BUTTE MEMORIES

OUR MURPHY / SULLIVAN FAMILY IN BUTTE

John E. Murphy

October 20, 2019

This document was intended to be a list of things I remember about my family and our lives growing up in Butte and those who came before us in Butte. It morphed into a stream of consciousness. One memory triggered another. I just kept typing as the ideas occurred so the stories may not be exactly be sequential. This volume only deals with my father’s side of the family, the Murphys and Sullivans. It would be too confusing to mix in my mother’s side. The Kelleys will be covered in a separate volume. Most of the information here is constructed from memory so the exact times and facts may vary somewhat. After all, it is written by a person of Irish descent, so embellishment is expected and conjecture is used to fill in the gaps. JM

The blood of Butte flows deep in the Murphy veins and the heart of Butte is affected by this family. How would Butte have been different without these people?

As with many Irish in Butte, their history starts in the great Irish diaspora of the 1850’s. My second great grandparents, Cornelius Murphy and Catherine Harrington, were natives of Castletownbere in County Cork, Ireland or so their tombstones indicate. Castletownbere is on the Beara Peninsula just over the hill from Allihies which is where many of Ireland’s copper mines were located. Copper is the metal and mining the occupation that drove the history of our family. Whether it was the famine called “the Great Hunger” or oppression of the Irish copper miners My second great grandparents Cornelius “Curly Con” Murphy and Catherine Harrington came to America first showing up in Virginia where my great grandfather Jeremiah Daniel Murphy was born in 1855. Soon thereafter the family moved to the Michigan copper mines around Rockland. Cornelius or “Curly Con” as he was called because of his curly hair, was a miner in the underground copper mines. His son Jeremiah or JD or sometimes called Jerry, grew to adulthood in Rockland and became a blacksmith.

Young JD left Rockland and travelled north to work on the construction of the trans-Canada railroad. When the railroad reached the west, above the Territory of Montana, JD headed to the mines near Helena in Marysville. He settled in a tiny mining town called Vestal. It was in Vestal where JD and other miners started the first Montana chapter of the Ancient Order of Hibernians on July 10, 1879 and JD became the first President of the Montana AOH. Not long after the founding of the AOH, the Penobscott Mine where he was working, played out and JD headed to the copper mines in Butte. He lived in the Sullivan Hotel in Walkerville which was across from the Lexington mine where he worked. In March of 1880 he established Division No. 2 of the AOH in Walkerville. Butte was only a teenager having been established in 1864. The AOH hall was in the same block in Walkerville as the Sullivan Hotel or Boarding House. The Sullivan Hotel was owned and operated by Margaret Hanley Sullivan and her brother Eugene Sullivan. Eugene became Sheriff of Butte.

On October 1883 JD married Honora “Nora” Sullivan the daughter of Margaret. Their marriage certificate notes that they were married in the Territory of Walkerville as Montana was not yet a state. It was a great social event in Butte. Honora (Nora) Murphy was President of the Women’s Auxiliary of the AOH for many years as well as being a highly respected citizen of Butte. JD was a miner and became undersheriff to Nora’s uncle Eugene. Nora’s Sister Margaret married Joseph Hogan a prominent mine inspector. Margaret was elected Superintendent of Schools before women had the right to vote. Margaret maintained that position for many years and was unopposed. When Margaret stepped down, her daughter Maybelle Hogan campaigned for and became Superintendent of Schools and maintained that position for many more years. I remember visiting Maybelle at her office and she would give us text books.

Four years after Nora and JD were married, the Sullivan Hotel and the block where it was located in Walkerville burned to the ground. The first AOH hall in Montana was on that block. Miners on their way to work tried to stop the fire but it was too large. The following morning whiskey was served to those who tried to quell the blaze. As the paper at the time put it: “the whiskey was filled with fight and a Donnybrook Fair broke out.” Miners settled old scores and new scores.

In Saint Patrick’s cemetery at the foot of Montana Street, there is a joint plot of the Sullivans and the Murphys. It is not far from the Robert Emmett Literary Association monument and behind a small mausoleum. The joint plot indicates that the two families were closely associated back to Michigan and probably to Ireland.

My grandfather, John Emmett Murphy, was born in January of 1885 probably in the family house on Pacific Street where he was raised. Emmett was the oldest of four children. He was followed by Katherine, Jeremiah Daniel (JD) and Mary. A daughter Laura lived to age twelve when she died of diphtheria. Another daughter Irene died in infancy in 1902.

Emmett was a young man when he heard a beautiful voice in the St. Mary’s choir. It was the voice of Mary Margaret Sullivan. She had twelve brothers and sisters. Her parents were Patrick Dennis Sullivan (PD) and Ann Pendergast. They were not related to the boarding house Sullivans. PD came from Ireland and was a miner. Ann was from Halifax, Canada. Both of my grandmother’s parents had been widowed and each had three boys. Annie and PD were married and had seven more children, four girls and three boys. The family now consisted of thirteen children. My grandmother Margaret Mary was the second child of the new marriage. Around 1900 the mother Ann became ill and it became necessary to send some of the children including Margaret Mary to Sacred Heart Academy, a boarding school run by the Sisters of Providence in Missoula. When her mother died, Margaret Mary returned home to take care of her father and brothers. Her three sisters became Sisters of Providence nuns. The eldest, Anna Catherine, was Mother Lucia and was the foundress of the Great Falls Normal School, which became the College of Great Falls and is now the University of Providence. Johanna Josephine became Sister Margarita and Kathryn became Sister Mary Dorothy. The three sisters worked closely together in their careers. Several years ago, a building on the campus of the University of Providence was named in honor of the three Sullivan sisters. A portrait of Mother Lucia hangs in the Founder’s Room in the Student Union building.

Emmett and Margaret Mary were married in Saint Mary’s Church in 1909. Their home was on Woolman street near the Original mine. Emmett supported the family by working in the mines and eventually became the Paymaster for the Anaconda Company. My dad said that his father could remember the working number of every miner on the hill. Emmett and Margaret’s four children including my father John Emmett Murphy Jr. were born in the house on Woolman street. Later they moved to 620 South Montana Street.

