Domestic Dirt in the Coal Rush: 
Women’s struggle for home and community

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Women’s struggle for home and community

Abstract

This paper deals with the historical role of house and community as ‘home’ for mining women and men and the roles that women have played in the fight to make their towns liveable places. It includes discussion of life in the ‘early days’ of the towns, encompassing such matters as early housing, health, facilities, family life, town life, wages and conditions, the treatment of single women and the role of wives; and the role of women in two major housing-related disputes - the Moura housing strike of 1963 and the housing tax strike through most of the Bowen Basin in 1980.

Introduction

Domestic dirt permeates all of life when your home is a tent at the mouth of the mine. Life is hard here: for the miner; for the miner’s children but most particularly for the miners’ wife. Here we look at the older people’s descriptions of the different roles that women played– at home, at work in the home and active community members. We discuss life in the ‘early days’ of the towns, encompassing such matters as early housing, health, facilities, family life, town life, conditions, the treatment of single women and the role of wives. These are the same sort of people that Clare Williams1 describes in her earlier book about a Queensland town, as working class families working within working class cultures that often struggle to survive. Relative prosperity has come to the Bowen Basin Mines at a cost and reading the stories of the older people we will see in some cases how significant this cost was.

This paper represents part of a contemporary oral history project, Women in the Coal Rushes.2 We interviewed 114 mining women and men, in fifteen communities, nine of which were or had been primarily mining communities. We received many comments on the diverse nature of the shifts, the rosters and specifically the twelve hour shifts, and what they were doing to the health ad well being of the mining communities. The distribution of our interviews is shown in the table below. Interviewees names have been changed, when quoted, for reasons of privacy.

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2 Financial support for this project came from the Mining and Energy Division, Queensland District, of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union.
Table 1: Number and location of interviews by gender and town

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<th>Mining Towns studied:</th>
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* includes interviews held in Mackay, Tieri, Yeppoon, Rockhampton, Gladstone, Bowen.
** excludes ‘out of town’ interviews listed above.
Note: More people were interviewed (sometimes up to 3 people in one interview) than interviews.

Early days

Domestic dirt took many forms in the Queensland mining community where their struggles began ‘in tents with dirt floors.’ The struggle with domestic dirt is different in the different lives of the different nine coal mine towns where we did our research. It varies according to different locations; different degrees of isolation, different cultures and, very importantly, different periods in which mines started and in some cases went into serious decline. Where housing was non existent, inadequate or incomplete peoples’ intimacy with bush life was likely to be immediate. For example, Norma from Moura remembered that her early 1960s house was not sealed

and in the rafters there was a tree snake that used to camp there and my bed was under it. Well one day my step mother and I saw it and we were trying to get this snake off the roof and it chased us I didn’t hang around I just jumped over the rail’.

There were also goannas. Norma’s uncle

said to me if you see a goanna and the dog chases it lie down because they will think you are a tree and they will try and run up your legs. So the dog had a goanna just over at the house and it started to run and I took off in case it ran up my legs.

Overall these are very different lives from those led by the majority of other Australian at the time.

Ipswich: Nineteenth century to the 1950s

Queensland’s first mine was built at Red bank, Ipswich in 1843 and this mine dominated the area until most Ipswich mines between 1990 and 2000. Kaitlyn’s husband Eddie told us that ‘coal was first discovered in Ipswich in 1825 on the banks of the Bremer River’ by early explorer John Oxley.
The mine I worked at was just down on the river bank from that mine. That mine was a convict tunnel. They tunneled it all out and tipped it into a barge and ferried it in the barge down the Brisbane and the Bremer Rivers.

Kaitlyn was a fifth generation, Ipswich-born girl. Her father was a railway worker who would not let her go to work because he ‘thought that girl’s should stop home and not go to work.’ This was, from Kaitlyn’s perspective, a very bad idea. During the war she was able to go and work for the Red Cross which she much preferred to being at home as ‘it got very narrow at home.’ Because Eddie was very busy with union work it was difficult for Kaitlyn to cope with rearing their three children, but no you got used to it, because they got used to being without their father, in fact they wondered who the stranger was that came home every now and then, but you manage and he was only away a week here and a week there, sometimes it was bad, [if] he was longer but, I don’t know, you just went on.4

After her marriage to Eddie, Kaitlyn helped re-form the women’s auxiliary in Ipswich in 1957 which according to Norm, a friend of theirs, was ‘active right from the word go’.5 Her tasks with it were numerous including a crucial role in maintaining contacts with the Union of Australian Women (UAW), a national organisation formed in 1950 ‘to work for the status and well being of women in a peaceful and environmentally safe world’.6 Her daughter Cheryl, many years later, became the UAW President.

In the 1950s, while McCarthyism was underway in the USA, anti-communist hysteria also hit Australia, exacerbated by the Petrov affair7 and culminating in a split in the Australian Labor Party. Kaitlyn found that being in the women’s auxiliary made her the butt of criticism because some men did not necessarily like their wives being involved with the organisation or with her because her husband was a Communist party member. ‘It was a very bad time for our family and the friends that we had in the communist party… it was so frightening because of things they were going to do.’8

Clare, was the daughter of an Ipswich miner, although she had been born in Collinsville. She spoke of how her father began in the underground mine in the 1920s at Amberley (13 km from Ipswich) when he was seventeen. He worked in coal seams 18 inches (45 cm) high by chipping away at the coal whilst lying on his back. Her mother was: ‘always a very gentle type person and dad just provided’. She never left ‘the home and she never worked a day after the day she was married and she was a home maker and she always found [strikes and accidents] that sort of thing so hard – it tore her to pieces.’ He was always fighting for the men and for himself. He kept that part of his life away from the home and we were very lucky, my dad wasn’t a social person. Everybody would want to be his mate and work with him. But after the five o’clock knock off, he never saw

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4 Collie op cit.
5 Women’s auxiliary’s see Chapter 3.
6 http://home.vicnet.net.au/~uawvic/
7 Whitlam, N. (19XX). Nest of Traitors.
8 Collie op cit.
anybody because he didn’t drink or smoke and we just did things as a family... He started at five but then he would be home at three. And he would want his evening meal all ready at that hour because he had worked hard all day. And then later on mum would give us supper.

She remembers him with love and tenderness for ‘we always had such a good life... we were pretty lucky us three kids.’

