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Interview of Frank Tortoritch

You were a barber in Jackson right. Were you downtown?

Yes.

Did you actually talk to the people who worked in the mine?

Ya a lot of people. We had a lot of customers from the mine.

Do you remember any specific stories?

For some reason some of them talked a lot... I can't recall,... really we talked about sports, we talked about things like that. Once in awhile we'll talk about the mine and how it was terribly hot. It wasn't a healthy place to work. Cause ninety percent of the miners they got, they called it rock in the box, miners consumption. The gold is a strong magnetism, there were many things they did to take some of that gold. Some of them used to throw it out and when they had a chance to get it, pick it up later. What they did then, they made these guys strip their clothes and put like a uniform on. And those poor miners it was so dog gone hot it was terrifically hot and the air was stale, all they were getting was four- four fifty a day. So some times you can't blame them for trying to steal it. They mined out millions of dollars out of that mine. They were hard working people. They had practically every nationality; Italian, French, Portuguese... That was their life vocations, they just loved it. But it took a lot of men with it, later on, the consumption. But that's out of that, there were real nice families in hard times and that's probably why they worked hard. They all had families. There wasn't too much... outside of the danger in working those mines but that's all they new and that's all they liked to do.

Do you think that the town was at all different than how it is today?

This town was wide open there was gambling, roulette, cards, houses were open. But the people... the gambling houses were all on Main Street practically. The police kept a lot of order, they never had any real problems. When any of them over drank the police would take them home. We had a lot of tourist, visitors staying and gambling.

Was the town a lot bigger back then?

It wasn't bigger in population. As far as the town, the development was nothing, practically tripled the population with all the development now. But everybody knew everybody, the people were so friendly.

Did you have any close friends that worked in the mine?

Oh ya, one of my friends there tended the hoist, I wanted to go down in the mine and see it but at the time I went over to talk to Mitch, I couldn't go down. They used to let you go down there but the insurance got pretty strict, wouldn't allow tourist to go down the mines any more, any thing could happen down there.

Do you think that the mine helped your business?

The time was lively. At that time we had six barber shops on main street, now we have one.

What do you recall the night like, you said it was pretty lively, was that just with all the gambling going on?

Gambling goin', a lot of drinking, we'd get a lot of loud mouths. They were spending money. We'd get a lot of tourist a lot of your legislators came to gamble and the houses. It was a lively town and full of life, we usually didn't have any problems. Later on when they closed gambling a few years later they were trying to get gambling back. People from Tahoe came in to open up business and that would be the worst thing that could have ever happened putting those people in there in my opinion, cause I talked to several of those people that used to own the gambling, locals, and they were out of business. So we voted it down. It was a good thing.

Do you think it would make the place more lively again?

It isn't that so much. You get outside people running something, it doesn't run the same.

Because it is not the community that's running it?

It was the community, it was local people who lived here and had respect for people here, and the outsiders I think would have ruined it.

How were your personal feelings about the Kennedy mine? Do you think it affected the town in a bad way?

Oh no, this town needed that, that was its biggest payroll. I don't see anybody that would be against the Kennedy mine or any of the mines. It kept this town going to become what it is right now.

So you feel if the Kennedy mine never was here the town never would be how it is today?

I don't know how to answer that. If the Kennedy mine wasn't here what could we assume.

Do you think this amount of people would be here, do you think Jackson would be this big because it brought people for jobs?

Yes, the industry which depended on it. The payroll depended on anything, no community survives without it wouldn't be a community. The Kennedy and the Argonaut were a big thing it kept this town alive.

Did you have any relatives that worked in the gold mines?

No.

When the gold mines shut down could you feel the change in the community?



Well yes, there was a big change economically, until the businesses and things would start to come in. There was a big difference.

Of your friends that worked at the Kennedy mine, do you know about how many hours a day they worked: were they the kind of guys that would have worked twelve hours?

I don't know exactly but they worked different shifts, they worked long shifts.

Do you know how any of the working conditions were like in the Kennedy mine than maybe the Argonaut?

Today the Kennedy mine couldn't have operated without the air conditioners they had then, the air wasn't you know they would have had to make changes there and that's a big change because they could get fresh air to the miners. That air down there was just dead, not only that the glass the rocks and other things that were down there, then they breath in all the dust and stuff and that's how they got all their TB.

When you used to work downtown, if you just showed up in town could you tell there was a mine there? Did it smell, was it loud, could you here the pumps working?

It was the loudest thing they had in Jackson.

All together with both of the mines, were you used to the sound of the mines?

Yes, you get used to it of course. I don't see how if you get too close to it, I don't see... because it was tremendous. I was so used to it I didn't hear every thing, you know you get used to silence.

