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At the Heart of It

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AT THE HEART OF IT

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

Alixandra F. Mattingly

Western Kentucky University
2013

CE/T Committee:

Professor Timothy Broekema

Professor Joshua Meltzer

Professor Nathan Phelps

Approved by

School of Journalism and
Broadcasting

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2013

ABSTRACT

On the close of my career at Western I wanted to cover a story, utilizing my learned photojournalism skills, which reflected by upbringing. I grew up in a small coalmining county in western Kentucky where my interest in photojournalism began. At this time I would look for stories I could relate to and noticed that the majority of coal stories covered were centered on the environment, politics or accidents in mines. Few stories exist that give voice to the miners and their families. So, for my thesis and capstone project I wanted to tell the other side of the coal story, that of the miner.

The journey to that story was very rewarding. A combination of interviews, travel and networking led me to River View coalmine in my hometown of Waverly in Union County, Kentucky. More searching led me to Mark Wilson, a young coalminer with a growing family. Wilson, like many men from Union County, joined the military out of high school and returned home after his service to join his family legacy of coalmining.

Wilson's story is universal; he is a father working hard at a job he is proud of to provide a comfortable life for his family. His job, however, is a little less common. Each workday he wakes up and prepares to work 400 feet below the surface, drawing out the earth's wealth to sustain his family.

Finding the heart of this story has taught me a lot about patience, people and my chosen career. I have used all of my skills learned here at Western to tell the coalminers story. The result is a short documentary that sits in a custom webpage with info graphics.

Keywords: coal, coal mining, photojournalism, multimedia, documentary

For everyone that has inspired me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not be possible without the support of the photojournalism faculty here at Western. Tim Broekema, Jim Bye and Josh Meltzer were my guiding lights through this project. Their constant push toward excellence was a driving force. I feel truly humbled to be apart of such a wonderful program and count myself lucky to be a part of the WKUPJ family.

A big thank you goes out to the Honors College for its constant support in my academic career. I am lucky to have had the opportunity to be a part of such a valuable support network. A special thank to Johnny Bergman whose great organization skills, patience and sheer awesomeness helped me to finish my thesis.

VITA

September 20,1990.....	Born- Rapid City, South Dakota
May 2009.....	Union County High School, Morganfield, Kentucky- Valedictorian
Fall 2009.....	Dean's List, President's List
Spring 2010.....	Dean's List, President's List
April 2011.....	Engage & Exchange Challenge, Second Place
January 2011.....	Kentucky News Photographers Association Competition Student Division, Second Place Sports Action, Second Place Portrait
Fall 2012.....	Dean's List
January 2013.....	Kentucky News Photographers Association Competition Student Division, Honorable Mention Pictoral
May 2013.....	Western Kentucky University Bowling Green, Kentucky

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major: Photojournalism

Minor: Folklore

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My project aims to give a face to the occupation of coalmining. The majority of recent media coverage involving coalmines and miners has been negative. Often these stories focus on the environmental or political aspects of mining and exclude details about the people who work for/in mines. Giving voice to often voiceless miners will help create a larger understanding of mining in America, helping to shape public opinion.

My goal is to have the audience understand that choosing a coal way of life isn't bad or sad. I want the audience to feel a connection to my subjects and see them as people, not as a number or stereotype. The men and women who mine for their paychecks work toward providing their families with a better tomorrow just like every other working person. Re-humanizing coalminers by telling the story of a typical miner will help tell part of the large story that is coalmining in America.

In order to accomplish this goal I had to find a coalminer who represented the life style of an average miner. My search ended with Mark Wilson, a 27 year-old miner, husband and father of two who joined his family legacy of coalmining after serving in the military. I found Mark through word of mouth and networking via visits to Union County and many phone calls. The search for a subject to tell this story began in January and ended in March.

Before I met Mark I had been underground at River View Coal to film, get more information and learn all that I could about mining and its culture. To gain access to the mine I had to network my way to the top tier of the management and ask permission. Luckily, my uncle works at the mine and ran into the main manager where he then passed along my business card. After this I called the manager, Ken Ford, and set up a date to come tour the mine. It was a week or two later that I met Mark Wilson and began telling his story.

