one else had applied. So he suggested that I put my application in for Hannan High School. And I did and even though it was time for school to start, I put my application in and told them I was available and they hired me at Hannan High School. So I eventually went to Hannan High School and I taught there 4 years and coached. But because of the income, I couldn't stay there. I had to leave and go back to construction work. I had saved some money doing construction work—I had saved a lot of money, actually. And I had used my savings, my car was worn out from traveling to Hannan High School 4 years, and I didn't have money to buy a new car so I decided to go back—I had an opportunity to go back to construction work and I took advantage and went to the... but I went back to construction work. And...well...

EH: (laughs)

LB: I did a lot of traveling with construction because I had to go where the work was. I went to Niagara Falls, I worked on a big projects up there— 13-unit powerhouse. I went to St. Mary's, West Virginia, there was a powerhouse there that I did construction work on, and I went to Kittanning, Pennsylvania— there was a powerhouse there that I worked on and that's where, when my 3rd child was born, in Kittanning. And away after working a couple years, jumping around to different places, we decided to move back to Morgantown, so we hopefully, we did find a house and 'cause I thought the university would be doing some construction work, which they did. They've done a lot of construction work here in

Morgantown, so I was able to make a good living and eventually have 3 more kids. So we had 6 kids altogether, 3 boys and 3 girls.

24:27

And I'm 92 and I'll be 93 in March, March 22. And... I don't know what else.

EH: So going back to your dad, what did he do when he got fired from the coal mine?

LB: My dad?

EH: Yeah.

LB: Oh, okay. When he got fired, they had contracted a house to be built right next to where they were living so they decided to build a 2-story building and the downstairs of the building would be a business. It was one big room with a kitchen and upstairs is where the 2, which was gonna be the duplex, 2 rooms on the right would be for the Birurakis' and the 2 rooms on the left would be for my dad's brother-in-law and sister would live. But after the decision was to go back to Greece, then my dad had bought the other half and we had the whole house to grow up in. And my dad started a little business because there were a lot of Greeks in Liberty, and they would come in to play cards and read the paper and talk about old country and different Greek-related holidays. And like I said there were a lot of Greeks in Liberty. And so they, we lived on the top, on the 2nd floor and we didn't have indoor plumbing, we had 2 stall outhouse about 30 yards from the house, in the backyard. Actually there was 2 stalls because originally it was built for a duplex, but my father's sister and brother-in-law went back to Greece with their daughter, so we had advantage of 2 stall outhouses, which we had until I went to service. When I went to service in '45, I noticed in the wintertime that behind our house, there was a crevice in the ground and when it snowed, the snow would come down and melt and anytime there was a foot of snow or 18 inches of snow, there would be no snow in that little crevice. So I got to thinking that there must be an opening in the mine, in that... and that's why it's a crevice when it's settled. So when I went to service, I told my younger brother, I told him to turn the water on, put it into that crevice, and leave it run all night and see what would happen. So they did and in the morning they went up and it was dry! The water was running but it was disappearing. So I told him to run the sewer line from the house over to that crevice and built a little bathhouse, outhouse... no, wouldn't be an outhouse... a bathroom onto the outside of the... to the outside of the house, so they built a little room and put a commode in and a shower stall, and run that sewer into that crevice and it was used, and I think it still could be used if it had to. It never did fill up, whether you'd flush the commode or take a shower and the water would go into the pipe and disappear.

28:32

So we had one of the first out... inside bathrooms in Liberty. (laughs) And eventually other people did the same thing because the mine, the Berry mine which had mined coal had mined coal from under the area we lived in. So if a person would dig a hole deep enough and go through the roof of the mine, they would have a big storage area for water.

EH: So you were basically using the old mine as a septic tank? (laughs)

LB: Yeah! That's what it was. And it worked! And I think it would still work.

EH: Wow.