Robyn’s father, like Clare’s, was an Ipswich man, and she too considered herself an Ipswich girl although she had lived in Moura since 1964. Her dad worked as an underground miner since he was fifteen when he too crawled into seams on his ‘belly’. The advantages for him, however, were that ‘you didn’t have set hours; you showed up for work early in the morning, you filled so many carts or wagons and that was it. Once you had them filled you knocked off for the day’ but because the older fellows ‘guided you, so you helped them fill their wagons. Because you’re young, you can get it done quick but the older guys had all the experience and they usually teamed you with an older guy and he could tell you what to listen for if things were starting to crack’ and alert you to when things were going wrong.

In those early Ipswich years mining companies were small, diverse and often owner-operated. We asked Eddie whether these ‘family’ owned firms had worse conditions and Eddie replied that ‘no they were better being the family-owned mines than some of the multinationals that are getting around now. They were more safety-conscious’ because miners did not rely on anybody else for ‘their safety that was how they were brought up; you look after your own. Don’t mind about the boss he won’t look after you.’

The last Ipswich underground mine closed in 1997 and the last remaining open cut mine at Rosewood is closing as write this book. When Eddie was asked in 2007 ‘How do you feel about that?’ he said that it was inevitable because Ipswich ‘relied mainly on domestic markets and they disappeared. Coal trains they stopped burning coal, the gasworks stopped making gas from coal, there were a number of other things it was a very difficult minefield to mine actually. All steep seams and faults it was all underground.’

**Collinsville: 1920s to 1960s**

The oldest coal town we visited in the Bowen Basin, Collinsville, is 88km inland from Bowen (where the movie *Australia* was filmed), 273 km northwest of Mackay, and 1,140km north of Brisbane. It is geographically isolated from the other Bowen Basin towns. Irene and Kirk, a married Collinsville couple, spoke of times travelling

> four hours to go to Bowen. ... The creeks would be washed out and you would be struggling with the creeks and you would be climbing in and out of them. We just had the old Ford with the back in it. And the kids would be standing in the back and they said “Oh dad the wheel has come off” and the wheel went tumbling down the road.

*Four hours to Bowen - that was a good trip!*

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9 Ipswich city Council, 2008, Media Release, Only 1% of Ipswich built over former mines, 30 April.
Nowadays you are passed by drivers trying to do it in under one hour. Coal was first discovered in Collinsville in 1866 but not systematically mined there until 1912. A railway was built in 1917 and the town began developing in 1921.\textsuperscript{10} It became a State government mine until 1961 when, with a fortnight’s notice, the state closed it down and sold the leases, probably in an attempt to remove the influence of radicals in the mine.\textsuperscript{11} The leases were bought by overseas corporate interests who recommenced operations a year later.

Betty was born in Collinsville in 1924, three years after the town put down its roots. As her grandfather was a mine manager and her father and husband were miners Betty’s was sceptical as to class divisions in the town. She thought the smallness of the town prevented class divisions: ‘There wasn’t the divides there are now. There probably were in parts in the bigger inner cities but in country towns, no. The towns were too small for that.’ Her father had come to Collinsville from another mine at Blair Athol riding a horse and he had ‘left mum to come by boat’ as there was no railway line north of Rockhampton. ‘My dad was a good horseman and he used to have horse teams. But that took him away from home too long so that is why he went into the mine’ but her mother ‘has never been on a boat since.’

Betty had very clear and precise memories about what it meant to live in Collinsville in the 1920s. She spoke with authority and conviction when she said:

We are going right back to 1926. It was a different world to what the mainline Australian’s people were living. We were a really small country, a tiny, tiny little country town with no power, we didn’t have electricity here until after I was married and had children. We had a boiler you know a copper boiler in a stand. And you had what was called the ‘pot stick’ that you lifted the clothes out of the boiling water and you dumped them into a tub. You had a set of three tubs dumped them into the draining box first then you put them in the first big tub and washed them until they were clean. Then you put them into a rinse then you put them into a blue rinse. The blue rinse was what made the whites, white. Then you had a little one for the starched things.’

Unlike some of her contemporaries, Betty did not starch or iron sheets. She did however have a set of irons that stood on her wood stove to keep hot

as they lost their heat you simply unclipped the handle and you would put that onto the stove and clipped it onto a fresh hot one and away you ironed again. Well then we got petrol irons. Oh golly, weren’t they the last thing! It had a petrol tank on the back of it and you filled that with petrol and then you put some methylated spirits into the iron itself and then when that heated up the petrol you could turn the petrol on and it lit a flame inside the iron. We didn’t have bad accidents but sometimes your iron would spring a leak and catch on fire and you would be beating your clothes.

Betty described this not as dangerous, rather as ‘Dolly Parton times, only we weren’t

hillbillies.

Gladys remembers a good life when she grew up in Collinsville, even though their earliest house had only Hessian bags walls. ‘The bedroom had iron and corrugated walls but the front part where the kitchen part was it had bags there. But it was home’.

When you talk about that toilet, we had the proper little building. You stepped up in to it because it was on four blocks, with a seat there, where the pans were put in. The night watchman once a week used to come and empty them. He just put it on his shoulder and off he would go.

She remembered the early days very fondly because ‘we had a wonderful life mum and dad spoilt us rotten. You wouldn’t say you were bored, ever.’

Irene and Kirk spoke of their families; her father had been a station master at Collinsville and Kirk’s father and mother had migrated from Scotland in 1926. His father had mined in Scotland and then he got a job at the underground mine in Collinsville and Kirk followed his fathers down the mine ‘because most of the lads in those days followed their fathers’. They spoke of the physical toll that the harshness of their lives took on their parents. Irene said

Kirk’s mother was very frail and life was too hard for her. The bare floor with the Hessian walls and the toilet in the backyard and using a kerosene tin to boil up and all that sort of thing – doing clothes and her life – was too hard and she died after twelve months. So Jimmy’s auntie helped bring [the children] up with the help of his father. Mostly they were all miner’s here at that time, and they were great mob, they all helped each other.

For the original Collinsville miners, many including Kirk, built their own houses. When we asked them to describe their home as it had been when they first moved in Irene answered:

It was more or less a shell. It was a room in the middle and a veranda half way around it. Then we had the bathroom and we had a backyard toilet. Of course you had to walk half a mile down the yard to the loo. We had a little wood stove in a recess and we used to have very cold winters and the children would always go around the stove in the morning to get the warmth off it.