After my initial interview with Mark, I decided that he was a good fit for this piece. We then discussed what making him my story's subject would entail, things like spending time with his family and just letting me know when things are going on, he agreed and I began filming Mark and his family. Over the next weeks I filmed with the Wilsons several times and got familiar with their family dynamic and story.

Once I had a substantial amount of footage, I began to compile it into a short visual outline. This was then presented to my class and professor where suggestions were offered and my piece was discussed. A few more weeks of filming lead me to another edit on my footage. This was then presented to faculty and students at Western where critique was given. A few weeks of editing and filming later I had a complete piece.

This process was very lengthy, time consuming and stressful. I would estimate that I spent over 100 hours on this project. Working at building a network of support, adding to my technical knowledge and furthering my story telling skills were added bonuses to having a complete sort documentary.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

For this project a lot of technical skill was needed. My last three years at Western have been spent learning how to create quality images and record quality video and audio. Moreover I have learned how to tell stories and communicate effectively with people while training how to produce and edit content. I cannot stress how much technical knowledge is needed to shoot, edit and produce a piece of this quality.

All of the technical knowledge in the world would not have gotten me this story though. I put a lot of person-to-person work in to build a network of support and knowledge. The first two months were spent calling and visiting people to gain knowledge and find a subject. After I found Mark, the technical aspect of this project began.

To complete this project successfully I purchased a new Canon 5D Mark II and a new laptop as well as a new external hard drive. All of this gear was used in tandem with gear provided by Western. Production of this piece took place in the photojournalism lab.

CHAPTER 3

CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

Being a successful photojournalist means being a successful logistics coordinator. The main challenges I faced in this project revolved around people and equipment. As said before, it took me around two months to find a subject just right for this story. I spoke with approximately ten miners and countless members of miner's families before I was led to Mark Wilson. I networked via word of mouth and Facebook to find people who were interested in participating and/or had knowledge they were willing to share.

A big challenge with doing any photojournalism work is getting people comfortable with the camera. I will say that it is a little easier when shooting stills than video because filming involves a tripod and microphone as well as a camera and lens. To get passed the initial awkward-camera-in-the-room stage I set up my camera and just talked to my subjects while I sat behind it. This eventually desensitized them to my camera and I could get the footage I needed.

Getting the correct equipment was also an issue for me. The first camera I checked out from the school had a broken audio jack. After that jack caused me to have terrible audio from an interview, I decided it was time I bought my own camera that was capable of shooting stills and video. From that point I checked out a tripod from the school and periodically checked out microphones and lenses.

Time management also became a key player in this project. With my story being two hours away and me being a full time student with a part time job, I had little extra time to spend on my story. I planned out my shooting two weeks to a month in advance to make sure my work schedule and school schedules were open. I did have to miss two days of class over the semester to film for my project but was lucky to have professors who understood my situation.

My final hurdle was money for gas, food and equipment. Each time I go to Union County to shoot I spent roughly \$40 in gas money and I went home four to five times. Since I decided on specifics for my project late, I had passed deadlines for grants to help cover costs so the money came out of my savings. The gear I purchased was paid for with student loans and included a camera body and a new laptop.

CHAPTER 4

EQUIPMENT

Equipment	Source
Canon 5D Mark II	Personal Camera
RODE video microphone	Photojournalism Department
Lavaliere Microphone	Photojournalism Department & Technology Resource Center
TriPod	Photojournalism Department
16-35mm Lens	Photojournalism Department
70-200mm Lens	Photojournalism Department
External 1 Terabyte hard drive	Personal
MacBook Pro laptop	Personal
Final Cut Pro 7	Photojournalism Department

The chart above lists the majority of the resources needed to complete this project.

CHAPTER 5

PROPOSAL

When you drive into Union County, Kentucky, it is apparent that you are in coal country. A teal green tube that serves as a route for the tons of coal pulled from the ground each day stretches for miles in either direction. The coal belt seeming providing a gate to the working mans world. While you might associate coal with global warming or see it as a source of political turmoil, for the residents of Union County it is a way of life.