The oldest Murphy daughter, Margaret became a teacher graduating from the University of Montana in Missoula. She taught in Melrose. She married Dr. Edward Carroll and moved to Ventura, California where they raised their five children.

The second daughter Dorothy became a nurse. She joined the Army nursing corps and landed on Normandy the day after the invasion began. When she left for Europe her hair was black. When she returned it had turned completely white. After World War II. Dorothy married Dan Auvil a Lt. Colonel in the Army tank corps. They lived mainly in Oxnard, California where they raised their son Dan.

Emmett and Margaret’s youngest child, Jeremiah Daniel, married Etta McGree the daughter of Tucker and Lucy McGree. Etta and Jerry raised five children. Jerry worked in the aluminum industry at various places in the US and Mexico. He was a Vice President for several of the companies. Etta died October 16, 2019 while I was writing this. She was 98 years old and the last living person of that Murphy generation.

The Murphy’s third child was my father John Emmett Murphy Jr. He went to St. Patrick’s grade school and Butte Central High School. He was working in various mines in the summer while attending Carroll College. He wanted to become a Catholic priest but couldn’t learn Latin. When World War II began, he quit school and returned to the Butte mines. He was deferred from the draft because he was in a strategic industry (copper was vital for the defense). In 1944 he felt he could no longer stay home because his older sister Dorothy was a nurse in the Army and his younger brother was a pilot in the Army Air corps flying B-25’s. Jerry flew in the battle of the Burma Road in India. Emmett’s sense of patriotism led him to join the Army Corps of Engineers as an enlisted soldier. He was sent to officer candidate school and stationed at Fort Belvoir, Virginia near Washington, DC.

It was during this time that Helen Lally from Butte was working in Washington DC. She knew my father was at Fort Belvoir and she also knew that Rita Jeanette Kelley from Butte was in the Navy and was a WAVE working for the Signal Corps in the Pentagon. As children Rita and Emmett went to St. Patrick’s grade school together but Rita went to Butte High and Emmett to Central so they lost touch. Helen reunited the two Butte natives. They dated, fell in love and got married in December of 1945 in Fort Belvoir. Dad got his commission a second lieutenant in the Army Engineer Corp the day before they got married. The new family set up housekeeping in Washington, DC. WWII was over but in March of 1946 Emmett got orders to go to Germany with the US army of occupation. Rita was pregnant so she moved back to Butte to live with her parents. In Germany, Emmett was the officer in charge of a transportation company of all African American soldiers. He returned to Butte in September of 1946 and arrived the night his first child John Emmett Murphy III was born. He was so exhausted from the boat and train journey from Germany that my mother had him sleep in her hospital maternity bed while she labored in a chair. Dad’s brother who had returned from the Air Corps, held my mother’s hand and coached her through labor. I was born at the old St. James Hospital on Idaho street. I was the first in my family to be born in a hospital and not at home. Dr. Lorin Mondloch, my mother’s uncle delivered me.

Butte was a roaring place following WWII with all the servicemen returning and starting families, the start of the baby boom. My dad and his brother and their families and many other service families moved into the new Silver Bow Homes. Dad and his brother Jerry started attending the School of Mines and worked in the mines at the same time to support their families. They both graduated with degrees in Metallurgy. Jerry left Butte to work in the Aluminum industry and Emmett stayed in Butte and continued a 38 year career with the Anaconda, Co.

Over the years Dad worked for the Anaconda Company at the Mt. Con, Emma, Anselmo, Mining Engineering Dept, Research Dept, Badger, Travonia, Berkeley Pit and Safety Department. He worked as a Miner, Laborer, Sampler, Mining Engineer, Underground Engineer, Shift Boss, Asst. Foreman, Foreman and Superintendent. He and Rita moved to Bishop, California for a year where he worked for US Vanadium at a mine before returning to Butte.

I have vivid memories of many of those years. One of my favorite places was the Badger mine. My father would take me with him while he was lining out a shift. I was 4-6 years old at the time. I would wander the mine yard while he was working. The timbers for shoring up the underground workings were stacked at one end of the mine yard. Rabbits would hide in the piles of timbers. It was fun to catch the young rabbits. There was a lot of activity in the mine yard since it was change of shift. I would stand near the shaft and watch the cages come up and get lowered into the mine carrying the miners. I would talk with the miners waiting for the cage and they would give me goodies from their lunch boxes. Such an experience would be unthinkable with today’s safety regulations. The Engine Room or room where the hoists operated terrified me. It was noisy and the machinery was huge and moved fast. Dad said he would take me underground but that terrified me more. I liked the battery room where the batteries for the lights on the miner’s helmets were charged. Even at that age, I did not want to become a miner.

It was about this time that I remember the big First Aid contests at the Columbia Gardens. On Miner’s Union Day each year, each mine or operation would field a first aid team to compete in a contest to see which mine had the best first aid rescue squad. My dad was a great supporter of first aid and many times served as the captain or trainer for the mine team. If the weather was good, the contest would be held outdoors but many times it would be held inside at the Garden’s pavilion or dance hall. I can still see so vividly the rows of canvas squares taped to the floor with the placard showing which mine was represented. The team members were dressed is perfectly ironed new blue bib overalls and long sleeve white shirts. A whistle would sound and one team member would move to the center of the canvas and lie face up. He was the victim. The next whistle would signal that the captain of the team to open an envelope. Inside was the “problem” or description of what injuries the miner had sustained. The team would gather what materials they needed and on the sounding of the third whistle would charge on to the canvas carrying stretchers, splints, bandages and whatever materials they needed for the rescue. There would be a lot of crashing and noise as they set the equipment down. The event was timed and the first team to finish preparing the victim to be moved and picking up the stretcher and moving off the canvas and back would win points. The patient had to be affixed to the stretcher so that he could be securely raised to a vertical position since a horizontal stretcher would not fit in a cage to be raised to the surface. Judges would assess whether all the procedures were done properly and give points for how well they were done and how quickly. The best score determined the winning team. There was great pride among the miners about which mine was the best and they would work hard all year to achieve that goal. There were other mining competitions such as hand drilling and mucking. Dad had several hernia operations because he ruptured himself lifting heavy objects off trapped miners. He lived safety. I enjoyed Miners Union Day at the gardens because of the free ice cream and rides and other events for children.

