Good afternoon. My name is Joseph Lowatchie Sr. I am 77 years of age, and have been a resident of Ronald, Wa. For the past 54 years. At the request of Mr. Nick Henderson and Mr. Fred Kruger, representing Trend West Mt. Star Resorts, I would like to tell you a little of my ethnic background. How and why my family migrated to this country, and to the Roslyn Ronald area. I would like to tell you a little about my coal mining experiences in this area, and the hazards faced by every coal miner on a daily basis, some worse than others.

My ethnic background is similar to that of most of the ethnic people who came to the Kittitas Valley of the Territory of Washington in the late 1800's and the early 1900's. My families' migration story is one of thousands that helped build this great country.

On Dec. 15, 1922, I was born in Pocohontas, Virginia. The state boundary line between W. Va. and Virginia ran right down the middle of the street. I was born in one state and Baptized across the street in another state. My mother was age 35 at the time. My father was 47. One later brother was born stillbirth in Helen, W. Va.

My parents were Hungarian, of Major lineage that goes back to Attila The Hun, Bela, and Ghengis Khan. The Major tribes still live in the Mongolian, China, and Indian area of Asia. The people of Finland are also descended from these migratory, warlike people. Tiring of war, they settled in beautiful Danube Valley, in what is today called Hungary.
<My parents story began in the small village of Kisvarda in North East Hungary, bordered by Chekoslovakia on the North, the Russian Ukraine to the East, and Romania to the South. Both spoke all languages, and my father spoke a little of many others as he traveled extensively in Europe and the Near East.

Kisvarda lay in and was a part of the huge estate of, as my mother called him, Lord Baron Istvan Esterhazy, member of the ruling family of the Austro Hungarian Empire. His family lineage pre dated the Crusades; his forbears fed and received Crusade leaders from time to time.

My father, born in 1875, at the age of 9 years, came to the Barons estate to ask for work and a place to stay. His first name was Francisco. He said he came from the horse raising people of the Alfold, (Great Plain). He had no family, and no last name. The Baron accepted this free young labor, and assigned him to taking care of the feeding and cleaning of his horses.

The Baron just called him “LOVASKI”. This meant one who takes care of horses. In our Western states he would have been called the Horse Wrangler. In later years my sister, starting school in Virginia, not speaking English, said her name and the teacher not understanding her wrote it as LOWATCHIE and we still keep it that way. As he grew up my father was taught to train and race Sulky horses. This was the Barons great love, and the key to my parents' migration to America.

My mother, Marcella Catherine Angyal was born in Kisvarda in 1887. She was schooled for three years, my father, none. I suspect the Baron wanted him to stay illiterate for his own selfish purposes. At the age of 8 years, mother was sent to the palace kitchen. This was to be her life’s work; a scullery maid. She was the eighth child of her mother who soon passed away. Her father remarried and sired eight more brothers and sisters. Mother was one of 16 Angyal’s in Kisvarda.
Every one in the small villages worked for the Baron, and each was assigned and taught to do a specific job. Each person was an important cog in the Estate wheel. You lived, worked, ate and were subject to the laws of the Estate, as dictated by the Baron. In later years she understood, they were slaves to this man and the Estate.

Mother’s oldest brother Jimmy was assigned and trained to become a member of the Royal Hussars, Hungarian Calvary. He knew horseflesh and he was small and wiry. They were mounted on large, strong, and fast horses. The idea was, this small strong Hussar could be carried far and fast to combat on these great horses.

While fighting Russian Cossacks, Jimmy was captured. Somehow they let him become a Cossack. (You know, fight for us or die.) He was sent to the Russian Caucacus. He somehow ran away and escaped to Turkey, made his way to Canada, and later to America. The family heard from him from time to time, the last was in 1913. He said he was in the U.S. Air Force training to become a W.W. pilot.

Years later I read in the Readers Digest about a Bush Pilot of Hungarian descent named Jimmy Angle discovering the world's highest waterfall in Venezuela and it being named “Angle Falls” after him. Was this my uncle? I like to think so. He spoke of a brother George in his later years living with him. My mothers real brothers were Jimmy, George, Bill, Bela, and Istvan. Steve??????