Male children from coal rich counties are not asked what they want to be when they grow up. Their families know that he will be a coalminer, like his father and his father before him. His other options: the military, factory work or a life of drugs, are a less likely choice, as they do not come with the large paycheck earned by coalminers. These industries are the largest sources of income in rural areas like Union County, a small community in northwest Kentucky on the Ohio River. For the fortunate who can afford college or other career routes, chances are high that they will not return to Union County because there are no jobs waiting for them.

Coal mines open and close in cycles creating times of wealth and depression alongside their operation status. In 2012 River View Coal, LLC mined 14 million tons of coal making it the top grossing mine in the Illinois Coal Basin, a coal rich area covering

Southern Illinois and Western Kentucky. This is a sure sign of a time of prosperity, but all involved know it could be short lived. Still, each day crews enter into small caverns to cut even deeper into the earth.

The hard work of the coal miners takes a toll on family and social life. Medical issues, chronic back pain and constantly changing sleeping patterns are commonplace for a coalminer. As much as they might want a new career, a miner is coupled with coal and its legacy as a fastidious employer. A steady paycheck means dinner on the table and shoes for the kids.

I was raised in Union County and come from a long line of men who worked in mines to support their families. College has given me a ticket to job opportunity, but before I set out, I want to tell the stories of the families that coal supports. I am not taking a political or environmental stance on coal, but am giving voice to the people who's lives are directly tied to veins of coal.

I plan to travel to Union County to document the culture of coal. The money would be used to cover fuel expenses and help to furnish photo gear to tell the story adequately. This money would document some of the richest culture in Kentucky and shed light on the effect of coalmines on an area.

The heart of this project is to create a true image of mining in a small coal town. Through building an understanding of what it means to be a miner, I hope to give voice to a labor force that is often overlooked. This story will be driven by the voices of the men and women who are supported by coalmines through audio in a multimedia presentation.

CHAPTER 6

VISUALS



Figure 6.1 Mark Wilson, of Morganfield, Ky., mines coal at River View Coal, LLC.



Figure 6.2 Kevin Brown, of Boxville, Ky., pins the ceiling of a recently mined area.



Figure 6.3 Cleaned coal sits as barges come to pick it up in Uniontown, Ky.