Dad was the last supervisor at the Travonia mine when it was shut down for good. On the day he died, he was telling his brother-in-law about a “beautiful” deposit of manganese which was about 30 feet below Egger’s grocery store on Excelsior. “I would love to get that someday.”

My father was very safety oriented from the time he started in the mines until he retired as the Head Safety Engineer for the Anaconda Company Butte Operations. Some nights he would come home and be very quiet. I could hear him telling my mom about some accident or fatality that had happened. Often, he would lead the first aid team to “patch up” the injured miners or he would be involved in the recovery after a fatality. He knew almost everyone on the hill and considered them his friends. Every loss was personal for him. As I got older, he would relate the gory details of the accident. Often, he would drink heavily to numb the memory and was affected for weeks. Several times he had near misses himself. He always said that accidents occur because someone isn’t paying attention and they set a trap for themselves and then walk in. Sometimes when I went with him to the mine and we would drive up on a work crew and I could see them scramble to put on their safety glasses, respirators or hard hats. He had no tolerance for safety violations. Later in his career he was instrumental in drafting the Mining Occupational Safety Act enacted by the Montana Legislature which was like OSHA for mines. Dad also supervised a volunteer “helmet crew” that went to Kellogg Idaho to rescue and recover miners from the disaster at the Sunshine Mine. He was too old to don a helmet and enter the smoke filled mine, but he saw to it that his men were safe and had what they needed to complete their mission.

It seemed as if my father was fearless. He told the story of having to inspect the Modoc air shaft. The Modoc did not have a headframe or hoist so a crane was brought in and he was lowered into the shaft on a bosun’s chair with just the light on his helmet for illumination. Another time he was driving his jeep in the pit when the ground opened under him. He had driven over an old concealed mine shaft. The jeep was wedged at an angle in the shaft. He opened his door and looked down into the darkness of the shaft.

When I was 9 years old, Dad came home and picked up my mother and all the kids in our station wagon. He said he wanted to show us something new. We drove out in a field and there was a large earth moving shovel and a few big trucks. The shovel started “ramping down” and the Berkeley Pit was born. He said, “I want you to remember this because it is really going to be something someday.” He was an assistant foreman of the new Berkeley Pit project. He remained there for many years until he was appointed Superintendent.

I went with my father often when he got called out when there was a problem or breakdown. I learned how things operated and we would have long talks about the mine, equipment and people. I loved this time with Dad. When I was in high school, sometimes Dad would give me a helmet and have me direct traffic like an adult worker. Dad knew everyone in town and they knew and respected him. On one occasion in a restaurant we ran into an old miner who had worked for him at one of the mines. The miner was a big guy and when he saw dad he boomed “do you remember the time you fired me on Christmas Eve?” I got concerned. Dad laughed and said “I never fired anyone who didn’t need firing.” They both laughed slapped each other on the back and conversation moved on. Dad would always introduce me to guys he ran into. He would say to the person “This is my boy Emmett,” and then he would say to me, “Emmett, this is Joe, he is/was the best hoisting engineer, ropeman, electrician, mechanic, boss, etc. on the hill, at the Badger and so on.” At my dad’s wake, many old miner’s hat in hand would file in and tell us that Emmett was the best there was on the hill. Some were crying so the sentiment was genuine. Others told stories of how knowing Emmett had changed their lives. Several said they were students at the School of Mines and had come to him looking for a job. He would give them a job for the summer or weekends but only if they would return to school in the fall. He wanted them educated and not working in the mines all their lives.

Strikes were part of the Butte culture. My father was a supervisor. The supervisors would stay on the other side of the picket lines and keep the vital equipment running. I remember times when Dad would leave and say he didn’t know when he would be back because the strikers might not allow supervisors to cross the picket lines and they would have to remain inside until the strike was over. One time the company pulled railroad sleeper cars into the office area of the pit and refrigerator trucks full of food supplies for the to live on until the strike was over. Fortunately, my Dad and the union workers got along very well. Mutual respect was the order of the day plus they genuinely liked each other. I can only remember one time when a drunk man came to our house and threatened dad. There was some intense conversation on the sidewalk out front before the man left. Another time the FBI contacted dad at work. A man on their most wanted list was working in the pit as a truck driver. They planned to have Dad call the man to his office to talk to him. FBI officers in miner’s clothes would be mulling around outside Dad’s office. Once the man was in his office, the officers would jump him and arrest him. Dad was told to get under his desk at that point because there was likely to be gunfire. My father could not tell anyone about this, even my Mother until the operation was completed. Dad was very quiet and worried when he went to work but when the time came, the arrest was made without incident.

My earliest memories started when my family moved from Silver Bow Homes to our first house on Florence street across from Gribben’s Plumbing. The house is gone now but stood on the spot where Wayrenen and Richrards funeral home is. I was about four years old. My dad would take me across the street to Clarks Park where we would peek through holes in the wooden fence surrounding the baseball field and stadium. One night the stadium burned, and we watched the whole scene from across the street. My next sibling Jeanette was born while we were living there. In 1950, I remember driving with my parents and baby sister to North Drive. Dad showed us a new two-story house under construction in a new development called “the Drives.” Soon we moved in and the family lived there for over fifty years. At first, there were few houses around us and there was a horse pasture across the street. We were living on the edge of town.

The rhythm of our lives was set to the sound of mine whistles. Each mine had a whistle with a distinct pitch. In the morning, we left for school when the whistles blew. Whistles signaled lunch time. The evening whistles signaled when it was time to head for dinner. The siren on the Race Track fire station at 9 PM signaled curfew at night. At night we were lulled to sleep by the sound of the trucks in the pit, the air starters whining on the trucks or the horns on the shovels signaling the trucks whether to take their load to the crusher as ore or as waste to the waste dumps. The sound of the blasting in the Berkeley Pit reminded us it was noon. One by one the whistles grew silent as mining in Bute changed. Only the sounds of the East Pit remain.