My parents married in 1900. My mother was 13 years of age, father was 25. Three children were born in Kisvarda. Anna Elizabeth in 1902, Feank or “Ference” in 1904, Steve or “Istvan” in 1907. Later in the USA Margaret Catherine was born in Powhatan, Va. 1911. Bill was born in Simmínsw VA 1912. Helen was born in Sanakaville, Ohio 1919.
My parents lived in a stone one-room cottage that was part of a stone wall encompassing the main palace grounds. The only light was from a small fireplace used for heat and cooking. Everyone on the Estate helped bring in the harvest. One evening after harvest was in, the racing season was over, too. My father hung his saddlebags on a peg by the door as usual. Later after the children were sleeping he removed a packet from his bags. He told our mother these papers were passports to the land of America and freedom. This was the dreamland he had spoken of so often in private.

Mother was to pack the two bags my father traveled with, with their clothes and food, nothing more. She was to tell no one, not even her family. They would leave the following night with the children, Steve and a Babe in arms. They had to leave their loved ones like thieves in the night.

This man was illiterate, but he could count and think and dream, had bet his horses, gambled and saved enough money to, with the help of friends to get all the passports for his family, purchase train tickets and arrange for transport by horse and buggy from point to point as needed. They traveled near the southern border as close as possible, so they could cross if they were in danger of being caught by the Baron. They crossed Hungary, across Croatia to the seaport town of Rijeka, on the Adriatic Sea.

After running scared, day and night, for two weeks without proper rest and sanitation, they boarded an Italian liner. In the bottom of the hold they suffered sweltering heat, human odor from seasickness, and poor food for seven days and nights. Mercifully, they arrived at Ellis Island, when mother said she was ready to roll over and die.
Finally on the upper deck, seeing the Statue of Liberty, my father spoke of, as my mother swore, “the perfumed air of freedom”. Father hugged her and said, “Marcella, we will never again answer to any man, what we work for is ours to give to our children. We are free to make our life as we wish, Thank God.”

Friends met them at Ellis Island. After a few days of rest, they were sent by train to Pocohontas, Virginia, where my father was given a job at the coal mines. Friends who taught him the mining trade took him to work. He worked hard. He was a small man. 130 pounds but he was very strong in his back, arms, and legs from a lifetime of handling horses. Three years in a row he won a pin from the Pocohontas Coal Co. inscribed Champion Coal Miner.

The Co. allowed my mother to take a two story house next door and convert it into a boarding house for miners who had no place to live, mostly single men. Most were of foreign descent. The men paid fifty cents per day, room and board. This was two meals a day, a packed lunch for work, clean bedding each week, with clothes washed and ironed. Mother had seven boarders with $3.50 coming in each day. That equaled what my father could earn on some of his best days doing contract work. In those early days, 6 and 7 dollars a day for one family was a lot of money. Neighbors taught my parents how to make some brew and wine. This was sold to the boarders and friends. Life was good. Mother loved this land of freedom.

At one point in time, at the urging of friends, father purchased a 40-acre farm in Sanakaville, Ohio. He was a good horsetrainer, and a good miner. He soon sold the farm and went back to mining. My sister, Helen, was born on the farm.
Our home life was typical Hungarian. We were a loving, close-knit family. Everyone shared in the home chores. We cleaned, repaired, planted, harvested, canned and preserved. We were very self-sufficient. Mother, like the people before her, was a (pot) cooker. She prepared her meals in the cooking pot or roaster, put in on the stove to cook all day and this gave her time to clean, wash, and iron. She also made time to work in her flower or vegetable gardens and delighted in giving her friends the best of these. Mother’s coffee was black as sin, and loaded with chicory. It was good for cuts and bruises, too. The food was removed from the pot and we served ourselves. There was always plenty. She made bread in pots or pans, light and fluffy. Store bread had no place in her kitchen. Our food was boiled, baked or roasted. Only eggs were sometimes fried. She said frying attracted flies and these flies had no place in her kitchen either.

Like most people from Central Europe my family celebrated only three holidays. Christmas, the birth of Christ, New Years, a time for fulfilling all obligations and planning the new year, and Easter, a time of joy, the Lord has risen, a time of a new beginning. As a young boy I was expected to visit all our neighbors who had young daughters on Easter. I was to sprinkle their head with Holy water from the church. This was to insure them good health and happiness in the coming year.