Did it smell a certain way around here, did it smell like dust or anything?

No, I didn't notice anything like that. People with respiratory conditions probably, I would say.

What kind of entertainment was there for the Amador county citizens and the people that worked at the mine? Were there any special things going on then to keep people entertained?

Well they had the movies in down town Jackson, once in a while we had ballroom dancing and Sutter Creek had entertainment stuff. A lot of times we went home and families got together and had parties. The Druids used to have an annual new years dance. Different organizations... the American Legion would put on a dance.

And a lot of the miners would show up?

Oh no, there would be miners we know that, it was public. But to say there was a miner here a miner there, no.

When the miners were in town were they the kind of people that brought families along or were they mostly single guys that worked?

There were a lot of singles guys but there were a lot of families too. It was a tough life.

Besides the Kennedy and Argonaut mines were there other main industries that were in the county at the time?

In the county? Well there was the coal mine and the Preston school. Most people were basically in various jobs some worked out of town like they do now.

You said that the mine brought a lot of different kinds of people like Italians, Irish and all types of people, do you think that there was a lot of ethnic groups in Amador county then?

There was Italians, Cousin Jacks that is what they called the French, Slovenians, Spanish, there were all different nationalities.

Like Chinese?

Used to be way back there was a Chinese restaurant when I moved here it was on main street. Then Sammy had his place for years but there was a lot of Chinese people who were in Jackson years back.

Were there any African Americans?

Very few if there were any of those they were at Preston but one was a customer... I can't think of his name but he was pretty well relaxed and a real nice guy. There were very few African Americans.

When you lived here, you said you remembered the gambling halls and other businesses, where were they located, downtown?

You mean the gambling? There was gambling all up and down both sides of the street. Where the Wells Fargo Bank is now, the one across from the Wells Fargo going down the steps. That parking lot, that was a bank lot there. A bar, a bank club was there, the Rex, it used to be the Rex. It was always the restaurant and bar that's still there, right on this side a little ways there in between there was another bar there. Just both sides you could go to bars all over the place.

What was the sort of transportation that people had?

We walked a lot, we parked on Main St., it filled up all the time.

With cars?

Oh ya, a lot of people, tourist and a lot of different people parked their cars. That's how they came around to building those parking lots. They needed more parking spaces. Main St. was busy all the time, all the businesses were on Main St. Everything was on Main St.

Did the miners have cars or could they not afford them?

Some of them did. There were a lot of poor people.

Do you remember where you used to buy your groceries?

Yes, you know where Sammys is now that used to be a SafeWay when I first moved here

Was that before it moved near Coast to Coast?

Oh ya, and from there it went to where Coldwell is now and from there it moved to Coast to Coast and then to where they are now. And it got bigger each time. And there were a couple grocery stores on Main St. too.

Where did they get gas?

Standard was right across from Wells Fargo. Where the park is now.

Was that one of the only gas stations?

No, Standard was there and I think that was the only one on Main street. And we had Shell where shell is now.

How much was gas back then?

You know when you talk price it's irrelevant. Then you didn't make much so it was... it was expensive as far as we were concerned depending on the amount of money you make. I'm mean look at what the young people today make. They make more money a month then I did.

Was there a main doctor that every one went to?

We had another doctor, Doctor Ruble. Well my doctor was Doctor Linch. And he was upstairs on the Drug store on the right side of the street, right on the corner the street the barber shop was on. The Drug store and up stairs was Doctor Linch's office.

Was he the doctor everyone went to?

Well there was a couple other doctors, they were busy and he had a good reputation. His son works in Amador City.

Where did you get your clothes?

We had a nice men's store... I never thought I'd forget him... he was here when I came here... Tam's, Tam's Clothing. He was on Main St., mostly men's clothes. He had a nice big store.

Where were the boarding houses when you lived here?

One of them was on Broadway. That empty lot on Broadway has been empty since the boarding house left. Paul's Boarding House.

At the boarding houses, what could you expect for services, and how much was it to stay there?

Well some of the miners stayed there. I don't know how much it was but I'll tell you, when you went there to eat you ate. They sure served, and it was cheap. There were a lot of boarding houses in Jackson. Buscaglia's, Teresa's boarding house...

Did most of the miners and locals have cars?



Most of the people had cars.

So a majority you would say?

A majority I would say.

Was ranching and farming real big around here?

Ya, we had quite a bit of it.

Do you remember any of them?

It was all local people. Well the Onettos, they had ranches.

Was the timber industry large and developed as it is now?

It is bigger now than it was then, a lot bigger. Just before the war they came in that's when the mill started.

Were the two mines similar to each other?

Yes, they were similar and close together, they had to go through the Kennedy to get the miners out of the Argonaut.