Women and Death in a Mining Community

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When we hear about accidents or fatalities at work, all too often it is put to us in terms of bare statistics, but rarely do the media comprehend what it means for those directly and indirectly affected. Underground coal mining is one of the most dangerous industries there is, and when accidents strike they affect whole communities. We spoke to women in the Queensland coal town of Moura about how they organised through the women's auxiliaries and the experiences of the women, their families and friends, and the town, including the role of the media, in the disasters that struck the community in the last quarter of the last century.

Introduction

For two weeks in 2006, Australia was transfixed following a collapse at the Beaconsfield metals mine in Tasmania, as rescuers sought to find three miners unaccounted for after the collapse, and then to rescue the two survivors who had been traced. The media attention briefly highlighted the human tension and suffering from accidents in underground mining.

Since 1961, 47 miners from the coal and cattle community of Moura, at the southern end of Queensland's Bowen Basin, have been killed in 13 fatal accidents there, including 40 deaths in underground mines and 7 in open cut mines (Department of Mines and Energy 2008). What the town is most known for is that 36 of these underground deaths occurred over just three disasters, in 1975, 1986 and 1994. Only Mount Mulligan, where 77 men were killed in 1921 in Queensland's worst ever industrial accident, an explosion of coal dust, can lay claim to a sadder history. But nothing in the post-war era matches Moura's tragedy.

Too often accidents and fatalities at work are put to us in terms of bare statistics, rarely comprehending what it means for those affected – especially the wives, families and communities devastated when multiple-death mine disasters occur. As part of a wider contemporary oral history project, financially supported by the Mining and Energy Division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, we interviewed 114 people, including 28 people (26 women and two men), who lived or had lived in Moura. They talked about the past and present, about women as wives, mothers, daughters and, nowadays, as miners – and the role of the media. Other tales can be told elsewhere, but here we wish to focus on the responses of women to the disasters that befell Moura.

Coal mining is a sex-segregated industry, with almost all underground work undertaken by men, certainly in the period under review. So women had very different experiences and roles to men in the coal towns, but the two were highly interdependent. One of the significant ways in which women organised their activities, particularly in relation to the sphere of production, was through the creation of women's auxiliaries. Accordingly, we commence this paper with an overview of the auxiliaries, before discussing the specific incidents we focus on. We have used pseudonyms to protect privacy.

Women's Auxiliaries

The first Queensland Women's Auxiliary began in Ipswich in 1938, when twelve women joined together to form the West Moreten Women's Auxiliary 'with the specific purpose of winning the coming strike' (Bailey 1983, 32). The women's actions included going on to radio and addressing groups of ALP, Rotary and Country Women's Associations. They also held balls and were therefore able to meet their target of feeding the striking miners' families. Eddie, a retired union official, told us, 'Some of the women there would have made better unionists than their husbands.'

At the national level, the New Housewives Association (NHA) was started in 1946, adopting a charter that sought equal status for women and supporting working class causes including price control and improvements in the basic wage. It published a newspaper, *The Housewives' Guide* and a journal, *The New Housewife*. In 1950 it sought to change its name to reflect a broader constituency. The Union of Australian Women (UAW) was established in 1950 as a successor organisation to the NHA. UAW membership included Labour Party supporters, communists, members of the New Housewives' Association and Christian activists. Their first goals included improving the equity and status for women and children, a halt to nuclear testing and mining, equal distribution of wealth, increased welfare services, equal pay for women, disarmament, equality for Indigenous Australians, opposition to the White Australia Policy and abortion law reform (Carey 2004; Land & Henningham 2004). The UAW set about developing links with women's auxiliaries and encouraging their establishment and operation. Perhaps not surprisingly the UAW was described by one ASIO officer as a 'monstrous regiment of women' (Curthoys & McDonald 1996).

The success of the Ipswich auxiliary led to the formation of the Burrum Ladies Committee set up at Maryborough. The Ipswich branch helped set up a number of branches, including in Collinsville in 1952 and Moura in 1963, to help the women of Moura organise for the 1963 Housing Strike. Queensland had been notable by its absence at the first National Women's Auxiliaries conference in July 1940 (Bailey 1983, 32). But a delegation led by Collinsville's Bid Nisbet made up for lost time at the next May 1958 national convention in Sydney. It was during this meeting that the convention was told that a Moura-Kianga Women's Auxiliary field branch was being started up to provide support in the 'current struggle' (Thomas & Mallory 2007). As Emily said:

The Women's Mining Auxiliary ladies came up from Ipswich and talked to us ladies to start this Mining Women's Auxiliary and what we could do for the men and what we couldn't do for the men...

