

MUSIC

Cape Breton's Diversity in Unity

Coal Mining Days

Collected by John C O'Donnell from the singing of Archie MacInnis

Tune: "The Flying Cloud"

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1. Archie MacInnis is my name, as you may understand.
I was born in the town of New Waterford
In Cape Breton's Highland land.
The year was nineteen sixteen, the world it was at war,
The war to end all world wars which we've never known before.
2. I entered the mine at an early age to shoot and roll the coal.
There was no other survival then, if you weren't loadin' coal.
The face was black, the lights were dim,
But the spirit, it was high;
The powder smoke was flourishin', but the air was very shy.
3. My father bein' a pro miner, he knew his way around,
His guidance bein' the greatest help in the dangers all around.
The danger's so prevailin' that no one ever knows
What time a prop or boom might snap, and you may never see your home.
4. One day my spirit, it had dropped, a tragedy'd occurred:
A friend of mine, two rooms away, had met his final doom.
His name was Clarence Fraser, no finer man I've known;
He did not have the guidance, and he didn't know what to do.
5. A fall of stone came from his roof where his air machine was set;
Lack of timber bein' the cause that unfortunately it was
Lack of guidance in this case, the only course to take;
Keep your timber up close, close to that black, black dirty coal face.
6. The bravest men in the coal mine field are the gallant draeger men:
They search the pits in tragic hours when miners are in tomb;
When men are trapped within their space and lacking food and air,
The only hope the miner has is those men with such a career.

7. The draeger men so successfully can rescue so many men;
The miners know in tragic hours they need those gallant men
In order that they may go down and earn their daily bread,
Return to home and families and sleep in their own bed.

8. My own experience was not that bad, as my time was not that long;
World War Two had broken out and I had said, "So long!"
So long to that deep and black, black face, and smoke and gases too;
To head to the Strait of Canso, that's all that I could do.

9. The Strait of Canso had a boat that took us to the main;
If we had missed a chance on her, we'd have to wait again.
The exodus from the island was not that hard to explain,
But the hills behind were flourishin' in their old, great domain.

Recording:

[Coal Mining Days](#). Archie MacInnis. John C. O'Donnell Tape Collection. Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University.