Rita and Emmett’s family grew as three more children, Patty, Walter and Dennis, came along. We all walked to St. Ann’s school which was a block away. The baby boom generation was growing, and each teacher had upwards of sixty students. We were taught by the Sisters of Charity of the BVM (Blessed Virgin Mary). These women were extraordinary. They could control a room of students with a snap of their fingers or rattling the large rosary which hung from their waists. The rattle was a warning much like the rattle of a rattlesnake, a sound that you better heed. Sunday mass was always a big event. Large Catholic families stood lined up in the pews. Murphys, Bartolettis, Orozottis, Joness, Sullivans. With only five children, my family was only medium sized. Birth control hadn’t been perfected and was frowned upon by the Catholic church. When I was in 8th grade, I was the second highest rated altar boy at Saint Ann’s. Dad often worked on Sunday or would get called out, so he would attend mass as early as he could. Sundays I enjoyed awaking at 5 AM and going to 6 AM mass with my father at Saint Joseph’s church or Sacred Heart. Tony Konicka (Trader Tony) was one of the men taking up the collection at Sacred Heart. I was baptized at Sacred Heart Church by Father Kaparich. Grade school in the fifties in Butte was interesting. At the beginning of the year an adult (I don’t remember if it was the police, firemen or somebody from the mines) would come to our classes and warn us about finding blasting caps used to set off dynamite. This included photos of the caps and pictures of what they could do to a person if they were standing nearby or holding one. Of course, as soon as school ended for the day, many students scoured their neighborhoods looking for…….blasting caps! It was the height of the Cold War and nuclear war was imminent. To prepare, we had drills teaching us how to hide under our desks so we would be protected when an A-bomb was dropped on Butte.

On Christmas morning we would rise to see that Santa left a pile of presents for us. They were covered with a sheet, no peeking! With five kids, our parents didn’t have time for wrapping presents. Then it was off to 7 AM mass at St. Ann’s. After mass we headed to Martha’s Café on Front Street or the 4Bs for breakfast. Finally, we would get home and with much fanfare, the sheet was removed revealing our treasures. Those were very social times. Holidays meant visiting your relatives and neighbors particularly on Christmas Day. In the afternoon, neighbors and their children would come to visit, and the children could play with their friends’ toys. Many of dad’s co-workers would come to visit. Liquor flowed and dad was known for his generous cocktails. Everyone smoked cigarettes. The Butte relatives, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins would come to visit. My mother always made Christmas dinner a week early so she could visit and have Christmas day with her kids and visitors without worrying about cooking. Sometime during the day, dad’s cousin Fr. Joe Pat Sullivan would come to visit, and we would all kneel to receive his blessing when he left. The visits went until late in the evening. New Year’s Day was similar with more drinking and less presents.

Easter was a more solemn time. This is the time of year when we got new clothes to replace the ones we outgrew. A trip to Newman’s Bootery was in the cards. We got to see the live monkey they kept on a cage high on the wall and see the bones in our feet with the X-ray machine, very cool. Not to mention that we left with new Buster Brown shoes and occasionally some Red Ball Jets (the tennis shoes were banned from Catholic school). Every Friday night, dad would line up our shoes and polish them. They would be lined up, largest to smallest, on the counter in the kitchen. You could count on it just like the mine whistles. Everyone dressed up on Easter. Mom and my sisters wore their new dresses and Easter bonnets. The boys had dress shirts, ties, suit coats and sometimes a fedora. We would go visit my grandparents after mass and breakfast. Sometimes we would visit my aunts and uncles and other relatives. In the afternoon, my mother would prepare a large dinner often for twenty or more relatives and friends. Then the “oldsters” as she called them, would show up for an hour or two of cocktails and then dinner. Mom put out her finest dishes, silver and crystal. There were fancy tablecloths and cloth napkins. Perfect manners were the order of the day. Dad would give the blessing ending with “god bless the Irish and the people who wish they were Irish.” After my sister Patty married Lenny Luzzi, an Italian, Lenny would add “and God bless the Italians and those who can never be.” The smell of Ham, mashed potatoes and gravy, candied yams, jello salad, assorted vegetables and tons of other food. These were large gatherings. After the dinner, the older folks would gather in the living room having a beer or their favorite cocktail. The children would sit on the floor and were expected to listen and be quiet. This is the time we learned about our family history and genealogy. I wish I paid more attention to what they were saying. My brothers and I played practical jokes on our strait-laced great Aunts. They pretended to be incensed but Mom told us that they secretly liked the teasing and looked forward to it. The talking commode was our favorite trick. My mother’s parents moved from the west side and were living next door, but other oldsters needed to be driven home at the end of the evening.

Over the years, the oldsters dwindled, and the “children” began bringing boyfriends, girlfriends or spouses to these celebrations. After Mother died, Dad tried to replicate the dinners but without Mom there it was never the same.

Funerals were another time for gathering of the family. These were traditional Butte Irish funerals. The evening before the funeral was the wake and rosary at the funeral home. In the morning was the funeral mass and trip to the cemetery followed by a reception and then the family would come over to our house for drinking and remembering. Relatives came from everywhere and, for the most part, the deceased was one of the oldsters, so it was a time for rejoicing and celebrating life, a combination of sadness and happiness at the same time and a time of reconnecting with relatives from far away. One day I was out with my father when we came on an accident on Front Street. A worker got buried while working in a deep trench. Dad helped pull him out but he was dead. This was the first dead person that I saw. I was very young when I came to accept that death was just part of life. Soon the “oldsters” were passing often.

When it was nearing time for me to go to high school, my dad took me uptown to see the pre-game “festivities” the night before the Butte High vs Butte Central football game. A snake dance on Park Street degenerated into a riot and the police had to use tear gas to disperse the crowd. It was scary for an eighth grader and I was wondering what I was getting into. We often would hear the fire sirens and I would scan the town from our second-story window. If there was the glow of a fire, we would go see what was burning. Fires were occasions for social gatherings as the crowd would discuss what the firemen should be doing. I remember the big fires like Penney’s, the old Butte Library, the Winter Garden Bowling Alley and others. It was typical the Butte response, pulling together in the face of adversity.