Collinsville had lots of entertainment to offer the mining families; they had ‘a picture show that we used to go to’ and they had ‘dance halls too there was always somewhere to go or you would go to somebody’s house and play cards and of course you always took your children everywhere.’ There was no childcare and no networks of grandparents or siblings to look after children. ‘Nobody offered to mind them or you didn’t expect anybody to mind them.’ They took their children along, down to the river to ‘catch Barra’ where the children ‘used to come and catch little frogs with what ever bait they had. There was basketball, cricket and football that was all going then, vigoro.’ Irene and Kirk had enjoyed bringing up their three children (three in four and a half years) because ‘they were good kids and they never got into trouble or anything and they would all go to the creeks. That is where they learned to swim. I didn’t know they could swim.’
Though Betty said that the smallness of the towns precluded social division, Kirk and Irene disagreed. They observed that the managers lived (as they currently do) in one particular part of the town away from the workers. Bosses ‘lived up on the hill and they had ‘good’ houses.’

Under emergency powers during the war years, 1939 to 1945, Australian men were requisitioned into work in the mines. Betty had wanted to join the army but had not been allowed to because she was a nurse.

You came under manpower where your choices were taken away from you for the good of the country. Every week your employer stamped your little book that you were present and that you hadn’t run away to join the forces. Lots of the boys tried but they were hauled back by the Police.

She stayed in Collinsville where she met her future husband Tom, a miner manpowered with his father to Collinsville, the nearest mine to the port of Townsville, where American coal-fired warships were based.

So they all tramped to Collinsville – ‘You go there and work!’ – because the American Army were fighting in the Pacific. Every coalminer in Queensland was manpowered to Collinsville, and they worked round and round and round the clock.

For young women, like Betty, living in male dominated Collinsville throughout the second-world-war was great - a good time to be young, single and a woman

With every miner and his family from Queensland here, plus all the extra people that it took, this town was jumping! It was a wonderful place to be just on eighteen and free. I had gone nursing and you had to live in the quarters. That was compulsory. Free of mum and all. We had a ball. We had all the boys in the world here.

Kathy was also born in 1924 and went with her family to a mine at Ogmore, near the coast. When she was sixteen Kathy left the mine town to go to Rockhampton where she worked as a tailor in 1940. At that time the Americans dominated the war effort from their ‘big camp outside Rockie called Pan Doyne.’ We asked Kathy what it had been like and she said described relations between the Americans and Australians as tense

There was a troop train of Australians and a troop train of Americans came into Rockhampton and there were guns and everything on Stanley Street Station… I would say that it was that they had more money to spend…

I had a friend in Rockie and she had an open veranda at her house and I can remember this as if it happened today. This American Negro soldier he just walked in because the Kelpa Hotel wasn’t far down Lakes Creek Road. And he was walking up there and he must have seen the verandah and laid down and went to sleep. So she called the American [military police] to tell them that he was there you know to see if they wanted to come and pick him up. So they came and they just shot him dead on that bed. Just shot him.
She was a mess for ages after. She said ‘I would have never have rang them, I thought they would just come and take him to sober up’ …

I tell you they did some horrible things. Then they got so many Americans you couldn’t walk up East Street in Rockie and they would accost you to talk to them and all this sort of thing. So my father said ‘Well you are not staying in Rockie any longer’ so he hauled me off home. I was about sixteen then and I went home to Ogmore. And I was working in a boarding house with twenty-three miners.

Robyn was born in Collinsville where her father worked in the mine for several years, having moved there from Ipswich in 1941.

It was a really volatile place in those days because it was the war time and dad tired to enlist, but because he was a [coalminer] they wanted the coal for the ships and would take him. So he went up there into the coal field and the work was okay I think for him. But mum just said that they treated the Ipswich people so badly, because they felt like they were coming into their area and taking their work of their men… She was just newly married and she had no children and they went up there and it was terrible…

Everybody had voucher types things for food. And she said that you would stand in this in this ungodly line of women and they would just push you aside. She said it was really terrible for the first few years. But slowly but surely – my father was a top miner – I think he became respected in the area and consequently mum was too. And things got a bit better. And then dad had this dreadful, dreadful accident.

The month before Robyn’s birth, her father walked into a shot which had been put in the wrong place. It ‘flew back and he copped it all in the face and the upper body. He was hanging on by a thread’ Clare’s mother did not hear the alarm but

She saw these men walk up the road with Daddy’s helmet and billy and she knew…His face was just blown to pieces, his eyes were out of the socket and they said that he wouldn’t survive it but he went into hospital and they saved his life… They did save one eye, but they left the injured eye in – because there was a doctor there and dad always said to him, “Don’t ever let them take that eye out,” because it helps somehow in the back to balance, because I think he could always see a shadow. There was no real vision, but there was always something there.

It was a dreadful time for Robyn’s mother, but one which transformed her relationship with the other women in the town.

He was 12 months recuperating and then of course mum had me the next week at Collinsville hospital. So she was there and he was over there, and she has got this little 18 month old boy at home…That is when these other women rallied – the ones that were so horrible, were just so wonderful to her and she made lifelong friends from them.
Twelve months later, Dad came back to Collinsville and recuperated. He went back into the mines up there and worked, always underground. But during that time it was dreadful. He was so traumatised with it and so upset and angry with everything. She said at one stage he put his fist through the wall and things like that and the frustration was just unbelievable. Two years later she was having another bub and she just said, “We are going home. I am not staying here,” and they came back here [to Ipswich] and that was in ‘47.

Biloela women

The next generation of coal miners opened mines in the 1940s. One of these was the mine that opened near Biloela, a small rural town at the southern end of the Bowen Basin, 594 km north of Brisbane and 118 km west of Gladstone. Coal had been found in the 1890s but people waited until 1942 to mine it at what became the Callide mine.12

We interviewed ten people from Biloela one of whom was an elderly woman Daisy. She had grown up in a small Welsh mining village as the eldest in a family of ten children. Daisy was an unfavoured stepchild, primarily because she was a girl, which meant she would not go down the mine and earn vital household money early. She helped her stepmother look after the younger children, wash and sew. When her father and brothers came home from the mine in Wales at six every evening they would

sit down in their black, the men and the boys would sit down in their black. And when he was having his dinner, he’d put the boiler on to boil on the fire for them to have a bath, and you’d sit in front of the bath, tin bath in front of the fire. We girls had to get out of the room when the boys would bath. We had the front room but we never used it, no we were upstairs in the bedroom or hiding away or shut in the bathroom.

As she got older she had to assume more of the household tasks ‘I had to help wash everything before the men went back to work the next day. They used to wear mole skin trousers and they’d last forever.’ And her step mother would be

sitting there kneeling and patching and I had to thread the needles because we didn't have no electric lights in those days. We had candles and oil lamps. I learnt to knit socks for the children. I was a nine year old and I could knit a pair of socks for the baby and whenever I could I used to just put them on and pull them up over my legs.