Really, this was to bring boys and girls together. The fathers looked you over with a future father-in-law look. The mothers tried to stuff you with food they claimed the daughters made. (Usually not true.) It was hard on young boys, but it had its good points, too. Young girls do grow up, and remember you.
In the coal camps of Va. WVA. Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Illinois, the Ethnic people were the same as those who settled in the Roslyn and Ronald area. They were Russians, Poles, Checks, Slovaks, Croatians, Hungarians, and Italian. They were from all over the world and they merged together nicely. For the most part, they left their Ethnic hatreds in the old countries. They had no time for that nonsense in the new land and life. Their sports and games were played together. Hard and serious stuff. When they held their national dances everyone attended. You saw the Kola, the Chardas, the polka and others in the same dance hall on the same night performed by all nationalities. These NEW AMERICANS sent their sons and daughters to the battlefields of the world TOGETHER, without question. Sometimes to fight their own kind. They were now AMERICANS, in every sense of the word.

Mother always dressed in the old country manner. A bandana or BABOSKA covered her hair and her dresses were usually one piece of dark color and hung to the tops of her shoes. I don’t recall seeing a bra but I know she always had two or three undershirts on under there. Her socks went to her knees. When we were both younger she could lift her skirts and outrun me any day of the week. Sundays her flowered hat and her Sunday best was put on to go to church so she could thank God for bringing her family to this wonderful land. She never let us forget this blessing.

My father had many friends. Upon his death in 1934 friends called from New York and Fort Lauderdale, Florida saying they were coming to his funeral. The morgue held his body for two days and then he lay in our living room for three days. His funeral procession was the largest ever seen in Beckley W. Va. at that time. This was a fitting tribute to a man who made every one his special friend. I was proud of my parents always, but moreso as I grow older and understand their worth better. Father is buried in Beckley W.Va. with one of his Grandsons by Brother Bill.
Mother died in Seattle, WA. in 1959. She lays in the Mt. View Cemetery in Auburn WA. Brothers Frank and Steve, and Sister Margaret with her husband Joseph are buried around her on that beautiful mountaintop, closer to the God she loved.

In 1939, hearing the rumors of war, I lied about my age and joined the Army. I was 16 when I left. I was sworn in on my 17th birthday and sent to Portland, Maine from Ft. Hays Ohio. I was sent to an old Coast Artillery Post for training. During the winter and following summer, we were trained by a First Sergeant named Peter Montojounis, of Lithuanian extraction. He was a Congressional Medal of Honor winner, and carried a battlefield commission of Captain of Infantry. He told us what war was and about, what to expect, and how to cope in it. He taught us how to conduct ourselves under fire as soldiers, and as gentlemen on the streets of nearby cities. He taught us kindness and compassion and how to care for and protect each other. He taught us Judo, First Aid, and how to kill. If God would give me two wishes to help our military, I would wish Peter was alive today, and our scientists could clone him for each fighting unit in our military. I served my country in many ways, for 6 years on 3 continents, willingly faithfully, and proudly. Thanks to you Mom and Dad and Peter Montojounis.

I was discharged Oct. 30th 1945. I went to Washington D.C. to pick up my sister Helen. She was office manager in the Dept. of Interior for Secretary Ikes. Unknown to the both of us my nephew, Mickey Korman, Sister Annies firstborn, of the Navy Air Force, was the Secretary’s flight engineer. We went home together. Mickey’s younger brother Frank went down in the battle of Midway with the Destroyer Hamman, defending the Aircraft Carrier Yorktown. Their younger brother, Albert, a Navy Seabee survived Guam with minor wounds. Sister Annie passed away in 1944. She lies buried in Beckley W. Va.
The home coming with my Mother, Brother Frank, Sister Margaret, and brother-in-law Joseph Bartevy, Margarets spouse, was great. At this time most of my friends were still in the service, moved away, or dead. Within two weeks I was like a lost soul and very restless. Reading letters from Brothers Bill and Steve, who were in Bellingham, WA. I informed my mother that I was going to go see that beautiful state of Washington. Frank and Joseph had been thinking the same thing. By Dec. 18th we were in Bellingham. It rained for five months. I had been working at the logging camp in Concrete, WA. And winter was coming. Brother Bill and Steve said let's go to Eastern Washington. It's dry and there is lots of mining in the area. Mother and Margaret had sold their homes and were here by then. Mother and Frank had purchased a home in Seattle, Margaret and Joseph purchased a home on Lake Watcom, near Bellingham.