I graduated from St. Ann’s on the day dad quit smoking. He was smoking three packs a day and the doctor told him that he would never see his family grow up if he didn’t quit. Family was everything to him, so he quit, cold turkey. He was very grumpy. High school was an adjustment getting used to the Irish Christian Brothers instead of the nuns. Also, it seemed strange not having any girls around as it was an all-boys school. A friend of mine and I rode to school each morning with a neighbor, Hilary Nickel. Mr. Nickel worked for Metropolitan Life and drove uptown every morning so he would take us to Central. My mom gave me bus fare to get home on the Racetrack bus but most of the time I walked home the three miles and pocketed the fare. Sometimes, if I had some money, I would stop in at Joe’s pasty shop for a coke or maybe a pasty. Later we would run over Mercury Street to Arizona St and hitch hike home. The people of Butte were always good about stopping and giving us a ride especially when it was below zero. Very few students had cars in high school. For the most part, it was a safe time to hitch hike. There were only two times we felt threatened by the folks we rode with.

When I was a freshman in 1961, the television program Route 66 filmed an episode in Butte. Since Dad was the supervisor of the pit, he arranged the logistics for the filming that was done in the pit and the Berkeley garage. He took me along in the jeep to watch. I got to meet the actor who played the character Rusty on the Rin Tin Tin show on television. I saw the Rin Tin Tin show on the neighbor’s television several times. Route 66 was not carried on the Butte TV stations. While I was sitting in Dad’s jeep at the garage, a guy came and sat in the jeep with me and was studying the script. I talked with him a little then he left. I had no idea who he was. It was later that I found out that he was Marty Milner, one of the two primary stars of the show.

My high school experience was unremarkable. For all the rumors of fights and descriptions of tough Butte kids, we were a pretty docile group. True, we knew where we could find trouble, but my group just chose not to go there. I was built like my mother, tall and thin. At 6”1” and 130 pounds on a good day, I found it much better to be friends with people than to confront them. One of my friends had a car which was a rarity. Four of us would chip in 25 cents and buy enough gas to cruise the drag all evening. The drag consisted of driving west on Broadway from Mercury St to Montana. Broadway was one way going west. Then south on Montana to Park and East on Park which was one way going east to Mercury then up to Broadway to start over again. It was American Graffiti live. The objective was to scope out the chicks and show your friends that you were cool. At times, the hot rod crowd would intersperse with the group making fun of our dorky cars. When I was a senior, construction was complete on part of the new interstate between Harrison and Montana streets. The interstate section was not open yet but someone had marked off a one quarter mile stretch on the new road. At night, teens would sneak around the closed barricades and drag race on the quarter mile stretch until the cops came and chased everyone away. Spectators would hide in the barrow pits watch the action or hide from the cops.

One time a friend of mine Paul Zeigler and I decided to drag race each other. This was laughable since Paul’s car was a 1951 Chevy and my car was a 1953 Buick. These were two of the dorkiest cars ever to race against each other, but it was after dark and no one was around. We snuck onto the new interstate and were creeping up on the marked off quarter mile. Suddenly a whole bunch of people came up out of the barrow pit. It was the hard-core racing group. They had been racing and when they saw our lights coming, they assumed it was the police and scattered into the ditches along the side of the road. They were quite amused at the so called “race” that was happening. One of the girls with the hot rod group was going to be the starter. To make matters worse, I had accidentally gone on a date (another story) with this girl so she knew who I was. We took off, never looked back and never did that again.

In 2018 my wife Judy and I went on a tour of Ireland. Our tour guide grew up in Cork and went to a high school taught by the Irish Christian Brothers. This was the same order that taught at Boy’s Central in Butte. We exchanged stories and learned that our experiences with the brothers were identical. Same discipline, same leather straps used for discipline, same teaching. Now it is easy to see where the Butte brothers learned their trade.

Annually Butte Central would have a raffle to help support the school. Tickets would be handed out to the students to sell. When the dismissal bell rang at three, there was a footrace over Mercury Street to the brothels, 14 South Wyoming, the Dumas at 9 East Mercury and the Stockman. The workers at these establishments were always good for buying a book of tickets. I’m not sure whether they just wanted to be good supporters of Catholic schools in Butte or whether they were just “paying it forward.”

In August of 1963, I was watching the Gillette Friday Night Fights on TV with my father. They were about to announce the decision when the window over the TV bowed in followed by a tremendous explosion. Dad jumped up and said, “I think my powder dump just blew up.” (he was supervisor of the pit at the time). “Grab your hard hat and coat and come with me.” We raced from the house to his jeep. All the neighbors were standing outside wondering what happened. We roared up the street as Dad was on his radio trying to find out what happened. At the end of North Drive was Saint Ann’s Church. Father Joe Pat Sullivan, my Dad’s cousin, was standing in front of the church. Dad told him to get in because “we are probably going to need you for administering the last rites.” He quickly narrowed the location of the explosion to the Pittsmont Smelter Slag Dump near the road to the Columbia Gardens. He dropped Fr. Joe and I off to look in the field for bodies while he went to find out what happened. We roamed around with flashlights but only found the tip of a finger and part of a hip bone. It turned out that some men had stolen some dynamite from the LaVelle powder company west of Butte. They were attempting to sell it back to the LaVelle people. The police were in on the sting operation. Shots were fired and about 100 cases of dynamite in a panel truck blew up. An individual sitting in the truck was blown apart along with the truck. He was later identified from the part of the finger that we found. This was very intense activity for a high school junior. Another time a compressed air pipeline blew up on Anaconda Road. Dad and I rushed to the scene. He gave me a helmet and told me to direct traffic at the base of Anaconda Road and only let in officials and authorities. I was just a high school kid, but an aluminum mining helmet made me superman, I could do anything. I knew some secrets too. Several times I knew my dad got called to clean up suicides. He would say “they took a shortcut.” He would talk with the coroner and a suicide would turn into a heart attack to protect the families. Sometimes it took greasing the palm of the authorities.