This was because of the intense cold and snow. Daisy left home and school when she was fourteen and went to live with her aunty, when she was old enough to look after herself.

Then I was in the war factories for four and a half years and in the meantime I never went home. I never went back to my father or my stepmother. I was in the war factory and that's why I don't sing very well now because, working there, the powder got into my larynx. I've never been able to sing since then.

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She met her future husband on VE (Victory in Europe) night: ‘that's when we met and we walked for miles and I thought I was going to wear my feet out. He was a fairly big fellow, only twenty-three himself two years older than me, and he was handsome.’ Daisy emigrated to Australia and moved to Collinsville in 1968 when it was a ‘one horse town…There was English, Welsh, Dutch and Irish, all there. The power station was on strike; we had the big strike while we were there. But he wasn't working in the power station. He worked in the mine.’ She later moved to Biloela.

Another older woman, Davina, had lived in Biloela most of her life. She spoke of the financial poverty of the early days when her husband had a ‘cream run’, before getting a job at Kianga mine near Moura.

I could get the meals out of a leg of mutton then. When I eventually got a house I went and had my own chooks and ducks. You make do even if you have to go and sell bottles… We had a concrete floor with no linoleum on it and no water laid on. We had a loo way up in the back yard and a cold shower under the tank, and then we had a baby.

**Blackwater and Moura: 1960s**

Blackwater was discovered by explorer Ludwig Leichhardt in 1845. The first unsuccessful attempts to mine the area were made in 1892 but it was not until the 1960s that this next generation of mines was built.13 Blackwater is towards the middle of the Bowen Basin, 195 km west of Rockhampton and 796 kms from Brisbane. In 1962 the town had 25 people; twenty years later in 1982 it had over 8000.14 Through the early days the major open cut mine at Blackwater was operated by an American company, Utah Mining. Myra was a vivacious older woman from Blackwater who got married and went first to live in a caravan in her in-laws back yard for two months waiting for a house.

We were paying $5 a week rent. It was twenty-two footer. It was two months in the van – it wasn’t very long at all really. He had put his name down like 12 months before we got a house. It was just in the backyard of Les’s parent’s house. Les’s parents had already – when the mine closed in Baralaba - moved to here because they got jobs in the mine and then they already had a house.

These women were living with lots of native flora and fauna. Myra said that ‘

there were snakes and roos and dingos and all the different animals, you know. Like early on they were all getting disturbed as the place had been pretty quiet and then the mine had opened up. We had a snake under our house once where we are now. I think he was a children’s python or something like that – we are not too sure what it was.

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Moura is another busy Bowen Basin mining town, with a population around 2000, situated in the middle of an agricultural and pastoral heartland. The Dawson River flows through the town which is located in the southern part of the Basin, 184 km southwest of Gladstone and 609 km north of Brisbane. Moura coal was first mined at Kianga under the authority of owner-leaser Cecil Theiss and his brothers. The Kianga mine opened in 1958 driven by the new demand to sell coal to the Japanese.

Before the Moura Housing strike of 1963 housing conditions were deplorable. ‘We lived in tents and caravans and the only water we had came in the truck that watered the roads in the mine, and there’d be sticks and leaves and mud and all sorts of stuff, you know’ said Molly. Union secretary Blue Courtnadge reported in March, 1960, that ‘there were families with youngsters in tents with dirt floors when it rained water ran everywhere and with thunder boxes over holes in the ground as their toilets. Water came from the river and parents had to boil it before the children could drink it’. The shower was from a bore that had water so brackish and harsh that you needed to use liquid detergent. Eddie, the Union President, had told us that ‘Theiss Brothers were the first to start mining in Queensland’ and that they ‘supplied nothing. They said ‘We will sell you a tent.’

Robyn (or Miss Robyn to her work mates) works as a miner. She moved as a child with her whole family to live by the Dawson River in a tent so that her father could mine at Kianga. She told us that her younger sister was born at the river in a tent. Dad delivered her because by the time the ambulance arrived… whoosh there she was. You could never say to my sister, don’t

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17 ibid.
leave that door open were you born in a tent? Mum used to say you might have been born in a tent but that doesn’t mean you can leave the door open…

When we first came here we were out at tent city, out at the mine gate out there, but dad didn’t like the fact the tents were right beside one another so he moved us out to the river and we lived by the river there until the houses were built.

When they got their house eventually her parent bought their beds last,

but that’s the way my parents were. My mother came through concentration camps. When she was about three or four she said her first memory is of digging in the snow because she could see something green and because it was green she knew it was a piece of bread.

A later memory of her mothers was when she was seven and a sailor on the emigrant ship to Australia giving her a ‘white thing and she turned around to her mother and said “what is it?” It was bread. She had never seen white bread.’

Other women such as Doreen described what it was like when they arrived in Moura in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Doreen was at the Kianga mine with her husband and two boys in the 1960s. She was determined not to stay on the coast and see her husband at weekends. They had a ‘dirt floor and a wood stove and a kerosene fridge.’ And her two small boys were not at school when she ‘came there in 1959.’ They first lived in a tent

with the two boys and so was everybody else you know with pit toilets. The mine dug them. A lady used to come around with milk in cream cans and you would just grab your Billy and get how much you wanted.

The delivery of meat from nearby Theodore was organised

once a week and it was all dirt in those terrible days. Black soil it was. You would just write out what you wanted and you would put a certain amount of money in and that is how you did it. You just got your change back and all your things if you were lucky. Everyone had kerosene fridges when they worked – they were terrible things weren’t they? They used to always go off. You would have to clean the wick everyday and fill it up with kerosene. You might go somewhere and when you come home it was out and the fridge was warm, everything warm. You had to start all over again. They were a pest.

As Doreen had no access to electricity she was forced to do the washing in ‘a kerosene tin and hang them because there was no washing machines’ although she did have a ‘mix master that you do by hand. I would probably start at six I suppose and so you would have to be up about five. The dust found everything.’ When they first came to live at the mouth of the mine,

we didn’t have anywhere to go and they wanted a caretaker so we took on the caretaking job and we were in a small hut. The four of us… we were only there a couple of weeks and they came and said ‘Right, out! We are going to start the mine tomorrow” so we didn’t have anywhere to go. They wanted the hut for their office
or something. Anyway you didn’t argue, you just got out. Well we had to get out and we went down to Burt’s. I don’t know how far that was from the gate – a fair way anyway – and he said that we could stay in his wool shed till he started shearing. So we said “Great.”

