I am so excited that I am able to take this course this semester, since I’ve wanted to study it for over a year. I grew up in the heart of the Pennsylvania Anthracite Coal Region in the borough of Tamaqua. I spent close to the first 19 years of my life there. The story of the anthracite legacy was all around me when I was a child. My great-grandfather from my father’s side worked in the mines and breakers his entire life, starting as a “breaker boy” at the age of 8. When he was old enough, he went to work in the mines and was able to own a house and raise a family on wages of less than thirty dollars per week. My great-grandfather from my mother’s side worked on the railroad, the only means of transporting large amounts of coal at the time.

I have also been so interested in the story of the Molly Maguires, being that my family, let alone my home town, is so closely intertwined in the tales. John “Black Jack” Kehoe, a Molly Maguire who was hanged for murder, is buried across the street from the Junior High School that I attended. More interesting, though, is the fact that Tamaqua Police Officer Benjamin Yost, fatally shot by a Molly Maguire on the corner of Broad and Lehigh Streets in Tamaqua, died in my great-grandparents living room at 9 South Lehigh Street.

Coal and all the innovations that it brought with it have shaped my home town of Tamaqua and, subsequently, my life. Everything from shoveling coal into the furnace in my basement to the stories that I was told growing up is because of the ethnic diversity and social legacy that the mining of Anthracite coal brought to that area. It is only fitting that I take this opportunity to delve into the subject deeper and realize how much of my heritage is due to the strange black rock of which my paperweight is made.