

Coal mining in Sebastian County

Glen McDaniel

In Sebastian County, Arkansas, where I have lived my whole life, coal mines provided jobs to people from 1880 to 1965. But they also caused a lot of problems. These problems did not go away when the coal mines closed.

Almost every family in the district had someone working for the coal company, or supplying goods or services to them or the people that worked for the coal companies. Some boys as young as ten years old started working in the mines.

Although coal mining was a good income for most families, it also had a bad side. Coal mining is a very dangerous occupation. It left a number of

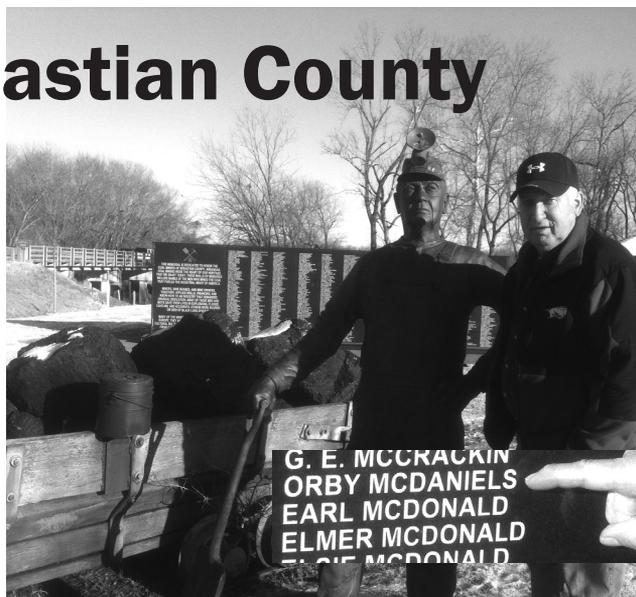
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families, without husbands or sons. In the mines, the roof and walls can collapse, and there can be explosions, fires, and poison gas. Even if you were not killed in a mining accident, you breathed the coal dust. Most miners who live to be older have some

type of respiratory disease such as black lung. New technology and regulations have helped to make mining safer today, but it is still a dangerous job.

In the 1960s, the coal companies moved out of the area. They left all of the machinery to rust and they had destroyed much of the land. The strip pits were up to 80 feet deep and there was dirt piled up 40 or 50 feet high. Some of the land has since been reclaimed.

Burning coal for energy is bad for the environment. It puts out a lot of smoke that is thicker and blacker than other types of smoke. When it rains,



The author stands by a statue honoring the coal miners of Sebastian County. Inset: the author's father, Orby McDaniel is listed on the memorial.

the rain picks up the toxins from the polluted air and carries them down to the ground and the waterways. This rain is called "acid rain." It can sterilize whole areas, leaving them so barren that nothing can grow.

The health of many people as well as the landscape has been destroyed by the burning of coal. Strip mining destroys the land and defaces it so it cannot be used. The underground mines pollute the ground water that runs into our lakes and streams.

Coal mining seemed good for the economy. It put people to work and it provided cheap fuel to industries. But, in the long run, coal mining proved to be costly for the environment and the miners. The government has had to pay disability payments to all the miners suffering from black lung. And the cost of reclaiming the land usually falls on the government as well. A lot of areas that are nowhere near coal mines have had to deal with the effects of acid rain. I hope we find ways to improve mining and the use of coal so that it will be safer.

Glen McDaniel has lived his whole life in Sebastian County, AR. He is a student in the ABE class at Fort Smith Educational Center in Fort Smith, AR.

There Are No Jobs on a Dead Planet

Judy Bonds

In southern West Virginia we live in a war zone. Three and one-half million pounds of explosives are being used every day to blow up the mountains. Blasting our communities, blasting our homes, poisoning us, trying to intimidate us. I don't mind being poor. I mind being blasted and poisoned. There ARE no jobs on a dead planet.

Judy Bonds was the co-director of Coal River Mountain Watch in West Virginia. Bonds was a coal miner's daughter and granddaughter. She started fighting for justice in the Appalachian coalfields in 1998. She died from cancer in January 2011 at the age of 58. Photo from <www.ohiocitizen.org>.



What do You Think?

Study the information on these two pages. Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of coal.

Would you be willing to give up any of the advantages of coal in order to *not* have the disadvantages?



This area of Perry, Kentucky, was once hills and trees. The photo shows the results of mountaintop removal, a technique used in coal mining. Photo from <www.mountainroadshow.com>.