I had purchased a 1939 Lincoln Zepher in mint condition from an old gentleman so we had transportation into this area. My brothers had gone to work for the Roslyn Cascade Coal Co. (Patricks). I had wanted to bum around a bit and see the Great Basin so I didn’t accept the job offer. (There was a manpower shortage in the mines at the time.). I left and just traveled around and enjoyed myself for five weeks. By the time I returned Bill and Steve had purchased a small home on 1st street in Ronald. I got hired at Patricks Mine, walked into the Company Store for cigarettes and came face to face with a girl who would become my wife for the next 48 years until her death in 1996. We have two daughters and three sons. They all live in this area today. All are married with families of their own. Brother Bill recently passed on at the age of 86. He lays in the Roslyn Memorial Gardens in Roslyn. His wife Floretta of 55 years lives in Ronald.

I worked in the Patrick Mine for two winters. This mine went underground with a slight upward slope (see drawing).
All the gangways did the same, so did the working rooms. This was a very economical mine to work. An electric hoist pulled the coal cars into the mine. Gravity on the down slopes rolled the cars out. Water from the mine was also self draining. The coal was 30 to 33 inches high and cutting machines were used to undercut the coal. The timbers were small, short, and light. There was a cap rock above the coal, it was 1 to 3 inches thick and it was very heavy and brittle if it came loose. It was dangerous, but the miners were very careful, timbered it well, and accidents were very few.

The working rooms or face in this mine was driven up about 30 feet wide. When driven to the boundary, and pillar pulling started, the machine man made one cut from the top of the room to the bottom. The pillar being 15 to 20 feet thick, with 8 feet removed coming back, the whole area became dangerous and the rest of the stump was left and lost. This was an easy mine to work and the owners were very safety conscious at all times. Each spring, I would quit the mine and go logging till winter came.

One fall, I went to work for the Northwestern Improvement Coal Co. in Ronald. Patricks mine went up at about a 2 or 3 degree slope. The #3 mine went down on about a 15-degree slope. At #3 you walked in for about 300 level feet. Then, you boarded a (man trip), flat bed coal cars on the slope. The hoisting engineer would drop the cars and men down on signal. Down past entryways, east and west, I believe, long since worked out, to the bottom of the slope. There, you dismounted and walked to other slopes and man trips until you reached your designated work place. Some miners took 40 minutes to reach their work place.
The gangway driven off from the slopes was usually level, more or less. The rooms were then driven upslope, usually about 14 to 16 feet wide. The pillars were 50 feet square between the crosscuts. When the pillars were robbed, they were completely robbed, if possible, down to the gangway, where some pillars and stumps were left for a period of time. (See sketches of method used.)

The coal in #3 mine was around 5 feet thick. The deeper you went into the mine the warmer it got. Not because you were nearer to hell, but because friction created by air moving over the coal and rock warmed the air. Also, the deeper you went the less force the air systems had and air moved slower. This took longer for dust, powder smoke, and mine gasses to move away. Very unhealthy. In general #3 mine was well ventilated. The roof was for the most part slate rock, and if well timbered, reasonably safe. Electric motors were used for hauling the coal in the gangways. Shaker conveyers were used to move the coal in the rooms or face. I know the mine officials had a policy of encouraging the shift bosses to push the men to work harder and faster. This sometimes caused men to get injured. To those kind of people coal was the important thing, men were plentiful.

Robbing pillars or stumps was usually hot, dusty, dirty, and dangerous work. Due to poor air delivery, gas and dust created a danger of explosion. As the coal was removed the pull of gravity on the roof became worse. The coal started crumbling, the timbers started mushrooming, and the roof rock started grinding and loosening and sometimes groaning under the terrific pressures their in. Only experienced miners understood what the roof was saying and knew when to get out.
The miners withdraw and let the roof cave in or sometimes the roof and the bottom would come together from pressure and then all would be quiet again. This cave in or squeeze in was a desirable part of mining as it removed pressure from other working areas.

Being as coal was formed millions of years ago, mostly from tropical vegetation and swamp like areas, it is possible in most mines to find fossil imprints of insects and leaves on a slate found in most mines. Even today, in the burnt out slag piles, fossils can be found. The old timers claimed that in the early days of Patricks Mine, miners discovered a fossilized or petrified frog in the coal seam. This was supposedly in the days of hand pick mining. Therefore, the blasting would not have destroyed this frog. I was told this frog was sent to the U. of WA. Archeological Museum. True or not? Who knows?

