

## Tales of the Wasatch

This is a brief snapshot of a remarkable book by David Jones about himself as a young man and his friend Roy Newman. “The life of the Blind Miner is significant because it is probably unparalleled in human history. He was like a father to me, and it’s thrilling that my life touched his for 23 years. I believe Roy would want me to share this marvelous adventure.”

David, the author, was only 14 when he met Roy (then aged 59). He often hitchhiked 20 miles up to Roy’s mining cabin in the pines high above the old Argenta mining town in Big Cottonwood. The cabin was typical of many mine buildings of its era. A frame structure covered with corrugated, galvanized steel, set back in a hand-dug cut in the steep hillside to keep it safe from snowslides. After a long day in the mine, Roy would sit in his old white rocker and reminisce. The chorale of alpine breezes whispered through the dark pines around the cabin. These were magical evenings by the old wood stove.

Roy observed a spiritual essence around the silent damp of bygone mining tunnels and outcrops. The silence of secrets, of untold numbers of untold stories of lives lived in the fog-bound forks and sunny ridges of Big Cottonwood Canyon. The mines were crowned with names of adventure, dignity, hope, and dreams that contradict the danger and drudgery of the work in the heavy ground below. Names like Prince of Wales, Silver Moon, Scottish Chief, Gypsy Blair, Eclipse, Great Western, Little Dolly, Victory Lode, Lusitania, Monarch, Staghead, Tarbaby, Kennebec, Black Bess (a famous mule), Baby McKee, Monte Cristo, Logger, Maxfield, Baker, Whitney, Argenta, Kentucky-Utah, Mutual Metals, Meridians, Reed & Benson, Gust Malmberg, American Metals.

Roy told a story of the Tarbaby Mine. “It was a real wet property, and sometimes the water ran up over the ore car wheels. We would push the cars along and shout ‘Quack, Quack, Quack’ all the way. He told the story of bad air in the Mutual Metals mine. “You have to watch out in the quartzite. Sometimes there’s no natural circulation and people can die. Air with too little oxygen is called Black Damp. Methane in the air like you find in the coal country is called Fire Damp.” Roy was a message runner on the frontlines during WWI. He recounted stories of sleeping in cold wet clothes under a bitter ice-cold moon. “All that heavy artillery hurt my hearing. I never did recover. I got gassed several times, my lungs and throat were burned.

## James Leroy Newman The Blind Miner of the Wasatch A Book by David A. Jones



Photo courtesy of Utah Historical Society

I was so glad to be home. I have a wonderful place here. I’m very fortunate. I feel like I was born to a calling here in the canyon.”

During the 40 years in his mine, he drove 1500 ft into the mountain, alone, by hand, year-round. He lost his sight in a blasting accident while helping friends in the Monarch Mine in April 1929 at age 36. He re-trained himself to cook, set railcar line, chop wood, keep bees, can fruit, and survive the fierce mountain winters. The inner tunnel’s 59 degree temperature moderated those bone-chilling winter days. “In the winter, I’ve gone as long as three months without anyone around. One day, when I was so low in my mind, I felt someone come in and sit gently on the bed beside me. She said she was my guardian angel. I asked if I could touch her face. As I ran my fingers along, I found it was exactly the same as my own in every detail. She told me that it was important that I know of her existence. She sat with me for awhile, and then without a word, she rose and left. I have never seen her since, but it changed my life.”

“I’ve led a charmed life; many wonderful memories. This is a wonderful place I have here in the canyon. I’m very fortunate.” Roy died in March 1974. At age 80, Roy Newman and his Angel flew home.

*David A. Jones is a local artist and photographer. He and his wife Kathleen raise American Quarter Horses in Tooele County. He paints people, animals and places throughout the West. His book is available at the Brighton Store.*