LB: But the house is gone now—it was demolished about a year ago because it was caving in. Nobody was living in it. My brother was living in it for a while but it got to the point where it wasn't safe to live in. So my son who had... I bought the house and I gave it to my youngest son and he demolished it because it was caving in and it was kind of leaning towards the road, Route 7. And if it fell, it would fall right into the road and cause a problem. So he had access to a machine that he had a person go up there and knock the walls down and it's still piled up. He's taking it down a little bit at a time. And I'm hoping to build a building there—same design as the building that was there—and hopefully put my collection, a museum in that room, cause I have a lot of stuff in my house right now. And it would make a good little sub-museum. Museum #2 or 3, anyway.

EH: That'd be great.

LB: Because Scott's Run does have a history and it needs to be remembered. And we have a park at Osage that used to be a very good park with—had baseball fields, football, tennis, but it's devastated with water now, so we need to re-do it and put a bigger pipe in, take care of the water, in memory of the coal miners that died at Osage in 194... hmmm... I forget the exact date. I should remember it, but during the war it blew up and killed 56 miners. And I'm working towards getting the park re-established in their memory. And we do have some money collected so far and I'm hoping we'll get enough to put that park back together.

EH: So you told me that you sort of had a family encounter with Eleanor Roosevelt? (knocking at door) Come in! (laughs)

Scott's Run Coffee Shop Attendee: Excuse me, I was wondering how long you're gonna be 'cause Louis has to be in Fairmont pretty soon.

EH: Oh, okay, well we can stop now and...

Attendee: About 7 more minutes.

EH: Okay.

Attendee: I'll give you 7 more minutes.

EH: Great.

LB: Thank you.

32:01

Okay.

EH: The Eleanor Roosevelt run-in.

LB: In 1933 when Mrs. Roosevelt went through Scott's Run after hearing about the conditions in Scott's Run from a friend who told her that Scott's Run is in bad condition because of the Depression and she decided to visit the area herself. She was the First Lady, her husband was the President, so she came to Scott's Run in 1933. And when she went up through Liberty, my neighbor who lived across the street told me later, cause I didn't hear it until I heard it from him, he said he and his mother were sitting on the porch on a swing—they had a porch swing—and they saw Mrs. Roosevelt drive up to the house—apparently somebody had told her that my mother was baking bread in an outside oven. So he said they

saw Mrs. Roosevelt go up our steps, stay a few minutes, and then come back down and then go on up through Scott's Run. And like I said, I didn't hear about this. I didn't hear it from my mother because when I wrote the story, I put in my story that my mother gave her a loaf of bread and Mrs. Roosevelt left and went on up. But I doubt it because I don't think they could correspond because Mrs. Roosevelt couldn't speak Greek and my mother couldn't speak English so I think they just shook hands and parted. So that story was told to me by my neighbor Toyo Viola (sp?) who's deceased now, but I have it written down about him telling me the story when... and I have a picture of our house and his house in my little story. But anyway, that's part of history because Mrs. Roosevelt did go up through Scott's Run and eventually we got Arthurdale. And I'm maintaining that Arthurdale and Scott's Run are related because when Scott's Run, which is the father, and Mrs. Roosevelt got together, Arthurdale was born.

EH: Right.

34:25

LB: Cause after she came up through Scott's Run, that was her new husband. 'Cause she kinda had a little falling out with Franklin Roosevelt because he had admitted to an affair that kinda upset the marriage a little bit. So I think she eventually married Scott's Run and then got the offspring was Arthurdale, which is still working as a historical site, very well.

EH: And it was a settlement—a homestead and a settlement school?

LB: Yes. It was a homestead during that period, Roosevelt and Congress come up with a Homestead Act which was to help people get back to work and find them a home place and that's what Arthurdale was just one of 'em. But that was the first one. There were others later, different one in New York, another one in West Virginia someplace—that I think they called the area Roosevelt.

EH: Ah, okay.