The sixties were the time of the space race between Russia and the US. Not to be left out, my friends Rick and Chuck Kaparich and I had our own space program. It consisted of making gunpowder from a recipe that we found in the Encyclopedia Britannica and filling various size pipes (rockets) and seeing how high they would fly when lit. Our Apollo or moon program consisted of a one-and-a-half-inch copper pipe about fifteen inches high jammed with gunpowder. We had an elaborate launch pad. Our goal was to launch a turtle into near earth orbit and return it safely by parachute. We took it out to Father Sheehan Park which was in the area where the War Bonnet Inn is now. There was a large pond and a baseball field there at the time. The interstate or other buildings hadn’t been built and the area was remote on the edge of town. We set the launch pad on the pitcher’s mound and hid in the dugout to launch. Instead of rising gently in the sky, the rocket exploded with a deafening roar and turtle went to heaven. We jumped on our bikes and quickly pedaled home. People were standing on their porches wondering what happened. They were skittish since the Pittsmont explosion only happened the week before. We lived about a mile away from Fr. Sheehan Park. When I got home, my Mother quizzed me about the big explosion. “Are you and Rick playing with rockets again?” No, I lied. Rick, now Fred, became an engineer in the aerospace industry and Chuck designed and built the Carousel in Missoula.

When I was a senior, I got a summer job at the Columbia Gardens. I had been mowing lawns in the summer and making about $2.50/per day. The Gardens job paid $2.50 an hour so I was rich! Ted Beech was my boss at the Gardens and he treated us like adults. I was a groundskeeper, mowing lawns, planting flowers, assembling the carousel in the spring, repairing the roller coaster, picking up garbage, cleaning up the pavilion dance hall and boardwalk and other tasks. We all wore aluminum helmets and had to join the Building Service Employees Union. We felt very grown up. It was a wonderful time working there in the summer. We got to associate with the girls who monitored the playgrounds. Zorka Milanovich was the adult who supervised the playground and the young high school girls were known as “Zorka’s Girls.” On busy holidays, the groundskeepers had to help with the rides which included the roller coaster, carousel and airplanes. We would give free rides to Zorka’s girls and earn extra points with them. Those were great times. After I graduated from high school, I got my first car, a 1953 Buick Special, a real tank. That summer, there was a picnic for all the gardens workers. My parents were out of town, so I went to the Club 45 in Meaderville with Mike Hannifin who was also working at the Gardens. It was my first experience drinking alcohol. Then we went to the party at the Gardens. Later in the evening after Ted Beech and his wife Sis and the other adults left, someone produced a keg and the party continued. I managed to make a fool of myself. Several days later Sis Beech called me over and told me how disappointed she was that I had done that. I was devastated because I respected Ted and Sis so much. It was a tough lesson. Growing up wasn’t easy. There were some great folks to work with at the Gardens, Jerry Bugni whose family lived at the gardens, Lou and Joe who worked in the greenhouse. Dolph the carpenter and Dobber the painter and all of the students who worked on the rides, took care of the playground and kept up the grounds. I remember Rich Collins, Jimmy Ballard, Bill Bugni, Mike Hannifan, Henry Lussy and Phil Nichols. The people who ran the concessions on the boardwark became our friends. Ossello’s ran the hot dog and popcorn stand nearest the pavilion. Frank “Paneek” Panisko had the game room. Mrs. Shea ran the ice cream Parlor.

We did the usual mischief in high school. The night before the Butte Central/Butte High football game, we painted, or rather threw paint, on the Bulldog at Naranche Stadium. This was more of a tradition than a malicious act. The Butte High kids meanwhile were throwing bottles of paint at the Butte Central building. The next week each would have to clean up the messes that the opponents had made. A concerted effort had been made to eliminate the riots I saw when in eighth grade. The big game was now a more controlled “event” than in the past.

I think it was about this time that dad came home and told us that the pit had been ordered to expand to the east and Meaderville would be razed. This hurt dad greatly as he had many Italian friends who lived there or had businesses like Tino Grosso who owned the Aro Café. My father loved to go to Meaderville for dinner and so did many of our relatives. Dad’s Brother-in-law Dan Auvil would drive over from Spokane and back in a day in his Jaguar just to eat in Meaderville. The destruction of Meaderville and McQueen was a sad project for Dad undertake because he knew so many residents.

In 1964 I graduated from Butte Central High School. Our commencement was held at the pavilion at the Columbia Gardens. It was just for Boy’s Central. Our prom that year was also at the Gardens. That fall, I started at the School of Mines. My grandfather attended the School of Mines just after it opened and only consisted of one building, Main Hall. My father told me that his dad thought he knew more than the professors, so he dropped out. My father and his brother Jerry attended the School of Mines when they returned from military service after World War II. They graduated together with degrees in Metallurgy. My attendance at The School of Mines lasted two years. During that time the school’s name was changed to the Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology. Years later my daughter Annette and future son-in-law Doug Compton would graduate from Montana Tech with degrees in Environmental Engineering. My wife Judy returned to school after raising our two children. In the same graduation ceremony as Annette and Doug, my wife Judy was awarded a master’s degree in industrial Hygiene.

The late sixties were a turbulent time in the United States. The war in Vietnam was escalating and there was increasing racial tension in the country. My School of Mines friends and I would sit in the Student Union Building and discuss the war and conjecture about who would wind up being drafted and who might not come back. As college students we had 2-S draft deferments if we stayed in school. Three of us decided that we would form a rock band and decided to call it Freddy and the Night Crawlers. Fred Bates was our drummer. Our dreams were dashed on June 28, 1966 when Fred was killed by a rock fall in the High Ore Mine. He had been mining to put himself through school. At least he wouldn’t have to worry about Vietnam. It was a reminder of the dangers of mining and our first experience with losing a friend.