When I rang up to find out things the president of the Ipswich Women's Auxiliary said 'Emily, if anything goes wrong, the Secretary is the one that goes to jail. We will throw you peanuts.' I said, 'Thank you very much, I appreciate that, going to jail.'

We asked Norma what led her to setting up the Moura Woman's Auxiliary. She said it was 'trying to get houses.' Doreen was at the Kianga mine with her husband and two boys in the 1960s. 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.' '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,' said Molly. Rose told us that at this time 'wives really got behind their men folk and there was quite a big strike in 1963.' It lasted over six weeks.

One of the women, Molly, who had been at different times Auxiliary President, Treasurer and Secretary, did not believe that it had been started with unqualified male support:

The men didn't want it either. They didn't want the women to know anything that was going on with the strike or anything, and we all put our foot down and said 'well we had to live there and we were fighting for the same conditions as they were fighting for'. And it was a real battle to get them to allow us to attend any of the meetings or anything like that... Seven weeks was a long while to be on strike with nothing coming in those days.

We asked Molly how it was decided which family would get what rations when they were apportioning food during the strike. She answered:

It all depends on how many you had in the family and what ages they were, how much bread you got, how much sugar, how much tea, you'd get a bit of jam and maybe 2-3 potatoes and a couple of onions...It was all written down and you had to sign for it when you got it each week.

All families were given a ration book that was weighted to their needs. The strike ended in an arbitration hearing that eventually forced a very reluctant company, and the state, to begin provide housing for mineworkers. It changed the way mining companies would treat the living conditions of their workers for the next three decades.

A small contribution each week, and fundraising through raffles, kept the auxiliary going:

Twenty cents a week the miners used to pay...I used to go out a couple of times a year and tell them what we were all about ...There was one dragline operator and they said if twenty cents was taken out of their pay they would go on strike... I thought, 'Twenty cents!' ...

As described by Nancy: 'we used to go to the bathrooms at the number one underground mine to sell raffles every Friday to get funding to support the Miner's Women's Auxiliary which then paid people who were off work,' as a result of illness or injury. Maxine told us that the Moura Women's Auxiliary had done 'everything. The poor buggers, when there are disasters they get together and the women, or the sons or husbands or what not, they try and help them out.'

The annual highlight, according to Norma, was the Woman's Auxiliary Ball: 'I remember them looking at me and saying "Did you bring the baby?" and I said "Well either she comes or I stay home."' The Ball was first held at Moura's *School of Arts* and later at the *Coal and Cattle Hotel* and then at the memorial hall. When we asked Norma what her husband had thought about her heavy commitment to the Women's Auxiliary, she answered, 'He didn't mind as long as I was there to cook his meals.' But she had given it up because she 'got too busy working in town.'

Individual accidents

Accidents and deaths were not confined to the underground mines. Referring to an incident in the Kianga open cut in 1961, Elaine told us that: 'They lost a couple of boys at Kianga with deaths out there, and nobody knew anything had happened to them until a couple of days later. One was found on the railway line squashed. They had a railway line at Kianga where they used to load the coal up to send onto trains to Gladstone.' According to Emily, he 'must have fell and he got squashed between the carriages and the buffer where it stops them from coming back further.'

There were six fatal accidents in the open cut, and seven underground. Molly's husband, who was working on the Moura open cut, 'was so glad to get out of there, he just wanted to get out of there. He said bad things were starting to happen, accidents and things were starting to happen.' Ironically, his last shift at the open cut was the day of the disaster at the Moura No 2 underground mine.

Nancy's son and husband were nearly killed in separate incidents underground. Her husband was buried alive when the roofing had collapsed, but no one had bothered to tell her:

They used to have continuous mines and [previously] they never had steel roofs on them. The men had been striking and trying to get the protection on them, and he was lucky that it was on there when it happened to him – it wasn't that long after it was put on there. [It took] about two hours to dig him out...