The woolshed had fence post steps that were not fenced off, so they had to keep an eye on the baby Gordon in case he fell off.

It was a fair way to the ground about four feet I suppose to the ground. We had to cook outside on an open fire just a couple of rails across and you would put your pot on and it would boil away.

Her husband spent the day at the mine but finished at three. Doreen went on to say that there were fifty five people living on the river bank with only one cesspit and the mines were blaming the miners for bringing their wives and their families and that conditions there were their responsibility. Doreen spent five years living under these conditions, ‘but we didn’t think anything of it because it was different in those days. And I know that is a cliché but everyone else was doing it and there was nothing else. There was nothing in Moura.’

Eventually mine owner, Cecil Thiess made available two barracks with a mess and a cook. ‘It wasn’t the best. One day we found our lettuce leaves moving on the plate because of all the grubs in the lettuce.’ 18 By 1961 there were 68 employees with wives and children living in tents with only four showers between them and two of the four out of order, when union boss Tom Miller made his report in 1961. 19 Only the single men lived in huts.

19 Ibid.
In 1963 one of the Moura women, Kerianne, was sent to the Arbitration Court by the union, to represent the mining families and to present to the Arbitration Court, Judge Gallagher the families’ case. By then this woman Kerianne and her family had been living in a tent for four years since 1959. This is what she told us:

Yes. That was a bit traumatic for me because I was pregnant too. When I went down to Brisbane I was about five months and I had six daughters. And no water, nothing, we were in the sheds and that was when the unions started to get a bit toey I think about all the housing. They done everything, accommodation, paid our fares and what have you and we stayed – I can’t even think of the hotel that we stayed at in Brisbane, it was pretty close to the Arbitration Court.

It was daunting, because actually, if you looked back in the archives, I am sure that someone said to me that I was the first women ever to appear in Arbitration Court. Because that was the first time ever that anyone had gone into the Arbitration Court to represent the mine workers, the women, the children to get houses. Because we were living – not like pigs, I wouldn’t say that, but I would say that we were living, I mean… We were living like we should not have been living. Water was delivered by the mine truck.

So Kerrianne filled up a bottle of the Dawson River water delivered to them by the mine truck into a 44 gallon drum.

[I] took it with me and when I got up in Court to have my say on the living conditions, I produced the bottle of water and I said to the judge; Judge Gallagher (I had a pretty well association with Judge Gallagher through the years after that, would you believe. He took a liking to me. He really did and when – I am getting ahead of myself.) Well anyway, when I went and produced the water I stood up and said, “This is what we have got to drink!”
Well he looked over and he seen it and said, “My goodness,” he said. “Is that what you drink?” I said, “It sure is.” And he said, “I think you might have to dilute it with a bit of whisky, wouldn’t you?”

Everyone laughed and I said, ‘Wow’. I didn’t drink that much in them days’, so you could tell that he was really disgusted and he was the one that handed down the decision that first six houses must be built by the company at the time. I can remember one of the Yanks names too was Harvey Grounds and he wasn’t really impressed that we were down there to get these houses. It must have been about 12 months after that the houses were built and finished and then we got a house.’

Eddie was the union President during this time and he told the Theiss brothers

“Right from now on you will get no employees until you build houses and you will build the houses before they start work in your mines.” And I said “what is more you will supply them free of rent.” We didn’t quite get away with that – they paid five dollars a week.

The 1970s and 1980s: Dysart, Middlemount, Moranbah and Tieri
Dysart\textsuperscript{20} is 339 km west of coastal Rockhampton, 250 kms from Mackay, and 940km from Brisbane, in Broadsound shire. The town was purpose built in 1973 as a mining town, to provide housing for the miners at the Saraji and Norwich Park mines.

Barbara was a mother and a hairdresser who came to Dysart with her husband and two children in the early 1970s. The family lived in a caravan. She thought it was ‘great it was very social because they used to work three eight hour shifts at Saraji’ and they had ‘a basketball court built near the caravan park.’ Her husband had come out to work in the construction of the mines first at Peak Downs and then he worked on the Saraji Mine and ‘by then our oldest started school so it was time we looked at settling down and Leon applied for a position at Saraji Mine and so we came to Dysart on the 19\textsuperscript{th} of October 1975’. Whilst her husband worked in the mines Barabara ‘looked after the kids’

I am a hairdresser by trade I had a nice little business out there on the construction site there are plenty of people wanting haircuts… it wasn’t a properly structured business you know I didn’t pay tax or anything. It was just for friends.

Throughout this time Barbara’s family of four lived in their caravan the same as everyone else ‘we fenced our little area it wasn’t big but it was big enough for the kids to play and Leon erected a carport to keep his tools in’. The caravan was eight feet wide.

Then you have your annexe which is double the size so you have got your van and your annexe out to the side. You virtually only prepared your food and slept in it. You had your outside area and lots of nice shady trees and we planted a lawn and fenced it.

Approximately one hundred people ‘in the dragline part’ of the site shared twelve toilets and twelve showers. The laundry had six washing machines and four dryers. But even though ‘there were two lots of facilities’ there were problems.

Yes people would put their load of washing on and then go off and probably have a cup of tea with their neighbour and forget to get their washing out and then there would be a bit of a barney\textsuperscript{21} going when someone would throw someone’s washing out on the floor and then there would be a bit of a cat fight in the laundry.

So she bought her own twin tub and she got Leon to make her a little clothes line. ‘You know you could live as nice as you like’. Barbara told us that people played pranks on each other. She had neighbours who were

really terrified of frogs. The guy that lived next door to us, the boys came to pick him up for work and he jumped in the car into the back between two fellows. And someone let a frog go in the car and he just dived straight out the window. He fixed them up though. On Friday night we would go up to the wet canteen. We would have dinner in the mess and a few drinks in the wet canteen. He caught a goanna and let it go in the

http://www.bowenbasin.cqu.edu.au/basin_data/town.html#dysart

\textsuperscript{21} Barney is a fight.
bar. You see all these big macho men sitting up on barstools like crows, like babies. They were funny buggers they just got even.

Middlemount, also located in Broadsound Shire, was established in 1979,\(^{22}\) to service the German Creek and Foxleigh mines. The current population is 3000.\(^{23}\) Amongst the people we interviewed at Middlemount, none now spoke of struggles with the mining company for housing – quite the opposite. A Middlemount couple called Kay and Vance were very enthusiastic about living in Middlemount.

Well we were lucky, we had a choice of three houses when I came to town so I could choose which style of home I wanted. And we came in, looked at the house, once Vance had been told he’d got the job…then we went back into Mackay to buy furniture and curtains. That’s when my eldest son was born, because we’d done that much walking around Mackay that he’d decided to come a month early. So when we moved into town I actually moved into town with a nine day old baby.

