

Questions for Interview

- 1.) What do you remember most about the Great Depression?
- 2.) What brought your family to Butte?
- 3.) What were your parents' jobs?
- 4.) What did you do for a job growing up around the Butte area?
- 5.) What major differences do you see in today's Butte compared to Butte in the days that you were growing up?
- 6.) What is your greatest sports memory that you were involved in?
- 7.) What was your job/position working for the Montana Power Company?

Kyle L. McCall
History 3236-01
Oral History Assignment
04/26/05

Kyle: This is an interview of Al Ducich, conducted by Kyle McCall at the Waterford on April 19th, 2005 at approximately 2:30 P.M.

Al Ducich: At an early age, oh about three years or four years old, we moved to Butte or to Phillipsburg. My dad followed mining and he had a couple of mines up there so we stayed there until I finished grade school there, so we were there about ten/twelve years. And then in the early thirties, 1930-31 we moved to Butte and I started Butte High School. In my sophomore year I got into all of the sports, football, basketball and track all three sports, lettered in all three. What might be interesting is the fact that while in Phillipsburg, when I was in the first grade, like I said my dad was a mining man and in those days we didn't have too many automobiles. I mean sure we had a car at home but basically used horse and buggy and my sister and I got out of school we saw the horse and buggy up in front of the house. We knew that dad had come in from mining drills and he was going back up the hill, and this was around three o'clock in the afternoon, and he was going back up to the drill so we hurried up through the fields and we were about half to three quarters of a mile from school to catch a ride up with him and the we would come back after his shift was over, the closing shift. So, we got aboard the wagon, horse and buggy and we went up the road and we came within maybe, oh a quarter of a mile, half a mile from the place where he had his mine, and then there was the bigger mine up the hill a little ways. Well, we came to a place in the road where the horse suddenly stopped. We couldn't figure it out because you know it was a country road, it wasn't

paved or anything like that but it had been used quite often by the miners, particularly in the mine above my dad's and the horse stopped. And dad couldn't imagine why it stopped; he tried to urge him on by gently patting him on the back, on his backsides. The horse kind of backed up and moved back wouldn't go. So dad got out and petted the horse patted him and talked to him, got back in. Then began with the reins and the horse took one step and then moved back and Dad was urging him to go and he backed right up, he stood up actually. By this time dad lost patience, and he cracked that horse on the rump and all I remember is one jump, the horse moved one jump and away we went, we went down ninety feet into a hole if you could imagine. What had happened, the mine above my dad's had mined out all of this area even though it was under the road and it was spring of the year and it started to thaw. We just happened to come along at the improper time I guess and it killed the horse immediately but my dad and my sister and I survived. I was unconscious probably the longest, my dad had a broken leg and a broken shoulder, he got pretty badly banged up. But anyhow, I relate that story because sometimes don't discount an animals fears. But yeah, we moved to Butte in 1931, I started Butte High School and like I said, I got active. There was another story in a short while and you know at that time things were pretty tough, just before the depression. Twenty-five cents per hour was big money. My dad of course followed his dream, he wanted to be a prospector and that's what he did. But we came to Butte and they had the four of us kids and things were pretty rough and so, she (mom) hadn't paid her bills to the Montana Power. So she went up to see the general superintendent, a guy by the name of M. E. Buck, and she says, I got a scrapping big boy, this is in the summer before school had started and they were just bringing gas into Butte. She says, he could work and pay