What I knew was after it all happened and the Ambulance drives into the yard and said 'Your husband is down at the doctor's surgery and don't be shocked this has happened and this has happened' but the mine never even contacted me.

Elaine added:

Well, they didn't do that to me either, when that happened to Teddy – when he got the tree around his neck at Kianga when he was cleaning. He was hung by a fork of a tree and nearly killed himself. They were clearing the road to load the coal up put at Kainga at the siding there and he as were pushing the trees so they could do it.

Norma told us, 'a fellow got killed at the mine and [his widow] left just after. Some of the women went and packed her stuff. We went to the funeral because she had no relatives here.'

Kianga No 1, 1975

Ngaire described to us 20 September 1975:

We were all still living in the caravan park and the saddest part was, there was this Mervyn, he'd just come up to Moura. He was only 21... Their brother Graham, both come to Moura and they were from Howard ...Mervyn was only just married a month...

His wife that same day...was laughing to us before it happened while he was at work, about how she was boiling up a tin on condensed milk to make a nice caramel tart that night and how, 'next thing', she said, 'it all exploded, and there was caramel all up on the ceiling', and she said 'oh, Merv's not going to be very happy with that when he gets home, coz he's going to have to get up and clean it!'

Well he never come home, did he?

The two brothers were, Graham had been underground and he was just coming up to get the crib and he was going to go back down, but Mervyn said to his brother, 'no I'll take it down and he went down and Graham was up, so, yeah.

At 5.10pm on that day, a large explosion shook Kianga number one mine. There were thirteen men in the mine trying to seal a wall behind which there was a fire. All were killed. Beltrollers were blown up to 300 metres from the tunnel mouth. The Warden's Inquiry found that: 'an explosion was initiated by a spontaneous combustion source which ignited inflammable gas and was propagated involving coal dust' and that 'the mine organisation underground on the day was wholly inadequate' (Loane 1975).

One of Kerianne's seven daughters was having an engagement party the night of the explosion:

We had it at our house and we were all [on a] verandah out the front. We were all just sitting around talking. There was quite a few young ones there. We heard this terrific bang. And we looked over and you could see – well it was dark, but you could see like a glow and we said, 'What was that?' 'Oh no! A mine explosion!'

At the time, one of the fellows that was at the engagement party was a union guy ... Ray Barker ... he left straight away to go out to the mine to see what was going on ...

Things get around so quickly and it puts a gloom right over the whole town and especially when you know the ones that were killed. ... I knew most or all of them in the first one.

It is so sad out at Moura because see some of the men are still buried underneath and it is so hard on the families. I mean they have got a nice memorial and everything out there for them, but that doesn't bring them back, does it...

Brenda was gardening the day that the first Moura explosion happened. She and her husband, Lewis, recalled it as follows:

Lewis was next door and I looked out ...and I said, 'Look Lewis, at that cloud over there,' and he said, 'That is not a cloud – that is Kianga blown!'

That was the shift on before I was supposed to be going back to work.

It was shocking that night. Not one person in that town slept. All they did was keep driving around from house to house. There had been a bit of a strike on and a lot of the men that were down there took the risk and went down, just to earn some money, and never walked out.

Emily was playing bowls and her young nephew Daryl ran into the bowling green:

I thought 'Oh Jesus! He was working with Phillip,' and I said 'Is it Phillip, Daryl?' and he said, 'No!' He said, 'I have to see Auntie Marcel'. He went to her and she just took off and she said 'I have got to go'. It was her sister's boy that got killed. I said to Daryl 'Where is Phillip?' and he said 'He is all right ... He was on my shift'. He said it was the next one that went in.

Molly remembers the night of the first fatal Moura mine explosions:

We were out at the Church of England ... fete ... And I had the two kids out there because they were both entered in the baby competitions. We heard this enormous boom and saw all this smoke. Nobody realised what it was, and it wasn't until we got back into town. Errol [my husband] and my sister were sitting on the front veranda and they said, 'We think there's been an accident out at the mine, but we don't know'... So we were still waiting at that stage to hear what that one was. And that's when the, thirteen ... got entombed down there.

The bodies were never recovered. It was too dangerous to retrieve them. An 18 year old died that day, Ngaire told us:

[A]nd the saddest part that day we were told was that the boy wanted to have a day off, coz he was getting his new bedroom suite that day. But the father made him get out of bed and go to work... I'm sure many a times he'd wished he'd never got him out of bed. They were all young, they were all very young.