I moved on from the Columbia Gardens and started working in the Berkeley Pit when I wasn’t in school. My jobs included working as a laborer, on the powder crew on the drills and as an oiler on the shovels. Bob Henderson was the shovel operator on our crew. Working with the massive machinery was impressive especially when I got to relieve the shovel operator for several hours each shift. Even above ground it was dangerous work and I had several brushes with death and came out on top. Sometime later my younger brother Walter was burned at the Precipitator Plant when an acid line pulled apart above him. When Walt got burned our dad was the head of the Safety Department of the Anaconda Company.

At the end of spring semester in 1966, I decided that I was not a good fit at the School of Mines. Dad said that there was probably going to be a strike that summer so the mines would be shut down. I would probably be better off going to school, so I started summer quarter at Montana State University in Bozeman. Almost every weekend I returned to Butte because I missed the excitement of having by two sisters and two brothers around. We were a close-knit family. Fall quarter I returned to MSU. That is when I met my future wife Judy Armstrong from Missoula at a dance for transfer students. Judy was transferring to MSU from Gonzaga. I was renting a house with a high school friend Hector Lott. Hector was from Cuba. He knew Judy’s cousin in Helena from time he spent in Helena and after he and Judy talked, he introduced her to me.

Around 1962, Catholic Charities brought about a dozen Cuban boys to Butte to go to Boys Central. Conditions in Cuba were deteriorating after Castro took control. Some parents in Cuba with the help of Catholic Charities were able to get their kids out of Cuba. They originally came to Helena and then some came on to Butte. I became friends with several of the boys and they graduated with me in 1964. Butte was quite an adjustment for them both climate and culturally wise. My parents took Hector under their wings and treated him like a member of the family. Hector and I became close friends and when we both went to Bozeman, we rented little a garage that had been converted to a house. The following year, Hector enlisted in the Army. We remain friends to this day.

At the beginning of Summer semester of 1968, Judy Armstrong and I were married in Missoula. Judy’s friends in Missoula could not believe she was marrying a guy from Butte since Butte had such a tough reputation. Missoula was flooded with my family and friends from Butte. All the rooms at the Thunderbird Motel were rented to Butte folks. The morning of the wedding, many of the cars were decorated with “still married” signs. Maybe the Missoula folks were right about those Butte hooligans except this was done by my parents and their friends!

My graduation from MSU in August brought a change of draft status from 2-S to 1-A which was the most classification most likely to get drafted. No business wanted to hire a man facing the draft because it was probable that he would be drafted. However, F.W. Woolworth hired me and told me that, if I was drafted, they would hold my job open until I got home. They assigned me to be the Assistant Manager at a store in Lewistown Montana. That December I got a letter ordering me to take a pre-draft physical at the induction center in Butte. There was quite a bit of anti-war sentiment in Montana. There was an expectation that there might be demonstrations or other trouble at the induction center. The Butte police decided to do some undercover surveillance of the center. Someone came up with the idea to use a street sweeper truck with a driver and an officer dressed in civilian clothes. The potential inductees sat on the sidewalk of the center waiting to enter for their physicals. A street sweeper kept driving around the block, inconspicuously of course, keeping an eye out for trouble. They went around so many times that they wore the stripes off the street and the street was never again that clean. Fortunately, there was no trouble that day, no demonstrations or riots. I passed my physical exam and they told me to expect my draft notice in two weeks. There would be thirteen weeks of boot camp and training and then straight to the infantry in Vietnam for one year. I decided to enlist in the Navy for four years rather than get drafted into the Army for two years. In January I left for Navy boot camp in San Diego. Judy moved back to her parents’ home in Missoula until she could join me. Other draftees opted to leave for Canada for asylum or go to prison rather than be forced into the military. I listed Butte as my permanent residence on my enlistment forms.

I received my basic training at the Naval Training Center in San Diego. We moved to Norfolk Virginia for a Navy school then got transferred to a Naval Air Station at Lemoore, California. NAS Lemoore was a training air station for aircraft carrier-based fighter/bomber aircraft when their carriers were in port. I worked in communications and we often received messages about Lemoore aircraft that had been shot down in Vietnam. The wives of the pilots lived at Lemoore while their husbands were deployed, and we had to deliver the horrible news that their husbands were captured or killed. After a year, I got orders to report to the USS Oklahoma City (CLG-5) which was homeported in Yokosuka, Japan. The Oklahoma City was a guided missile cruiser with five- and six-inch guns and Talos missiles. After my first cruise, Judy joined me in Japan, and we lived off base in the Japanese village of Kinugasa. The ship would return to Japan every few months for a few weeks and we could be together then the ship would sail for the South China Sea and the shores of North and South Vietnam where we provided naval gunfire support for US forces inland. I worked for the Commander of the US Seventh Fleet. The Seventh Fleet consisted of the US Navy ships in the South China Sea. COMSEVENTHFLT was a three-star admiral and the USS Oklahoma City was the flagship for the Seventh Fleet. In addition to our combat mission we also did diplomatic port visits throughout the area. We did diplomatic missions in the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand and Okinawa. The diplomatic missions were fun. The combat missions not so much. Most memorable was the mission into Haiphong Harbor in North Vietnam to take out the North Vietnamese anti-air defenses the night before the US mined the harbor. The Quan Tri Easter Offensive by the Viet Cong was intense. After two years, Judy and I flew back to the US and I was discharged from active duty. As with all the returning Vietnam military, our return to San Francisco from Vietnam was met with hostility from anti-war protestors. I didn’t mind it myself too much, but I didn’t think it was appropriate to direct that venom at my wife who was pregnant with our first child. Just before Christmas of 1972 we landed at the Bert Mooney Airport and were met by our joyful families. We were home and a new era of the Murphys in Butte started.