The local coalmines used cutting machines to undercut the coal. This machine has a cutting bar similar to a chain saw 6 feet or longer. It is inserted to the bottom of the coal seam, full depth, then driven across the working face of coal, pulled out, and set aside for safety. The miners then drilled holes in the coal the depth of the machine cut. The shift boss loaded the holes with Monobel Blasting powder, checked to see that there was no methane gas present with his safety lamp, and if none was found he fired the powder and blasted the coal down.

Sometimes in places where machines were not used to cut the coal, the miners would drill CUT SHOTS. These were a series of boreholes placed in such a manner as to blast a cut into the coal so it could be blasted down. (SEE SKETCH) Instead of drilling the holes straight in they would drill two holes in at a 45 degree angle to meet at the rear of the hole, or close, then two more were usually put in at a rough 20 degree angle, then two more were placed straight in.
These shots were placed and fired with timed fuses. The first two 45 degree shots fired then the two 20-degree shots, then the two straight ones. This left a rough cut across the coal seam that could then be easily blasted down.

There are hazards in mining, in all mines of every kind. I will tell you of what can happen in any underground mine. This happened in the #3 N.W.I. mine in Ronald, WA. I was there. A terrible human loss was prevented because of the quick positive action taken by an assistant mine foreman, Arthur Pasa. A very brave man.

This mine accident happened in the early 1950s. The exact date eludes me at this time, as the only impression it made on me was that it was a big factor in speeding the demise of the coal mining in this area. As the kids say today, “no big deal”. I do recall that it was two days before Christmas. I will list the names of those involved in this incident.

Thomas Murphy, General Manager for the N.W.I. coal company
Frank Badda, Mining Engineer and General Superintendent
George Miller, #3 Mine Foreman
Thomas (Montana) Starkovich, Shift, Section, Unit, or Pusher Boss
Frankie Batoric, Motor Man
Joseph Lowatchie, Miner

As you can see, as usual, too many bosses and not enough miners.
When I returned to the mine after a summer of logging, I was assigned to work in the gangway, encircling a dome of coal. This circle was said to be around two miles in circumference. When I arrived it was about ¾ complete. I recall it was two years of development involved in this project. SEE SKETCHES TO BETTER SEE THE LAY OF THE GROUND AND HOW IT APPEARED TO THE MINERS.

The crew consisted of one shift boss, one motor man, one timber man, one cutting machine operator, and two miners. All of worked together, cutting, drilling, timbering, and so on. These cutting machines may be seen outside the Roslyn Museum today. Underground we cut the coal, drilled and loaded it with dynamite (Monobel) blasted it down, loaded it into the conveyer, then repeated the process after timbering the roof. Of note here we entered this area by passing through a long rock tunnel, perhaps as long as 1000 feet long.

One afternoon we drilled the coal and a couple of holes drilled into white rock. This happened from time to time, so no big deal. The shots were fired at quitting time; we went home, all was well.

The next morning we found out we had run up against a solid wall of white rock, poor granite I believe. Tom went to the phone to report to the mine Forman. Meanwhile, we cleaned out the coal, retimbered the place, and in general kept busy. Soon all the listed mine officials were in the work place.
Mr. Murphy had seen or heard of this happening before. He said in the distant past the earth had shifted and sheared the coal seam. It could now be above or below us. He instructed us to clean the place thoroughly and to look for a thin pencil line of coal. We were to follow this line and find the missing coal seam. They left, we looked, we found the line, and we followed it up towards the back entry at a 45-degree angle. After about four days and four rounds of solid rock blasted out we hit the coal again. We continued up and after 50 feet or so, ran into the back entry (or airway) SEE SKETCH.

At this point there were only three men working, Tom, Frank, and myself. We were instructed to drive the airway forward to see if perhaps there had been another shift, hopefully back into place. Today we don’t know the answer to that question. SEE SKETCH FOR HOW THIS OPERATION WORKED. A few days later, after advancing 40 feet we were drilling the face coal. This was 5 feet and about 6 to 8 feet wide. We put in cut shots and were drilling the last hole on the bottom down side. WE DRILLED INTO A POCKET OF WATER!

The mine officials were called in. They brought two buckets with them. The water pushing out of that bore hole was 16 to 18 inches, the bore hole was 1 and ½ inches. We caught the water in one bucket, poured it into the second, and determined that it was running 8 gallons per minute. Since it was quitting time, Mr. Murphy said to let it drain until morning and then we would see what to do. He felt it was a common little pocket of water, like he had seen in some eastern coal mines.
The next morning, everyone, officials and miners, went up to the face to see if the water had stopped. It was barely seeping and everyone was happy about it. It had not crossed our minds that the hole may have plugged itself. Mr. Murphy said to go ahead and load and fire the round. They left, and we did as told and nothing happened. I tested for gas and fired the shot as Tom was having trouble with his back and knee. Climbing up a slippery slope was hard for him.