Sonia said,

[I]t was a dreadful thing ... after Kianga they said it wouldn't happen again. And then 1986 – 'well ... we'd put all these new things into place, it won't happen again'. And then 1994! ... We lost a son [not in the mines] ... and I know what that was like. You know, it's hard.

Moura No 4, 1986

At 11 o'clock on 16 July 1986, a large dust cloud emerged from the portals of the Moura No 4 mine, which had been operating for eight years. Twenty men were underground at the time. A roof fall had occurred in a 'goaf' (an area from which the coal had been completely extracted), creating a wind blast that blew a mixture of methane, air and coal dust into an area where twelve men were working. Something – the Warden's Inquiry found it was a Deputy's mine safety lamp – ignited the mixture. All twelve were killed – four from head injuries, seven from asphyxiation and one from incineration. Because of the dangerous conditions in

the mine, their bodies were not sighted for 36 hours, and were only recovered a week after the explosion, once the air had been inertised through nitrogen being pumped into the mine (Lynn 1987). Rose remembered:

It was the trauma of the fact that the guys were missing, they knew they were dead. They'd got close enough to tell that nobody could've been alive, but they couldn't get them. There were chances of other explosions. But it went on for a week before they retrieved them.

After the first one, it was so tragic to have the second one as well,' said Molly. Norma, in her role as the President of the Women's Auxiliary, was there:

I went out with them ... and they used to have meals and all that out there for them ... I had the kids, so there was a limit to what I could do. I was working up at camp in the 1986 disaster and they had the Police out there and they had the Miner's Rescue. They all stayed there. What ever time they came in, we gave them meals...

Holly said

You just cook all this food, all the women just cook. We'd take it to the church and they'd take it around to the family sort of thing. Because they all have extra family come in from out of town ... You're just sort of there for anyone who needs you. They just ring, 'can you do this?', 'can you do that?' The SES and the Mines Rescue, they have to be fed, they're out in the mine working and they have to be fed...

What does the company do in these times?

They just say how good they are and tell everyone what they're doing.

Norma had a friend who was an underground manager:

He must have been going down, the gas must have come up and it might have threw him too. He pulled out of the mine then, he finished up at the mine not long after that. Because it would be a terrible trauma for anyone that was around there.

And there is a really eerie feeling about too because the town it is a close little place when something happens...Everyone is just so quiet. I suppose just so upset about everything. But you had the newspapers out here trying to find out about everything.

For Molly reporters were 'blood hounds':

I remember the reporters swarming around the town trying to find somebody that was still up so that they could get stuff to put in the paper. .. They invaded a lot of people's privacy. I was in one paper, because [my husband] was working. There's the picture. That was 1986.

Doreen and Maxine held similar poor opinions of the press and their behaviour when the town was in deep mourning. Doreen told us that 'the press were terrible in those times'. When we asked how she replied:

Intruding...When all you wanted to do was to be left alone as a community...You have got to see it from their side because they have a job to do and they have to get the news out any way they can, and if they have to intrude in your life they don't care. It was very hard how they used to just go into people's houses if they see a light on at say midnight or something. They would just knock on a door...and go in and see what was going on...They were very intrusive but that is just the way the news gets out, isn't it?

Sonia said that 'the journalists, media, they were unreal in town here.' She added:

I don't think you will have anyone that would have a good word for them. Because they were knocking on people's doors at one o'clock in the morning. The family of people that had lost ones in the underground, Judy and Russell – they asked their family 'has anybody had a heart attack or anything because of the news from this?' And the media wondered why the people of Moura nearly run them out of town!

We ... were on ... the Fire Brigade ... And do you know, the media from Melbourne was ringing on that alarm system to try and get a story on the disaster....

When they got the bodies – well, they thought they were getting to the bodies – they set up a mobile morgue. And all the media was around with their cameras. I think one of the union blokes ended up going up and saying, 'Look, this will be a private thing. Go!' And the town wasn't liked for that. But it is a very private thing, you know...

In 1986 there was one young female journalist went into the Chemist. 'Oh, I wonder if this hick place even has soap?' Well you don't say things like that in front of people that have just lost a loved one or a great mate...