LB: Or Eleanor or something.

EH: Uh-huh, oh yeah, there's an Eleanor.

LB: But anyway, there were other settlements made and they were thinking about since African-Americans weren't allowed to go to Arthurdale, they were thinking of putting in a homestead just for African-Americans. And they also were not allowing foreign-born. So my parents wouldn't be allowed to be, to Arthurdale, because foreign-born weren't acceptable either. Whenever they, whenever the people in Reedsville, which is in Arthurdale area, when they met, public meetings, and they wanted to know who are you bringing up here. And when Mrs. Roosevelt said coal miners, they knew a lot of coal miners were black and foreigners, so they said what about the blacks? And Mrs. Roosevelt said yeah, they're coal miners. But the people in Reedsville didn't want 'em because they didn't have any black schools there, and it was segregated back then. So when a vote came up to allow African-Americans, the thumbs went down. Then somebody else at the meeting said, well what about the foreign-born? In other words, they didn't want people talking Italian and Greek in front of 'em and they wouldn't understand what they're saying, so somebody else said, they're worse yet. So they disallowed foreign-born from moving to Arthurdale. Now I understand—I got a dissertation from a student who had gone to university and did a dissertation on Arthurdale. And he stated in there about the people at Reedsville saying no to African-Americans and no to foreign-born. But if a foreign-born had married a non-foreign born, and American, they would be allowed because they would have to be speaking in English because the non-foreign born and the foreign-born would have to settle on a language and they would always settle on English. So they could talk with others also. So I understand that there were some foreign-born moved in, but they had to be married to a

local person, in other words, a foreign-born man would have to marry a girl that was born in the United States.

EH: Right.

LB: ...to be able to move into Arthurdale.

EH: And in Scotts Run, was there a Greek community in one place and an African American community in one place...?

LB: They did. And Liberty was pretty well a Greek community because there were a lot of Greeks there. And there were areas where if a Polish family was there and they needed coal miners, he'd write to Poland and bring other Polish people there. And they'd have a little community of their own. And there was a lot of that going on too, different languages. Russian. But we had a Russian neighbor, an Italian neighbor, Polish... in fact there was a Polish lady who had married a Russian man and they lived, they lived next to our house too.

EH: And what about businesses—was it—did people mostly stay with their ethnic group or were kind of grocery stores—were they, you would see everyone there?

LB: There were 3 grocery stores in Liberty, my dad had one, and there was another Greek family that had one. And it was right where the post office is now in Pursglove. That's where the Kurtakis (sp?) family lived. They had a store there. And I have a story about that situation too because the boy that lived there was in my class, lost his fingers because he found in that store they sold dynamite and they sold—for the coal mines—dynamite and caps and he found the little brass item and didn't know what it was and he held it in his hand and he got a nail 'cause it had a little coating on the outside, on the end of it, so he got a nail and he started picking it and it was a blasting cap for the coal mines, and when it went off it blew these 3 fingers off. And I have a picture of him. Anyway, but... and then there was an Italian store, there was a Polish store, and Greek. And I think there was a Russian, but it wasn't there very long. But there were different ethnic stores in there to cater to their group.

EH: And then—oh what are some of the things you remember your mother making? Some of the foods?

LB: Oh my mother made many things. She kept busy. I wrote a little story about my mother and the name of the story is "Ti Na Coma Tora" (sp?) and what it was—I was sitting in the kitchen by the door and my mother came to the door, opened the door and she was wringing her hands, and she kept saying "ti na coma tora, ti na coma tora," because she was always doing something all the time. She was either cooking, sewing, washing clothes, knitting—she knitted a sweater for all 5 of us, she made dollies, she did—she was always doing something. And "ti na coma tora" is "what can I do now?" because she's always busy. I very seldom saw her sitting down. Even at the table, she would serve us and after everybody left, she might nibble on something, but she was always on the go. And she did a very good job. "Ti na coma tora," I'll never forget that.