With the smoke out of the way, I drilled an 18 inch deep hole in the roof, installed the holding pin and pulley block, threaded the lines in the block, and started pulling coal with the drag bucket. This is noisy, dusty work and after a period of time I sensed that something was wrong. Shutting down the hoist and letting the air clear a little, I noticed a squeeze had started working. I also saw the brattish line timbers were mushrooming. No big deal. I’d seen this many times before.

I dragged coal until lunch. This free coal was great. The down pressure on the coal was bursting the coal out from the sidewalls; we had loaded an extra coal trip. I should have worried at such a squeeze in such a narrow place, but I had seen this before, too. I shut the hoist off and went down to the gangway for lunch with Tom and Frankie.

It is normal after removing pillars or stumps for the roof to settle and push down with great pressure on timbers, then will “MUSHROOM” at the top. They just seem to roll out like a mushroom. If the bottom is pushing up, the timber will seem to sink into the rock floor. This is because the great pressure down is even over a large area. Then the bottom in any open space will push up. This usually relieves the pressure. Some times the top and bottom will come together, Nature and Gravity at this point have defeated man.
After lunch I went topside. This place had lots of loose coal. I could hear the coal and roof working but decided I would clean up a little more, then stop and take a good look. I pulled coal for a period of time. I also cleaned about halfway to the pulley block. I then shut off the hoist and noticed no dust was blowing. Moving forward past the down cross cut or chute, I really saw how much the timbers had mushroomed. I saw and heard how hard the coal was crushing and popping. Then, I noticed the water squeezing out of the coal, like a sponge, and water actually running at the bottom of the coal seam. That's why there was no dust blowing.

At this point, I went down below and told Tom and Frank that I was afraid the place was going to cave and that the water really had me worried. Tom didn't seem to feel the apprehension I felt, and sort of laughed at my fears saying it would settle down soon and be all right. I replied that I was going back up there and remove the new bull block back to a safe place, near the hoist. At least until the place settled down. I had made up my mind as the old miners used to say, "That's deep enough."

Back up I went. I unhooked the pull bucket and pulled the cable back and coiled it by the hoist. I made sure the shovel, pick, and hatchet were safe, then I started forward to retrieve the pulley block. At a point about midway, I heard this loud sort of growl. This meant rock was crushing. Then I saw about a 5 foot chunk of rock fall from the roof, followed by a gush of water. Run, Joe, run. Back to the second downslope and down, the first would take on the water.
Prior to going back to the top, Frankie was to take a loaded trip. I asked Tom to have Frank call the office and advise them that I was afraid the place was about to flood and I worried for the men working down in the lower levels of the mine. I told Frankie that I would accept all responsibility. He and Tom agreed. Fortunately, on arriving at the parting by the rock tunnel, Frankie ran into Art Pasa, assistant Mine Foreman. After relating all I had said at lunch and all the coal loaded without firing a shot, Art decided the men's safety came first and he phoned down to the lower levels and instructed the men to vacate the place and go out the escape air way. I was told later by one of the men, they had heard the water rushing in as they neared the outside in the escape way. There were 42 men down there, two days before Christmas. I believe God placed Art Pasa there to avert a terrible tragedy. Art took the responsibility without question and his positive action saved those men. I often wonder if any of them ever said “Thanks, Art.”

With the wings of fear moving my feet, I literally flew down that crosscut. Reaching the bottom I ran towards Tom yelling the place was flooding. He didn’t hear from the noise of loading. I told him “It’s flooding, RUN”. He said to help him put a new air fan we had up on the high side for safety. I yelled the Hell with the fan and pulled a hitch pin on the cars he had already loaded. We had raised the track behind the loading point, so the cars would move down grade. They were controlled by a small hoist to lower or to pull back.

The cars started rolling and I hopped on. Just then, about two tons of coal and water shot out of that loading crosscut. Tom argued no more. Seeing visions of someone spending his fortune, this big 230-pound man with a sore leg and back ran and caught the coal cars and hopped on. They were moving fast by then.
We rode the cars through the parting and almost to the rock tunnel. We had to jump off as we knew there was a curve and we knew the cars couldn’t make it at that speed. We jumped and fell, both of us, but not bruised too bad. The loaded coal cars jumped and piled up. I believe later that these wrecked cars may have slowed or held back the flood somewhat.