Where's their brains? I don't think any journalists have a heart. May be I'm being hard, some of them are brilliant. But, you know, some of them are very heartless.

As in 1975, Kerianne knew most of the people involved

Some of the sons in the second one were friends of ours that had been there in Moura for years. Their kids had grown up and gone into the mines ... People don't realise how traumatic it is in a community and it is shocking on a community when anything like that happens. It is really, really sad and I hope that it never happens again, because when you have been through it and you have seen the sadness and the traumatic... It is just like a cloud over the town. You feel, I don't know, you just feel a gloom and then you had the funerals which was sad. To see your friends, the ones that were killed and their wives and kids, so sad. I never want to go through that...

Actually talking about it makes me a bit teary because I did lose some really nice friends. A couple of them lost their sons and that was sad. I do get a little bit thingo, but never mind, times change, time goes on...For some of the ones that really lost their loved ones, I don't think it would ever go away. Do you know what I mean? Because you are living still in that environment of the mining town.

Sonia told us that the saddest thing for her to do, as an auxiliary woman, was after the 1986 Moura disaster they had to go around to the families of the deceased: '

That's something I'll never forget. One of the hardest things I had to do, in the Auxiliary, when anything like that happens, we go to the family and give them two hundred dollars because you don't know whether they've got cash or anything like that. And we went round to every family.

Elaine's three sons were underground miners:

Rob was a contractor...he was caught underground and he was one of the four or five that got out. All the rest got killed...it was twenty years ago and they never did contact me at the time, never...

You look back and you think 'how did those kids really feel?' I mean, it is their job but, that is their mates down there. They don't speak very much about it, but recently we have had a conversation about it. You know it brings up and upsets him. It has upset Robert and Greg too. He is at Mines Rescue, so of the three boys that were in the underground it is very difficult for the three of them... I thought they would never go

back underground but my older son did. He only just went. He is up at Blackwater now he is a deputy up there...I don't know how he is handling it.

One of the women, whose husband was killed in the explosion, was teaching at the school with Rose. The widow was pregnant, and years later her daughter turned up at Moura to see if there was any memorial for her father and his friends. Rose said that there was a memorial:

Yes, Kianga Hall is there and his name is there. And there is a memorial out at the site. But you've got to know where you're going and you need mine permission to go on site and those sorts of things. It was sad that that little girl – well she'd be in her 30s now – couldn't find that and by the time several of us who knew, heard about it, it was too late. She'd been and gone. And I think, yes, people need to know where those places are.

Moura No 2, 1994

There were twenty-one miners down the Moura number 2 mine the night of the third major disaster at Moura in 1994 (Windridge 1996). The first explosion happened at 11.35 pm on Sunday 7 August. Ten men scrambled back to the surface. The next day, all recovery attempts were abandoned after a large explosion. The mine was sealed at the surface leaving the bodies of the eleven dead miners inside (Hopkins 1999). Once again, spontaneous combustion was identified as the source of the original explosion (Windridge 1996).

We were told by Hannah that miner's wives always dreaded the knock on the door in the middle of the night. It was not the police, nor the company, who would deliver the news about men dying. It was other miners who came around.

Holly heard about the disaster from her husband's grandmother who rang from the Gold Coast. Her husband, who was OK, had not been allowed to ring. 'All the communication was just for emergencies only.'

It was a funny time for them to ring because we always talk to them at night and she said 'Where's John?' and I said 'Oh, he's at work, best place for him, you know'... Well, they'd heard it on the news and here I was living in Moura and I didn't know anything about it... When I said he was at work, well, she just went to pieces.

Norma was there for the Moura 1994 disaster too. She noted that the response to it was different: 'I don't think the auxiliary went out there because it was different...the barracks supplied the meals out there then.'

I was working at the camp here when the 1994 disaster was on and I couldn't believe it. When they said to me 'Something has happened' I thought it must have happened to the manager's wife because I never heard a thing. I went to work on the Monday morning and I said, 'What happened?' and they said, 'A terrible thing.'

Some of the consequences were indirect. Sheena, a mine worker herself, missed all the Moura disasters but her husband did not:

All his mates were down there, you know and so he sort of went a bit funny...He ended up leaving with a younger women and I thought, 'oh well, that's it, don't worry about it, that's life.'