Hazardous Work

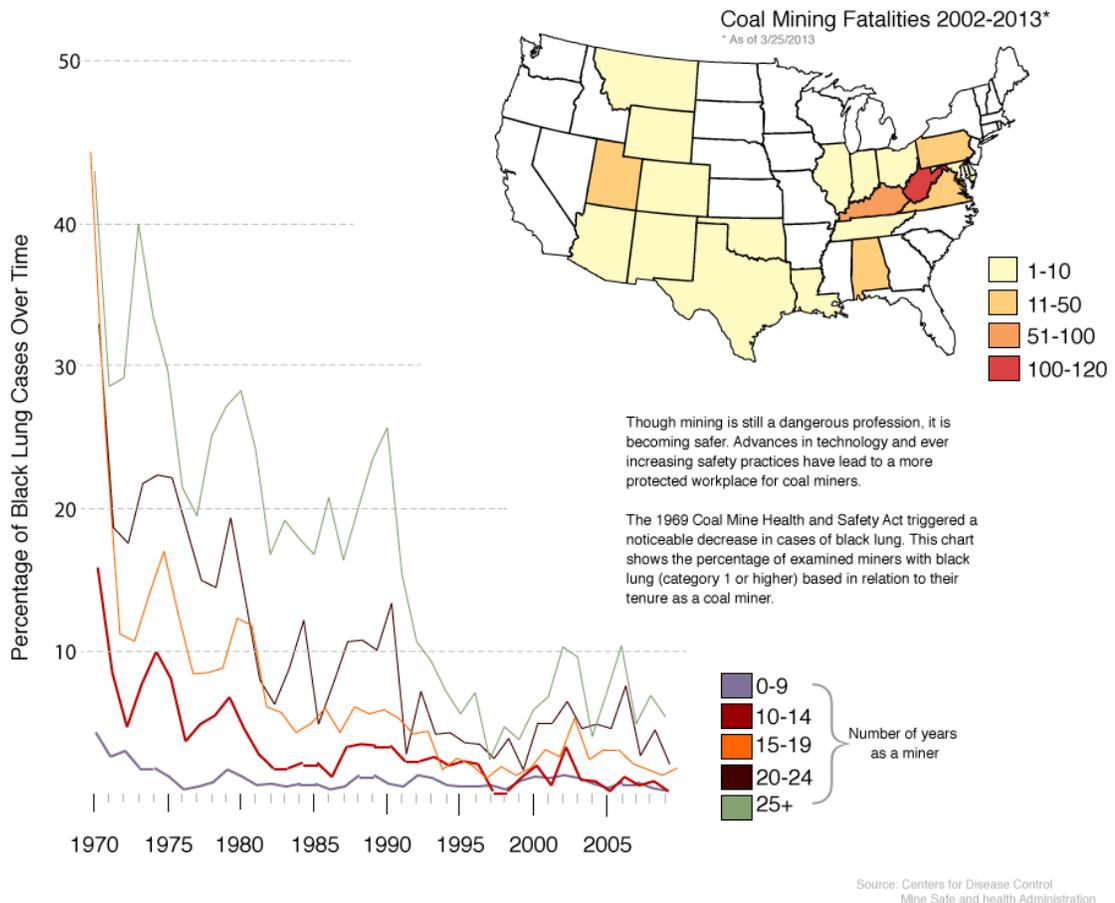


Figure 6.4 Though mining is still a dangerous profession, it is becoming safer. Advances in technology and ever increasing safety practices have lead to a more protected workplace for coalminers.

The 1969 Coal Mine Health and Safety Act triggered a noticeable decrease in cases of black lung. This chart shows the percentage of examined miners with black lung (category 1 or higher) based in relation to their tenure as a coalminer.

Money Talks

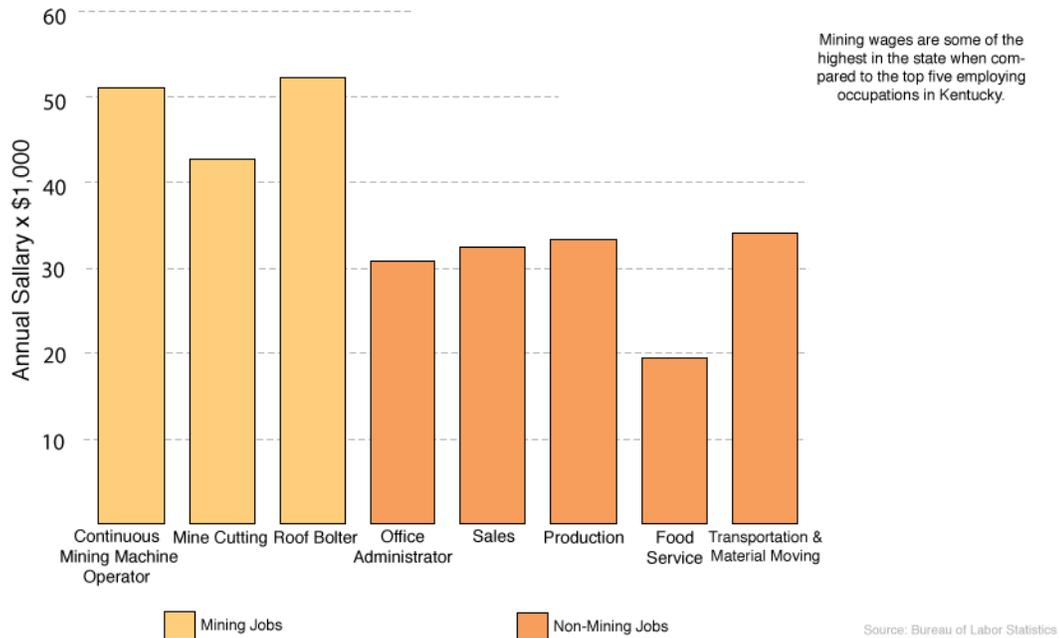


Figure 6.5 Mining wages are some of the highest in the state when compared to the top five employing occupations in Kentucky.