We joined Art and Frankie in their safe place, and we waited at least one half-hour. Nothing. No noise, no water, nothing. I could see Art was worried. So was I. Still, it looked like it wasn’t serious. Finally Art said he was going in to have a look. Nobody moved to go in with him so I said I would go with him. We walked to the parting. 1 mile. There we found that timbers had blocked the narrow part of the parting and there was a 4-foot damn of yellow silt, very thick and back as far as our lights would show. All was quiet. We waited awhile and listened, and finally Art said he had to go in and assess the damage.

Going in meant climbing up on the high side and walking on two one inch air and water lines in a place about 3 feet high. These pipes were hung to support posts with bailing wire. (SEE SKETCH). Art HAD to go, and I couldn’t let him go alone, so we started. Being younger and more nimble I went ahead. I tied the pipes tight with any wire I found hanging on the timbers. This way we went to within 100 feet of the loading chute. There we stopped to rest for a few minutes in a crosscut area. Finally, Art said, “Lowatch, we may as well go on up and see what happened up there.” He passed me and started to go. That’s when we heard a loud noise like a freight train coming, We heard a big roar, the wind nearly blew us off of our perch. Then all Hell broke loose. The noise was terrible; crashing falling and roaring. All at once silt was above my knees, inches from my face. We just had to stand and hang on to the timbers.
We were waiting for the end. It was that close. The silt and sands must have been moving 20 miles per hour, real scary. Poor Art was at least 8 inches shorter than I was.

After what seemed a lifetime, the silt lowered to just above ankles. Sometimes as we moved towards the outside we see the pipes, mostly we felt for them with our feet. At times the wind blowing with gale force almost blew us down. To this meant more caving. I checked every crosscut for a trap to the back entry. They were all sealed with concrete, tight. We moved on this way as fast as we could, expecting how to jam up at any second and end our misery.

As I said before, this was two days before Christmas. Somewhere along the way we stopped to rest our legs and backs. I said to Art "If those guys down below didn’t make it out we was going to be a miserable Christmas. To lose 42 men all at once." Art corrected me, "You didn’t count us Lowatch." At every stop he asked me if I was afraid to die. No, I told him.

Peter Montijounis told us, "Don’t worry about death, if you read you won’t know it until you reach that place promised us. If you get there, then who in the hell cares." We pushed on, eventually; I found a crosscut with a trap door to the entry. At this point we felt almost safe. Eventually, we saw light ahead. We were almost out of the dark.

We found a crew of about 10 men led by Honey George. They had almost finished a barricade across the way to seal off the flooded area and to stop the flood from entering the rock tunnel. This was in case the flood plugged the down slope to the old workings. Art and I were 15 minutes on being sealed in forever, everyone believed we had perished in the flood below. No one was hurt; no one lost their life. The days of coal were as dead as the #3 mine in Ronald.
The boats launch was to be constructed from timber beams from the mine tipples. It would have been a long floating launch and would rise and fall with the water level in the lake. Frank Badda and a Mr. McMillan (I believe he was the new mine manager.), said if I would remove everything from the mine sites excluding concrete and machinery it was mine to use. The forest service liked the idea, as did the Department of Natural Resources. Permission was given to me; all I needed was an estimated 150 thousand dollars.

Seaplanes often landed on the lake bringing fisherman from other places. My plans included a private lodge across the lake where a year round spring runs off MT. Baldy. This spring runs three times more water than the Dummerie water spring does. The land here is level and this lodge could be reached by boat or seaplane only. I had visualized a real moneymaker on this dream and a workplace for many displaced miners and their families. The dream was falling into place. I planned to do it in three stages. Asking for a 50,000 dollar loan to start with was the first stage. The only collateral I had was a dream, an idea, and rough plans. It would not be easy.

When I submitted my idea to Joseph Smith, manager of the Roslyn branch of the Cle Elum State Bank. It was short and bitter. I know he felt I had lost my mind. The mines were gone, the towns would die, and he was talking to a nut. He laughed me right out of his bank. One lost, two to go.