off some of this bill, we owed eight five buck and that was a lot of money in those days. So, M. E. Buck gave my mom a slip and I went down to the Montana Street substation, they were hiring there. Phoenix Utility was doing the work. With this slip I would do work, it was common labor you know, digging, ditching and stuff like that. Boy I had blisters upon blisters and my hands were so sore and I couldn't hardly eat because I was so damned tired and sore but anyhow I worked through that. But after that, every summer, every summer all I had to do was go to the Montana Power and I'd have a job. So it made it nice and then when I finished high school, I finished and went to USC and I was only at USC two years and then I finished some schooling at Montana Tech. And this was just before the war and they had professors coming in from Missoula and also from Bozeman teaching various classes. And I availed myself to that and I got a diploma from Montana State in electrical engineering and that of course gave me a career. When the war broke out in 1941 we were at that time, we were playing basketball. We played for the Montana Power Company and we had a pretty darn good team. We won the state championship two years. We played teams like the Bobcats and Grizzlies. We are the only team that I can think of, 'Did you ever hear of the Harlem Globetrotters?' we beat them in the Montana Tech gym. Yeah we did, we beat them. But anyhow they started clowning too soon and we got ahead of them and we managed to beat them. But anyway, many years ago I, oh I would say about fifteen years ago I went up to The Standard and we pounded the story and they gave me a big page and what not of my team beating the globetrotters it was interesting. But my career then started actually I might say from the time that I was a sophomore in high school at Montana Power and I stayed with Montana Power even after I got my schooling finished and uh went to work for them and worked

up through the channels and I was division manager of the Butte division for twelve years and then went up into the office as the Vice President. I retired in 1982 and I thought I was on safe ground. I built quite a kitty, I was really well off and I invested heavily in Montana Power stock and I refused to believe what was happening was going to happen. And your probably familiar with the story, of course the new kids on the block took the company, bum decision and bad decisions, and I still couldn't believe it was happening but I found out later that forty two years of work at the Montana Power Company went up in smoke and I had a substantial amount of money, well over two million dollars and that went up in smoke because it was all in stock. Montana Power of course was transferred to Touch America and Touch America went broke, I refused to believe it was happening and it happened. So there you go that's pretty much an outline of my life at Montana Power, now you go ahead with your questions.

Kyle: Well, I was going to ask you what brought your family to Butte, but you have already said that your dad was into mining.

Al Ducich: Into mining, yes. My dad came from the "old country", he came from Yugoslavia, and at that time it was Serbia. My mother lived down in Sheridan, Wyoming. Her parents were from Yugoslavia too, then they got married and what not. Then they started to raise their family here in Butte. He was a miner and then like I said, he followed mining and went to Phillipsburg.

Kyle: I was just going to ask, what major differences to you see in Butte today compared to Butte when you were growing up?

Al Ducich: Ok, when I was growing up, Butte was the largest town in the state. We used to go to Billings, Billings was a cow town to us, although they did have some

good football teams through the years and we lost one year to them but it was more or less a cow town, and like I said Butte was the biggest town in the state, bigger than Great Falls and now Butte is seventh or somewhere there about. The enrollment at Butte High School when I was there, we graduated something like three hundred and eighty out of High School.

Kyle: Do you know the enrollment now? Is the school smaller now?

Al Ducich: Oh, we went to school at the old high school. That is where Butte Central is now. There was a huge building there and that was Butte High School. They had a fire eventually there, but plans were made in the late thirties to build a new school currently where it is now. I believe that was completed in 1938, of course I was packed out and working construction. My brothers both went to Butte High, both were good athletes. So my old school went by the way side and Butte High School of course was there in the late thirties and has been there since.

Kyle: I know you were really into the athletics like you said and went quite a ways. Mr. Harrington actually mentioned that you might have had scholarship to play at USC.

Al Ducich: No, I went down at a walk on. And I thought I was you know, I thought I was a hell of an athlete which it was tough competition down there. One of the guys, I don't know if the name means anything to you but Al Buckvich had a scholarship in basketball and there were three of us, Al Brown, Al Buckvich and Al Ducich. We went to USC and started school there, two of us on the basis that we would walk on there and the other one had the scholarship. He did well, he lettered, Al Buckvich did, lettered in basketball all through the time so he was able to go through on his scholarships but after

my sophomore year I decided that I was going to have to bail out. I just couldn't, it was just too much money and actually I did have an appointment to go to West Point and I came home and started school at Butte College, a preparation for a West Point entry at the time. I was first alternate but the guy who had the principle appointment went in ahead of me and he just as well because he got killed anyway. But I served a little time in the air core until I had strong plans but I had ulcer break and that ended that part of it.

Kyle: What are some of your greatest sports memories? I am kind of interested on the sports part of this because I am an athlete myself here.