Davina had two sons and a daughter working at the Moura mines. They all had close friends killed, which seriously unnerved them:

There were people he knew because some of the boys used to play football. My daughter took it very badly when she was working out at Moura, because that was a very close knit community out there because they were nearly all miners. I went out to

visit her after the last one and we were hanging out clothes and the next thing there was all this stuff up in the air. She went 'Oh my god! Not again!' It was actually something else had happened and the fellows up near the surface they had run for their lives. But the whole town was always affected; those disasters they were bad disasters.

There were lucky misses for husbands, brothers and sons who changed shifts and just missed a date with death. Maxine had thought her brothers were down the mine when disaster struck:

I was sitting on my back porch when that went up. My brothers were down there ... Well they were supposed to be on shift, but they went and got on the piss that day and didn't make work. So they were lucky! ... My brother has been through the whole three and missed them — every time there has been a change of shift. Now he is working...underground and I said to him 'You are just not meant to go that way and that is all there is to it'.

Doreen's son Rick, missed death too. Doreen said: 'he went in one morning and said "I would like to change my shift" and he did. The mine went up on that shift... so he missed out by the skin of his teeth.'

Sonia, who had visited the families affected in 1986 and given them cash relief, said:

When '94 happened, I had to say to the girls, 'I can't do it again'. Someone else did it for me, because there is no way in the world I could have coped with seeing all the people again. But everybody was there. The town just closed ranks and that was it. Especially this last one because it was so bad with the media and everything in '86.

The media, she said, were much better behaved in 1994 than they had been in 1986. 'I think as they came into town they were told, you know!'

What happens to those left behind?

Where do partners go in these company towns when the company owns the house? Were they looked after? Rose said it depended on how integrated into town life they were: 'some have remarried, some moved right away, depending on what affiliation they had with the town to begin with I think, or what age their children were'. But Kathy said that after the 1975 Moura disaster: 'A lot of them left. They got a pay out, but some of them left most of them did.' Another woman painted a rosier picture for the widows. Bronwyn said: 'they get looked after. Like everyone sort of goes around, you know, try to give plenty, as much support as they can, and...everyone bands together when there's a fatality, or if there's any sort of crisis.'

The situation made tragic by the deaths was exacerbated for the community by the lack of work when the underground mine was closed. As Rose said:

Most moved on because the underground mining closed, certainly after 1994. There are still a few who opted to stay and move into different areas of the mine, a number who took voluntary redundancies. [Some] had time off and I don't know that they are all back working for the mine, certainly [some] went back with contractors perhaps [at] the bottom dollar.

The majority of the people directly affected by the deaths left, as Ngaire said, creating an emotional vacuum:

One of the women that lived beside us in the caravan park in 1975... Her baby was about six months ... Mandy her name was, and her husband Les was another one in the 1975 mine disaster. Well, her baby won the baby show and unbeknownst to us, three days later, you know, so no, no they all left, they all left. Marilyn went back down to her family in Howard, ... Graham, he just come home that night in the caravan park,

threw his work boots in the bin and that was it, he said he'd never ever work in another mine again, never. So he went back down home, yeah, he went back down to taxi driving down in Howard...

Even if they weren't close friends, you knew all the people, you knew every one that was killed ... Even now, we still go out and look at ... all the memorials and we still go round and look at them all and talk about the past and talk about the future for them, that could have been for them.

In some instances compensation was paid often many years after the event. But for Maxine the money that was paid was insufficient: 'my cousin's husband got killed in number four and I know what she went through to get payments...she was left with five kids and she left here. She couldn't stand to be here and she is down in Toowoomba. It is pretty hard when she has five kids and no income. [He was the] breadwinner' Her friend Doreen added 'Yes wives didn't work in those days, they just stayed home.'

Concluding remarks

These stories, which might speak for themselves, highlight several key things: the devastation brought by death and disasters in coal mines; the way in which the community came together in times of crisis; the role of women in organising to respond to the disasters; the resilience of the community; the intrusive and insensitive role of the media; and the importance of learning from these disasters, so that we never again have to read of the tragedy of another coal mine disaster in Australia. Elaine's comment summarised what many felt:

On reflection, truly, I am a lot older now. At the time I didn't think much about it. But I'm thinking now, that there was no duty of care at all, at all.

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