Middlemount was, they said, a good place

for bringing up children, I would not have chosen a better place than here because everything the kids have needed has been here, like Stephen played rugby league, Thomas used to play soccer, Matthew plays rugby league, there’s sports there for them to play and they both done a whole twelve years of schooling here. Both Stephen and Thomas have done apprenticeships; they’re both employed at a mine. Thomas is an electrician and Stephen is a fitter.

Others, like Clarry, expressed similar positive feelings

I always reckon here would have been a good town for kiddies because everybody knew everybody. If your kiddie was walking down the street and there was some strange man or whatever and I'm driving past you’d go ‘hey’ and that would be the end of it.

Close to Tieri is the most recent purpose built mining town, Tieri,\(^{24}\) with a population of approximately 1600. It was built in 1983 and services the German Creek, Oaky Creek and Gregory-Crimum mines. The distance to Brisbane is 917 km, to Blackwater 160 km, and to Rockhampton 329 km away. Eileen was an original settler who moved to Tieri from Blackwater. When she came from Blackwater to Tieri

it used to be about four, to four and a half hours, when Gary went out for his interview because it was just a dirt, corrugated bull dusty road to get there. As we’re driving along we’re thinking ‘what the hell are we doing coming all this way?’ The facilities were few for ‘there was nothing there actually.

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But again they were amongst the lucky ones and they ‘got a brand new house - that was lovely’, even though in the beginning there was ‘no preschool; which our daughter was starting’ and there ‘were no shops.’ At the mine site in Oakey Creek they had a bank with bankers coming there once a week ‘So you had to go to the bank out there once a week and that was a highlight for the kids because they got an ice cream when they got out there. They still remember that’.

The school had started but not preschool so they set one up ‘out at the construction camp in one of the mess areas. So we used to take her out there and it was good because they had open spaces’. She went on to speak fondly about the friendships she had there and is still in contact with people from the early days,

because we’re the ones who had got a lot of things up and running, a lot of clubs and a kindy. There were lots of meetings, lots of talks over coffees. Our second one, he was ready to go to a kindy; there was nothing. There were a couple of ladies, one was an ex teacher, one was an ex nurse. So they said they’d try and do something. There was a group of us who all had kids the same age that were behind them and we went to a hall and got it all going and you sort of had donations of toys, and I think that’s what drew everyone closer. We sit back and think what we’ve achieved.

Another important bonding factor was the lack of relative networks for them to fall back on in this geographically isolated area.

that was just your little community. You never felt alone because there was that good friendship. There were no grandparents. Most of them all had little ones and I think whenever you did anything it was always family orientated because that was just how it was. You couldn’t leave your little one with someone because you were always together; the whole community.

Others noted comparatively recent community changes. Husband and wife Kirsten, Kelvin and their friend Tracey, believed that, socially, the town had gone into decline due to the twelve hour work shifts in the mines. Kelvin a miner said ‘we used to work a seven day roster, so we used to have more time off because you only worked eight hours, so you had more family time, more time in the community’

Moranbah26 is another thriving, single-purpose mining town with a population of nearly 8000 people, located 193 km west of Mackay, 408km from Rockhampton or 113 km from Clermont – or as Vaughan expressed it, referring to days long past, ‘Clermont was a six stubby drive, it was a twelve stubby drive to Mackay, you know, and a carton drive to Rocky.’ Moranbah was established in 1971 by the Utah Development Company Ltd to service mines at Goonyella and Peak Downs Mines. Since then, the Goonyella Riverside coalmine to the north of the town has also been established and the railway to the Hay Point coal loading terminal near Mackay was constructed in 1972. Roxanne was one of the earliest settlers there. She said ‘When we first came up here it was a narrow piece of bitumen and the rest was dirt when we first came up to look at the town.’

\[\text{25 Kindergarten.}\]
\[\text{26 Bowen Basin Mining Research Exchange Accessed 8.11.2008,}\]
\[\text{http://www.bowenbasin.cqu.edu.au/basin_data/town.html#moranbah}\]
Some 1980s disputes

One of the first major things that Roxanne recalled about Moranbah was the housing strike of 1980 that spread across the whole Bowen Basin. She said

that went on for about two years the tradesmen worked about six months in about two years. I used to voice my opinions about that. I didn’t want them to put the rents up. I’d even go onto the main street and got myself onto ABC TV. It was hard but we managed it with hand-outs.

Elsa was living in Blackwater when the 1980 housing tax strike happened. She remembered it vividly. ‘I was mixed up in the housing strike then. We had that ten-week housing strike; I was actually Secretary of the Women’s Committee in Blackwater. The strike was state-wide’ and it was over Treasurer John Howard’s ‘housing tax... Yeah he got pelted with eggs while he was at Blackwater and he’s never forgiven it and never forgotten it. And that’s why he’s so against miners. To this day we will rue that.’ The Treasurer had tried to impose a housing tax on the subsidised housing that miners had lived in since the outcome of the 1962 Moura housing dispute. This effectively meant miners, as John Currie, then miners union President, pointed out, would ‘face a wage reduction of around $1,000 a year. Now what we need is a wage increase, not a reduction, and we are not prepared to accept it.’

In August 1980, in the seventh week of the strike John Howard clashed with miners at a Blackwater meeting where he had gone against police advice. The strike affected 4,000 Bowen Basin miners and their families.

Elsa was on the housing strike committee because two union officials’ wives felt that it would be better if an outsider from another mine took the position. ‘Therefore there would be no people saying it was political because that Jack Dempsey’s wife was the President.’ Another woman Selina remembered the ten week strike as a child

I remember growing up when dad did the march with the housing ten week strike. I remember they gave out food hampers; we used to go to the community hall to get our food hampers. Instead of giving money they’d give out boxes of essentials. We used to go to the community hall to get those. I think that was on a weekly basis. And you also had your savings; mum and dad had a few savings there.

Then there was a dispute over safety for apprentices. Roxanne recalled the rolling strikes.

You just didn’t have a strike for ten weeks where you knew you were going out. They would be one or two days here. The next week it would be a day and the next week it would be two days and the next week it would be three days. It would go on like this for months, because they were trying to break us before they got us out of the gate properly.///

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[It was] embarrassing when you had to go up to the bank every month and say “I have got bills to pay” but we used to have a good credit rating with the bank and they used to pay our bills every months.