Al Ducich: Well, I don't know if you are familiar with the rivalry between USC and Notre Dame. I am sure you are. Alright, I am one of a few people who went to USC everybody in Butte is of course pro Notre Dame, and even I married into a Notre Dame family. We went to a Notre Dame vs. Southern Cal football game one-year and there were ninety-two of us and we went by train. Two of us were for Southern Cal and the rest were for Notre Dame. Well it was the first year of the O.J. Simpson's playing, well I believe it was his third year of playing. Well, O.J. Simpson was one of the first blacks to ever get into USC. During the times that I was there, there were no blacks. See the blacks came later. We went to several of those games, and I remember Notre Dame was favored at this particular game in back in South Bend. Well, Simpson ran wild that day and Notre Dame fell short on the scoreboard 32-13 or something like that. Well coming back on the train I thought they were going to throw me out of the train. But it was fun and we enjoyed going to all of those games and we did, we went to a lot of them. In sports of course, I have always been sports minded and of course I never deserted my own school and that was tough in Butte where everybody was a Notre Damer.

Kyle: What difference do you see in today's athletics compared to the day that you played in?

Al Ducich: Ok, the day that, the years that I played the first thing that I would mention is that you played both offense and defense. The year I got my first letter there were only sixteen guys would get letters. Now you got a team who plays offense and a team who you know plays defense, you know offense and defense. I am not sure when the change took place but it was in the forties. But up until that time, our squad was never over oh; football squads were maybe well 22 or 21 guys. Now you got probably around seventy. That was a change of course, I played offense and defense. In basketball after every basket, we jumped center. You brought it back to the center, and your plays started from center. Rather than now, the other team takes it out under the basket and you are in play. Well that wasn't my day; we jumped center after every point scored.

Kyle: What memories really stand out to you when you think back to the depression?

Al Ducich: Well, one thing that it did do, it made you a believer of work. If you wanted anything you had to earn it and it wasn't given to you that is in my case it wasn't. You had to earn it. You worked for, well like I said, 25 to 30 cents per hour. I think to some extent that had a bearing on our children. I think in many ways we pampered our kids. We didn't make them learn the value of working for a living and earning for a living. Today, I see a lot of spoiled kids as a result of that. So, to me, you know who had the depression. Things were tough; it was a tremendous lesson. To the point to where we got over protective, and we did, we spoiled our kids. It is going on even today, although

there are a lot more jobs and kids can work if they want to. The thing that I am dismayed by is the fact that, this exposure to drugs. Young kids doing drugs. I am very grateful that my kids didn't and I feel sorry because I know a number of people who have problems with their kids because of drugs. It makes you wonder whether they may be being too lenient and having too much to some extent destroy the incentive for young people.

Kyle: Did you raise your family in Butte? Do you feel that Butte was a good place to raise a family, an easy place to raise a family?

Al Ducich: I believe it is and was, Butte is... I guess the rest of the state looked upon Butte as a rough town. It had the reputation of being a mining community not a bunch of social activity people although I'd say that Butte was every bit as social of a town as any other city in the state. But raising a kid in Butte, a kid still had, he couldn't be pampered, he had to be able to protect himself. What I am saying is, the boys, if they were a wimp they suffered and the girls didn't play basketball, they didn't participate too much in sports like basketball, softball, volleyball and tennis and things like that. Girls didn't participate; they were ruled out of it, well I am glad to see that that has changes.

Kyle: Now you mentioned that your dad was a miner and came here because of that. But what was your mom's job?

Al Ducich: She stayed home and took care of the kids and that is another thing, my wife didn't work. She stayed home and took care of the kids. But today you have to have two breadwinners you know to keep up. That is in most homes, some more fortunate. During my era, most of the time just the husband worked and the mom stayed home and took care of the kids.

Kyle: Well I think that's pretty much all I have go to bother you about and ask questions.

Al Ducich: Oh no that's fine, I'm glad to be with you. It's perhaps a prospective that you expected to find. That was my era and the era for my kids who are now in their fifties or so. One of my daughters is married to Jim Harrington's cousin, did he mention that? My daughter runs the instructor for these dancers, for the Dixie School of Dance.