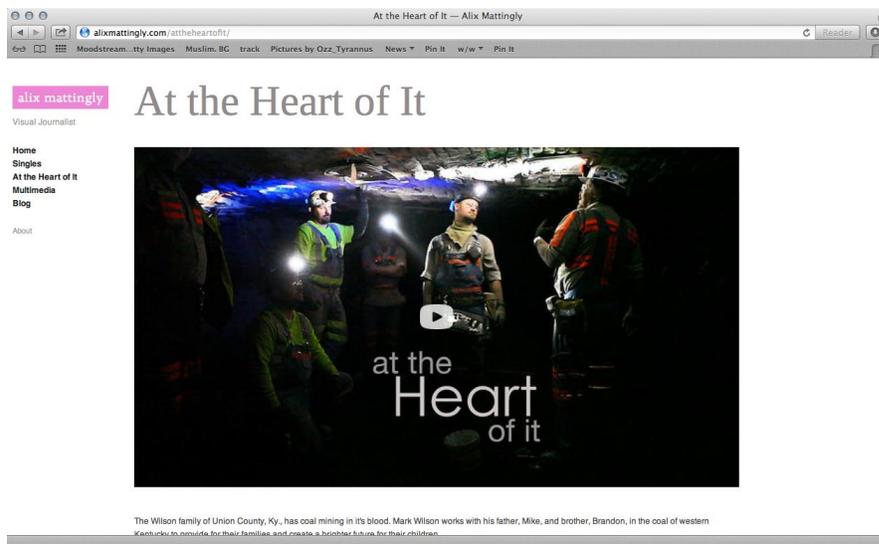


Figure 6.6 This is a screenshot of the top of the page that was designed to hold this project.

At the Heart of

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Moodstream...tty Images Muslim. BG track Pictures by Ozz_Tyrannus News Pin

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at the Heart of it

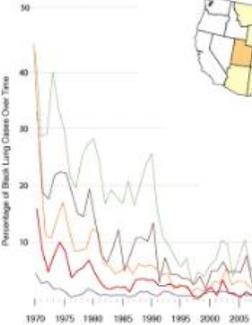
The Wilson family of Union County, Ky., has coal mining in it's blood. Mark Wilson works with his father, Mike, and brother, Brandon, in the coal of western Kentucky to provide for their families and create a brighter future for their children.

Hazardous Work

Coal Mining Fatalities 2003-2013*



1-10
11-50
51-100
100-120



Percentage of Black Lung Cases Over Time

0-9
10-14
15-19
20-24
25+

1970 1975 1980 1985 1990 1995 2000 2005

Number of years as a miner

Source: Centers for Disease Control, Mine Safety and Health Administration

Though mining is still a dangerous profession, it is becoming safer. Advances in technology and ever increasing safety practices have lead to a more protected workplace for coal miners.

Money Talks



Mining wages are some of the highest in the state when compared to the top five employing occupations in Kentucky.

Figure 6.7 This is a screenshot view of the page that was designed to hold this project.

CHAPTER 7

REFLECTION

This project is the culmination of my four years at Western and I can honestly say I used nearly every skill in my toolbox to complete this project. Through a mountain of stress I relied on my knowledge, network of support and hard work to get me through this process. Looking back, I cannot believe how much I have learned at Western and am so thankful to everyone along the way that helped me grow as a photojournalist and person.

I cannot explain how blessed I feel to have the opportunity to go to college. Both of my parents have two-year degrees, but I am the first in my family to attend a traditional four-year college. I have worked very hard to get to where I am in life but I would be nothing without my support network at home. My community has always encouraged me to be my best and make something of myself. This project is a reflection of my love for the people of Union County.

The thesis process taught me so much about long term, thorough projects. It tested my limits and pushed me to push myself toward an ever-increasing goal. At times I felt like my goal was out of reach, but with persistence and patience my idea came to fruition. Putting together my audio, visual, story telling and folklore training to create this piece proved that my time at Western was not in vain.

Areas for improvement include checking equipment and settings before shooting to make corrections before they become a problem and more concise planning. I feel like

much of my interviews were not as directed and poignant as they should have been. If I had worked on these two areas before undertaking the largest sections of work a lot of heartache and stress would have been prevented and a better product would have resulted.

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