On Valentines Day in 1973, I started work with the Montana Power Company in the Butte Division offices which were then located in the Butte General Office at 40 East Broadway. I was a Marketing Representative working for Harry Miller. Al Ducich was the Butte Division Manager. Judy and I couldn’t find housing in Butte so we rented a little house in Rocker. Our first child Annette was born in May of 1973 at Saint James Community Hospital in Butte. Dr. Bert T Jones was our OB GYN. He was a close friend of my family. Before starting with MPC we didn’t have insurance since we were just out of the Navy. Dr Jones let us pay what we could afford. Our son Kevin was born in August of 1975 in the same hospital. Dr. Jones delivered him also. We were still living in Rocker but I had been transferred to the Anaconda office. We packed up and moved to Anaconda. I worked as a Marketing Rep and after several years was promoted to Town Manager. A few years later, I was transferred to Butte to work in the General Office. Bill Sherwood was my boss and we worked with the largest electric and natural gas customers negotiating contracts and then monitoring the contracts. I commuted between Anaconda and Butte for over twenty years. My experiences with Montana Power could fill volumes. I was working with the large industrials and doing industrial development trying to attract businesses all over Montana to improve the economy. It was an interesting job that included working closely with cities and the State of Montana and the legislature. I was involved in working with Dennis Washington to get open pit mining reopened in Butte. Our greatest success came when we were successful in attracting ASiMI (Advanced Silicon) to Butte. Todd Higanbotham, a Butte native worked for ASiMI in Moses Lake, Washington. ASiMI was planning to build a new plant and were nearly ready to commit to Spokane. Todd was successful in getting them to look at Butte as a site. Jim Smitham who worked with me, Evan Barrett who directed the Butte Local Development Council and I drove to Moses Lake and made a presentation about the Butte site. Their management became interested and came to Butte and visited the site. Not long after that the CEO of Komatsu Corp of Japan (ASiMI was subsidiary of Komatsu) came to Butte and inspected the site. One hundred days from our first trip to Moses Lake, we reached a deal, negotiated electric and natural gas contracts and secured a mountain of governmental permits and agreements. ASiMI made the announcement that they had chosen Butte as the site for their Vision 2000 project. Soon construction began on the billion dollar plant. The ASiMI management said that it was the openness and honesty of the Butte and Montana people that caused them to choose Butte. The mining that had been the lifeblood of Butte was no longer the sole substance of Butte’s survival. Butte’s future was looking brighter.

I had been working for MPC for over twenty years and had risen to the level of middle manager. It was interesting being in the boardroom and hearing the officers and directors decide the direction of the company and being allowed into the discussion. Bob Gannon and I were driving to Great Falls for a meeting with the Rural Montana Electric Cooperatives where Bob was to give a speech. I managed the Co-op contract and I had asked Bob to speak to the Coops about the future. On the way to Great Falls, Bob’s cell phone rang. It was John Lahr who was the head lobbyist for MPC. John told Bob that the California legislature had just passed a bill deregulating electricity and changing the utility model of business to open competition. Bob got off the phone and told me what John had said. Then he muttered “this changes everything.” I’m convinced that this was the hour that deregulation and the fall of Montana Power started. It wasn’t long after that, I was at an officer’s meeting in the boardroom when they voted to proceed with deregulation in Montana. The next few were years were very turbulent at MPC and the story of the decline and fall would take many pages.

Montana Power offered enhanced retirement packages to persons who could qualify. Luckily I had enough points to qualify so I took the offer and retired at age 54. We saw this coming, so Judy had searched and found a job in Helena working for the State Department of Labor. I was no longer working in Butte. On New Years eve of 2001 my father died. He was buried in January of 2002 in Holy Cross Cemetery. It took several years to sell the house on North Drive. The day I closed on the house and headed up the pass toward Helena under Our Lady of the Rockies, I realized that after more than 125 years in Butte, the Murphy presence was gone. There were no living Murphy direct descendants living in Butte.

Within a small radius of the Butte Archives lies most of the history of the Murphy/Sullivans in Butte. At the top of Main Street just as you come into Walkerville is the location where the Sullivan Boarding house and the first AOH Hall stood. Coming just down the hill is Pacific Street where the first JD Murphy family house is still standing today. On Woolman in the block just east of Main is the location of the original PD Sullivan house and location of Liggans Bar where PQ Sullivan my grand uncle was murdered during a robbery. Just above the Original mine on Woolman St. is the home where the combined Sullivan and Murphy families lived. My father and his two sisters and brother were born in that house. On Main St just below the Archives to the east is a two-story pink building. This was the Anaconda Pay Office where my grandfather was the pay master for the Anaconda Company and many of the Murphy and Sullivan clans came to pick up their miners pay. On Granite Street is the Hennessey Building which was the headquarters of ACM. My father worked in that building when he was Head Safety Engineer for Anaconda. My sisters Jeanette and Patty worked as secretaries in the Hennessey building during summers for ACM. Later, when Montana Power bought the Hennessey Building and it became the headquarters for the non-regulated part of Montana Power, I worked for Montana Power Trading and Marketing in that building. To the west of Main on Granite is the Energy Building which was owned by Montana Power and now by Northwestern Energy. I worked in that building and was there when we attracted ASiMI to Butte. My office was on the top floor on the south west corner. Further west is the Silver Bow Club. When Montana Power was growing, they moved my department to the second floor of that facility. Our offices were next to the Butte offices of Senator Conrad Burns. Judy Martz was his representative in Butte. Judy would go on to become Lt. Governor then Governor of the State of Montana. On East Broadway was the General Office building which also housed the Butte Division Office for a while. I started on the ground floor of the GO in Butte Division. Later, when I came back to Butte from Anaconda my office was located on the second floor. Later I was moved to the Thornton building in different offices. My father occupied one of those offices years before when the Anaconda Co. owned and had its Safety Department there. Many people in the building watched the completion of Our Lady of the Rockies from my office on the top floor on the south east corner. My daughter worked as an intern for MPC in the Thornton Building when she was going to Montana Tech. The Thornton Building at one time was the ACM Club for employees. It had bowling alleys on the second floor. When I was four years old, I would go with my dad to watch him bowl leagues there. I bowled there when I was in high school. There weren’t automatic pin setters just “pin boys” who would manually reset the pins. I attended Rotary luncheons in the basement. When I first started, we would have coffee at a small snack counter located on the first floor. Later the Montana Power Credit Union occupied part of the first floor and the MPC personnel and training rooms were located there. Interspersed around the buildings are the mines where my ancestors toiled and helped make Butte.

I barely touched on my Mother’s family who came to Butte before Montana was a state. They had an equal impact. Their story is next.