EH: So the bread she would have been baking when Eleanor Roosevelt stopped by—what kind of bread would that have been?

LB: Yes, yes—she was baking bread. My dad had hired an Italian immigrant who was a stone mason. And he built us a outdoor oven which was just above the steps, after you go up our steps—the concrete steps on the outside—and go forward maybe 15 yards—there was a big oven made out of brick and she would—my dad would get wood and burn the wood, heat the oven up enough to bake bread and she would mix the dough, and she would always mix Pillsbury, Robin Hood, and A&P flour. Because A&P

flour was cheaper than the Robin Hood and Pillsbury, but it was a little coarser. So she would mix it half and half. Half of the A&P flour and Pillsbury or Robin Hood. She would mix that and that's what she would make her bread. And it was good! And when I'd go to school with homemade bread—I loved the homemade bread, but I also loved store bread—and I would meet with kids who had store bread who loved homemade bread, and we'd switch sandwiches sometimes. (laughs)

EH: (laughs) So was it— it was like a loaf bread she would have made? Not like a flatbread?

LB: No, no, it was big loaves of bread. Pretty good size. But she baked a lot of 'em. She baked a lot of pastries, Greek pastries, koularakia (sp?), finikia (sp?)—different kind of... my children still make some of it. And... but she was always busy. She sewed us blankets made out of coats or any kind of garment that would be heavy—she would sew 'em together and make a big blanket, and that's what would keep us warm in the winter time. (laughs) She was doing something all the time.

EH: And what was her name?

LB: My name?

EH: What was her name?

LB: Oh, Athena. A-T-H-E-N-A. And she was from Crete, and Vezonurakis (sp?) was her last name.

EH: You told me a story last week about collecting coal when you were a kid?

LB: Oh yeah.

EH: Going into the abandoned mine?

LB: There was a small mine near where we lived that had closed—the opening in the mine was still there and there were a lot of cars that had been in the mine at one time, out in the yard, out front. And they took up the rails and they brought in the copper, and the mine was still open and a friend and I— I had a wagon made and I think I told somebody that it wasn't a very good sight. And I didn't feel like going down the road in front of the public with that wagon so I talked a friend of mine, Charlie Talkish (sp?) who lived nearby to go in the mine with me and get coal instead of going down to the tipples where they processed coal, and coal rolls off of the cars and it falls off of the train along the tracks and you'd go along and pick up the coal. Instead of doing that, we went into the mine and not far in the mine there was a big lump of coal that they had left there. And we didn't realize it, but it was left there to hold the hillside up, and we pecked away at it with whatever tools we had, loaded our vehicles and went out. And not long after we went out, that whole hillside came down, and we would have been buried and no one knew we were in there because it was not right to go in there to begin with and nobody knew that we had gone in there, so we would come up missing. I don't know if— they might have found our bones later when they built the interstate because the interstate went right through that area. And I have pictures of where the mine was in relation to the interstate today. And when they put the interstate in, they went right through that area and they might have found our bones.

EH: Wow.

LB: But that was much later.

EH: You got lucky.

LB: Yeah (laughs)

EH: Well, I guess I better let you go— you have to get to Fairmont?

LB: Oh, yeah. Is she out there now?

EH: I'm not sure, let's see.

LB: I think you can tell her.

EH: Yeah, it's 1:26. It's almost 1:30.

LB: Oh, okay.

EH: But we should do it another time and I'll come up to the house. Yeah, I would like that.

LB: It would be a big help. Like I say, my hearing's not real good and I have a lot of stuff collected— a room full of stuff. (laughs)

EH: Yeah, that'd be great.

LB: You could spend a couple days there if you want! (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

LB: And we have extra rooms upstairs! (laughs)

EH: (laughs) Nice!

LB: Okay.

EH: Oh, I have a release form...

47:34

END OF TAPE

END OF INTERVIEW