I entered the Seattle 1st National Bank, Jake Bizyak, Manager. Jake did look the plan over good, all the while smiling. Then he could hold it in no longer and burst out laughing. The same speech was delivered; the towns are dying, forget it.
Two banks in Ellensburg said to forget this crazy idea and that they would be hung in public if they lent money to a harebrained scheme like this. I came home very much down in spirit. Vera insisted I go speak with Mr. Carpenter of the Cle Elum State Bank. She said he was a very forward thinking young man. After four lickings and ridicule, I was reluctant, but at her urging went down willing to try one more time. Dreams are hard to give up.

Mr. Carpenter was a very different kind of person. I quickly knew this man was a special type of man. His mind was wide open to ideas and dreams. As Vera had said, forward looking. He studied my plans, he listened to what I was saying, and he understood the other banker’s reactions. He also said they were wrong. He told me his bank, by state law, could only lend 20,000 thousand dollars. Also, that he was old and retiring soon, and that if he were younger I would have a partner. All this boosted my spirits, but wouldn’t build my dream. But, he said he could help, and he did.

Mr. Carpenter called Seattle offices of the Co. These well-educated successful businessmen, with all their questions, most of them long range. They never once made me feel that I was on a wild goose chase or wasting their time. Lunch was brought in and we spent most of the afternoon talking. Everything was recorded, names, places, addresses, everything. I left that afternoon full of hope and confidence. They said they would send two agents over for a week or two and make a study of the area.
Two years later, I became a building and electrical contractor at the age of 47. Later, I studied Real Estate and brokerage and Real Estate Law. Also, Vera and I purchased and developed land for building purposes for the next 30 years. I am still selling land in Alaska from what will be my last development. At age 77 I am still learning, I believe a person can do anything he or she sets their mind to.

You may ask what legacy I leave my children. I leave them the same legacy left by the early immigrants who came to this country and the Kittitas Valley in the 1880's and later. I leave them the same legacy left us by the founding fathers who fought the Revolutionary War for freedom to live their lives as they wanted. This, against the most powerful nation in the world at that time and won. A legacy of courage, will, determination, sacrifice, honesty, and moral integrity. The willingness to change their lives as needed and dictated by the times they live in, and to change the things they can for the betterment of all people in their lives.

To the 5th generation of young boys and girls, children of those early pioneers who settled this Kittitas Valley so long ago, and all the young newcomers, I would like to say this:

You are facing a changing world and the future looks uncertain. Your past generations faced these same obstacles. Don’t heed those who say “I feel sorry for these children born today, they have no future, the world is going to Hell”. These people are the losers of my generation. Disregard them. Above all, don’t be afraid. Look back at your past generations and absorb the legacy they gave you, with all your heart and soul. Then with your head held high and pride in your heart, turn around. Look neither left nor right, look straight ahead. You have the tools now go and build the future into a better place for your generation and those who follow in your footsteps.

Thank you for the privilege of speaking to you.

Joseph Lowatches S.
Ronald, WA.
1-31-2002.
This disaster was not just a little pocket of water as we had thought. When it caved into the opening left by the water underground, it broke 500 feet to the surface creating a hole 138 feet wide. The company dumped semi truckloads of hay into the hole for 30 days, 24 hours around the clock. This was done in an attempt to seal the water from the mine. The opening was in a swampy area about 100 to 150 feet from the Cle Elum River. We were really lucky, all of us. Soon the hole filled with water, the hay was doing the job. The deer and elk started jumping into the water to get to the hay. This was mid winter, if you remember. The company built an 8-foot fence around the hole and kept dumping the hay in. Finally, they just bulldozed part of the mountain into the hole. All to no avail. The mine was finished.

In the spring I went logging as usual. In the winter to Alaska to the coalmines. One weekend my wife commented on how many recreation vehicles and boats go up to lake Cle Elum and turn around and leave as there was no boat launching facilities or campgrounds for tourists. An idea was born. For four weekends one of us sat on our front porch and counted these boats. There were 100's. Knowing the lake area and with a place in mind, my wife, Vera and I went up to Bell Creek. After a day of walking and sketching a rough plan was formed in my mind. Over the next few weekends with only a hand compass and a rod, Vera and I had our rough grades and figures.

The next step was to lie out the perimeter of the area I had selected. Then I drew in the campground, the boatshop, the boat rental sheds, the tackle shops, and other little business areas including the boat launch. The boat launch was to be on the lake proper off the little island. The channel between would be filled with rock and gravel for a roadway.