This was ‘hard’ but she ‘got off her butt and I did things. I went to work; I used to deliver parcels around town with a young kid’ and she worked at the supermarket. But the company was determined ‘they just wouldn’t give the men what they wanted and I felt they were provoking the men into a bigger strike but trying to break us first.’

The company knew the threshold of the families was not high

it was very hard. We were lucky our two sons started work but they were only on apprenticeships and they were only on apprenticeship wages but that helped us out a little bit. The unions kept us, they were giving us vouchers every week to go and pick up our food but that was all just the food nothing to pay your bills or anything like that.

It felt like ‘the tradesmen worked about six months in about two years’.

**Leisure**

The earlier mention of community leads us to look back to questions asked\(^{28}\) about the degree to which this mining community is a gendered community particularly in the years back. Did men’s needs control both work and leisure?

Collis argues\(^{29}\) that women in mining communities play inferior roles; where women have to exercise ‘influence’ on men’s ‘leisure activities’ to enable females to be able to realise their interests. We did not specifically seek to investigate this issue at the time, but it is worth mentioning some of what we noticed. One set of comments from older women supported this hypothesis of gender division. Elizabeth, from Ipswich, and her husband Norm told us about men-only retirement parties. Elizabeth said

At the mines when anybody retired in early days they had men only at the retirement parties. And then it sort of got to be a choice whether the men would have it mixed or if they wanted to have it separate. And then they had a lot because of the older men retiring so they chose then to have the wives at the retirement parties. But it didn’t always happen.

Unlike Elizabeth, Norm felt that the women had some choice in this and sanctioned their husbands having male only nights but Elizabeth said ‘after all the woman’s there for them all through their working lives, so why wouldn’t they be part of their retirement.’

Older views of male and female relations were generally expressed as traditionally conservative. As Emily says when she gets together with her friends Nancy and Elaine: ‘It was a time when you went where your husband had to work. For better or worse. We mixed with the ladies and we had our afternoon teas.’ To which Elaine responded sharply ‘You

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\(^{29}\) Collis, M. 1999 *op cit*, p. 74.
might have I just looked after kids. I had five’. What held women together? Each other ‘the miners’ wives.’

So if gender has been shown to be at least a ‘sensitizing concept’ amongst these older women’s stories, so is class (despite Betty’s earlier denial as to its existence in small mining towns), for others including both Emily and Nancy commented on it. Emily said:

When I first came here from Kainga the ladies in the Moura mine used to say ‘don’t talk to the farmers they don’t like us.’ I had no trouble with any of the farmers mainly because I just kept to myself.

Nancy added:

In the early days there definitely was the miners and the country people… If you didn’t make your own entertainment there is nothing here for you. I think that is why the big bosses’ wives wouldn’t come here. There is no entertainment, nothing for them and they didn’t mix.

She went on to say their social gatherings were centred on mine workers who used to always bring their families

you had boiler makers and you had fitters all working in the power station, the same with the dam. We used to have barbecues and things. There were the miners and the ‘Feds.’ They all got together for a laugh at the mine picnic at the end of the year. The company used to give us a ham and a cake and, a turkey at the end of the year.’

Peggy said

when people came there would be no problem we would be all sitting around the table having a game of cards. The picture theatre, there was the picture theatre here then. People would get out and go to dances. There used to be a dance at the County Hall…sometimes be a dance at the Anzac Hall, on a Saturday night.

**Alcohol and violence**

‘The best thing’ said Norm ‘is to get with a heap of miners that are having a beer.’ Not unlike the rest of Australian society alcohol was associated with socialising and enjoying your self with your mates. Collis in her earlier mining study found hotels (with the exception of certain bars and late night discos) were designated male spaces. In the seventies and eighties, according to Davina from Biloela, miners ‘used to drink a fair bit of grog in those days too. It was just the-in thing and there were no breath analysers back then’.

Nancy, from Moura, spoke of when they had ‘a lot of men in the town and there was a lot of fighting and brawling and alcohol. I can’t say drugs were around in those days but a lot of

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gambling.’ The gambling was around horse races and the football. And the street she lived in for twenty six years was notorious ‘for the fights and the arguments and the parties and nearly murders with people set on fire’. Elaine added ‘What about the one that got her dress ripped off her down town because the other girl wanted it?’ ‘Can you remember who ripped whose dress off?’ ‘She was the one that was found later on dead in her house?’ All because, agreed Elaine, Nancy and Emily, ‘over drinking alcohol, they were fighting with different ones. Mum and Dad would be into it. The kids would be in bed asleep.’

Alcohol was the problem ‘A lot of the women back in those days did drink didn’t they? Why said Elaine because ‘they had too many children.’ Then there was this gem of an exchange:

_Elaine_: And we didn’t even get into the wife swapping club because they didn’t ask us.
_Nancy_: No we missed out.
_Emily_: We were told that if we couldn’t beat it we could join it.
_Elaine_: No one threw the keys at me.
_Emily_: You wouldn’t have got the keys anyway, we were the high society of Moura.

Ken Dempsey^{32} identifies an enormous gender inequality in the daily life of rural communities. Potentially, domestic violence is the most extreme manifestation of such inequality. The purpose of our project had not been to actively seek information on this, so little was brought to our attention. However, for one of our interviewees the Bowen Basin was an escape from such a situation. Her name was Molly. Her fiancée in New South Wales appeared to be perfectly normal until after she married him and he began to drink very, very, very heavily and he had like a Jekyll and Hyde personality and he brushed me up a few times when I was pregnant with my daughter and that sort of thing, and then after she was born I had a few miscarriages from the same thing. So I just moved out in the finish.

Her next words were very significant and go some way to explaining women living with violence.

_in those days the woman thought it was her fault_. The doctor said to me ‘if you don’t get away, either you or your daughter or both of you are going to finish up dead.’

Not only did she think it was her fault but this rendered her unable to do anything to end it, even with the doctors directions.

I was the worst in the world for doing something like that in those days. And with no support it was very, very hard. I went to one of my cousins who lived at Kempsey from there, and then unfortunately my stepfather told my husband where I’d gone. His two brothers were on their way through to Queensland and they stopped to see if we were alright. I said “yes” and then we heard while they were there that my step father had told my husband where I was and he was coming to get us. And so the boys said “well,

you know, why don’t you just come with us and we’ll look after you if you look after us” sort of thing. So that was the arrangement how I came to Queensland.

And there she met her new husband Errol and they lived in a hut and we had the little wooden caravan that Errol had been living in. We tried for years and years and years and I couldn’t have any more children because of the damage that had been done to me from my bashings. I had nineteen miscarriages, and the doctor kept saying to me, no, you can’t do it any more, you can’t do it any more, and I kept wanting to for his sake, because he was such a good person. And so we adopted two. Errol’s mum came up to stay with us, I had a very, very, very, very major operation and she came up to look after the kids because I wasn’t able to look after them for a few months.

Molly told us that her operations were also a result of the beatings that she had received from her first husband but her new husband ‘he’s always happy, he was happy right until the last. He never got cranky or tired or angry, not once.’

These older women did not think of divorce as an option. Like Molly they internalised it as their problem and they ran away in the most extreme of conditions.

Violence against children was mentioned by Daisy when she said her mother was a Tartar and that in ‘Those days they beat the children’.

**Church**

The big political divide in the early mining communities reflected, in part, the religious chasm within the labour movement generally. An influential sway emanated from Catholics such as B. A. Santamaria (1915-1998). He had a strong Catholic following amongst some miners. Betty articulated this for us:

There was a bitter divide – oh Christ, I could tread on toes here but I don’t care – there was a Catholic movement led by [Santamaria]… I know the church doesn’t have the control these days as it did in those days but it really had a strong control over their flock. Their children weren’t allowed, to be friends with us. It divided us, it was a terrible, terrible thing. I was glad when that man died I really was. He wasn’t a good man at all and he didn’t do anything for them except split the towns. Although not a controlling split because there were churches of every denomination, people of every denomination but they weren’t sort of controlled to the same extent…

There were people we lived with all our lives and all of a sudden they weren’t allowed to talk to us and their kids weren’t allowed to play with us. A girl I was especially friends with, she nursed, and she was getting married and she asked me to be her bridesmaid and I said “Yes” of course. When the priest knew I was going to be their bridesmaid he said “Go and get a good Catholic girl to be the chief bridesmaid” and she had to.’

As Betty articulately put it ‘that is too much power for anybody.’

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33 Unlike Marion Collis 1999. p.63 later women who had used divorce as the ultimate sanction against abuse.
Concluding remarks

There is some evidence here to support Clare William’s findings that these working class families do have some expectation of companionship in their relationships. Whether this sense of expectation is realised in the same way it is for middle class families, we do not know because we have no direct comparators. All we know for certain is that, though their stories were harsh, people talked fondly of successful marriages and successful parenting even within explicitly patriarchal rules. As a miners’ daughter, Kirsten said

The thing that we all realised with the miners is that they work bloody hard, but they also party pretty hard at times too, you know. Except at Christmas with the Christmas parties, the women and kids were involved too.

Patriarchal power was strong in these communities, as observed elsewhere.

These women, unlike other working class communities were not dependent upon networks of relatives, as these often lived elsewhere, but rather on neighbours and same sex friends living in their proximity for companionship and support. The leisure patterns continued to reflect gendered domestic roles with men associating with their mates and women associating with other women and with their children and their common focus was the activities of their children. But limits were placed on how extreme gendered segregation could go because mining towns were small. Men and women were more inter-dependent on each other and the very scarce resources they had access too. As Nancy said ‘your husband had to look after the kids... There is no one to look after your children because you didn’t have the support of family.’

Did they have a community that was integrated and solid and together?

Emily: Yes we did work together in the early days we all had things and we all did things.
What held you together?
Emily: I suppose it was the miner’s wives.
Elaine: I don’t know, time has brought us together, hasn’t it? It has with our kids and with time.
Nancy: I think being involved with our children and you get out and about.
Emily: But we are all well and truly different

Were there extremes of masculine ‘blokishness’ that led to possessiveness and in some cases domestic violence, as others have found? We heard some secondary stories and the case of

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34 The following list is based on a set of criteria outlined in Williams Open cut.
39 Young & Wilmott Family and Kinship, Komarovsky Blue-college marriage. Dennis, Henriques & Slaughter Coal is Our Life.
Molly’s terrible domestic situation where she suffered nineteen miscarriages as the result of extensive abuse before escaping to Queensland, but is not definitive. What did permeate all relations in those days was the roles of the ‘male provider’ and ‘woman domestic’ or the person that he provided for. ‘Back in those days’ said Martin ‘it wasn’t the known thing for the women to be working. It was the male who was the bread earner who put the food on the table. They just supported their man in lots of ways.’

Expectations of traditional marriages would be experienced by miners’ children. Vern, from a metals mine, explained to us that in his town there was a shared understanding ‘if a woman working for the company was married to a male working on a lease, one of them had to go. It was always the women.’ The reasoning behind this was if a woman was married to a male that was working on the lease, the chances are she’d stay in town and she was working anyway, so she was more likely to look for work in the township…if they already had a secure income because the husband was working for the mines, then she’d be available for work in the town and there was always lots of demand for women to work in the town. Also the other encouragement was that if that woman was no longer working on the lease that left a vacancy possibly for women to come in from other areas they in turn might marry. It put more marriageable women in the system, so that if they were marrying then they worked in two and more women would come into town and you’d breed factory fodder.

We did not hear direct evidence of exactly that understanding in any of the coal towns. But still, it was clear that women’s formal role in the earlier years of the coal towns was subordinate to the working interests of men, even though they provided the foundation of the communities and the social glue that held them together. What did women use to counter these strategies in this patriarchal mining society? Howard, Blumenstein and Schwartz suggests that women in these cornered situations use strategies of influence that are either ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ according to how successful they are in achieving a desired outcome. Women in heterosexual relationships were found to be more usually exercising weak strategies: which they said was due to their relative powerlessness. But the women we interviewed did not appear to us as weak or to think of themselves that way. These women fought strongly, side-by-side with men for the better housing and conditions in ways open to them and their limited options.

We finish this paper with some words from two strong women from Collinsville – Kath:

I married a coalminer and I never worked. He didn’t believe I should work.


43 Howard, Blumenstein & Schwartz "Sex, power, and influence tactics."
He was earning the money. I got six children.

and Betty:

I don’t call them the good old days. These are the good old days.
GLOSSARY FOR INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

barney  fight
barra  barramundi (a type of fish)
carton  a cardboard box containing 24 stubbies
Feds  members of the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen’s Association (FEDFA), originally a separate union to the Colliery Employees Union, but now amalgamated.
goanna  a large native monitor lizard, growing up to two metres in length.
kindy  kindergarten
loo  toilet
Rockie  Rockhampton (coastal town)
sprag  a one-way clutch, like a ratchet
stubby  a small bottle of beer
vigoro  a ball game with similarities to cricket and baseball
thunderbox  outside toilet over a pit

REFERENCES

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