

Angelina Costello, interviewed in her home by Teresa Jordan,
April 2, 1986.

Notes taken at time of interview; not audited against tape; not a transcript.

AC was born in 1930 in Butte. Her mother was from Texas; her mother's husband from Mexico. They came here when he was working on the railroad. Stayed because there was work here. He worked on the RR here until he discovered the mines. He worked in the mines, was killed by a rock fall. His last name was Acebedo. They had six children. A year later, she married John Aguilar. He was also from Mexico. He came here on the railroad. He was also a miner. He worked contract. They had five children. All together, AC's mother had 18 children, but five died.

AC's father was hurt in the mines, hit on the head with a rock. Her mother took care of him for a year, then he spent a year in Warm Springs. He went downhill after that and died. AC was nine years old when he was hurt. Her mother spoke only Spanish. At Warm Springs, they did surgery on AC's father without her mother's permission. They never told her they were going to do it, or if they did, she didn't understand. He went downhill after the surgery.

Q: How did she make do, raising all those children?

She HAD to make due. She received social security, \$18 for every child. She couldn't get welfare because she had social security. He died around 1942; she took in boarders.

Butte was a Hispanic town then--and there was lots of prejudice. Before the Hispanics came, there were blacks. When the Hispanics came, the mines got rid of the blacks. In school, Hispanics would be called "dirty Mexicans." You could feel the prejudice among the teachers. A principle of one school called AC's brother Joe a dirty Mexican; Joe threw him down the stairs. Their mother always said, 'just ignore it.' People will tell you they were embarassed to say they were Mexicans.

AC's mother used to help a lot of people who didn't have a husband working. She would help them with food and with money. She was open, generous. She would go without herself in order to help another.

Q: What was the Hispanic community like then?

AC remembers weddings--the celebrations were always in the home, not at bars. And children were always included. There were no babysitters.

Their family lived at 839 E. Galena--it's part of the pit now. Their church was Sacred Heart Church--it was adobe, very beautiful. It's gone now. AC doesn't go to church now.

AC had a happy childhood, though her mother went through a lot. She had lost a son in Lake Evoka (sp?) when he was 14. It took her a lot to get over that. But she was very friendly; they had an open house. She was never stingy with the food. Meat was a treat on Sundays. The rest of the time they ate beans and tortillas and potatoess. Their mother would give them glasses of bean juice while she was cooking because that's where all the nutrients are.

Q: What was the attitude in your family towards your brothers working for the Anaconda Company?

AC's mother didn't want her sons to go. But once she tried to get welfare. Queenie Lynch, the director, said her son could work in the mines. He was about 16. AC's mother said, No way; we will do without. But the boys grew, got married; they went in the mines. Also, there was no encouragement in the family to go to school. There just wasn't at that time.

AC's brothers' names are Fred, Dan, and Paul. They all worked for the Anaconda Company until the suspension. AC notes that the Company calls it suspension because they would have to pay out a lot more if they called it "shut down."

Her brothers are all unemployed. They don't want to leave their property here; they have exhausted what they have saved.

Q: They own their own homes?

Oh yeah.

Fred is in Salt Lake; he will be laid off there in Jue. He works there for the ACM, in an outfit like Stauffer Chemical. His wife works with the credit union; she is going to college to better herself.

The Company paid Dan retirement, though he is only 52. But he was in the mines since he was 15. He lied about his age to go. The Company didn't check then like they would now. His wife is a teachers' aide at West Junior High, but she will get laid off.

Paul has a job as a bartender--he makes enough to survive. He is divorced. All the brothers' families have grown & left home.

Paul told his son, who is in the Navy, get all the schooling you can.

Q: Are the problems associated with the shutdown more pronounced for Hispanics?

There is still prejudice. One of AC's sons is married to a German girl. They were looking for an apartment. She looked at an apartment, and it was fine with the landlord for her to rent it. He went to look at it with her the next day; they couldn't

rent it. That was years ago, but you still feel the prejudice. A woman called AC's daughter a dirty spic. That is just plain ignorant.

AC is involved with the Butte Community Union. She is very involved with En Centro De la Raza, an arm of the BCU. This Saturday they are having a Mexican breakfast to raise money for the Cinco de Mayo celebration. They hope this will get the seniors out. Two Mexican Sisters (Catholic) are coming in from Seattle. One, hopefully, will settle here.

Q: Did your brothers feel prejudice in trying to find jobs?

AC doesn't know.

AC has five children. Dave is 36 and bartends at the M&M. Carol is about 32; she cooks at the hospital. Sandra is 30, lives in Portland, works for the Forest Service. May is 29 and is an LPN. Phyllis is 28, is a case worker for big brothers and sisters.

Tape 1, Side B

AC raised her children on her own. Her husband got cancer and died 19 years ago. She didn't remarry.

Q: How have you made do?

Odds and ends; she has had welfare when she has had to. She didn't get social security--her husband needed three more quarters of work to be covered. She doesn't know how she did it, but they always had food, clothing, a roof over their head. She bought clothes at Salvation Army, dressed her kids better than her brothers' kids, and her brothers were working.

Q: A lot of people say now that the worst is over for Butte, that it is recovering, that it is over the hump. Do you agree?

It's certainly not over for those who worked in the mines. AC knows several who have lost their homes. Even if their homes are paid for, taxes are so high. AC pays \$800 in taxes for her house.

Q: Would you ever think of leaving Butte?

Butte is AC's home town, and she likes it. She worked in Billings for 13 years. She started working at the age of 14. She got her GED nine years ago. There had been no push for education at home. Her mother said that schools would show you how to smoke.

AC is pressing her kids to go to college. She has two about convinced. Her daughter who is an LPN would like to be an RN; her daughter in Portland would advance more if she had a degree.

Q: People talk about Butte as being a wide open town. What are

your memories along those lines?

AC was living in Billings at that time, doesn't have those memories.

Q: Is there still a strong Hispanic community?

No. AC has been trying for five years through El Centro to get the Hispanic group out but people only come out for fiestas. They are isolated.

Q: What are the goals of El Centro?

Right now they would like to get Spanish classes. There have been about ten people involved for about five years. One Cinco de Mayo celebration they brought in a Mariachi band from Los Angeles. It cost \$1000, but it was very successful. Among those involved are Mary Martinez, Everett Martinez, Lucio and Sally Montoya, Linda Herrera, Ruth Juarez, Mary Robb. AC is the chairperson.

Q: How effective have social services been here in Butte?

Welfare is humiliating. AC has a nephew who was laid off, went to get welfare. He had two cars. He was told he would have to sell one to get GA--he would have to sell what he worked so hard for. The GA administrators act like the money is coming out of their own pockets. Welfare--it is embarrassing for Butte Miners to go out and work for that little bit.

AC suggests I talk with her brothers and nephews. Paul and Dan Aguilar; Frank Martinez. Her nephew Joe Chavez.

AC knows of one family who went to Denver to look for work; he had a heart attack; they came back; welfare wouldn't help them.

AC says that her family was born poor, so they will survive. She feels bad for those who worked so hard and have lost what they worked for.

Q: Have the unions helped since the shut down?

Tape 2, Side A

Joe Maynard is the only one who is still fighting, and he always has.

Q: What do you think Butte has going for it?

AC says she supposes the Speed Skating Rink--it's a few jobs, not a lot. She thinks that money might better go to the Butte community, to help people with expenses. She would like to see guaranteed jobs.

All her brothers and nephews are savers; they have exhausted

their money.

People have spent money looking for jobs, and it's the same all over as far as what they are skilled for. And for those 50 and over--what are they going to train for?

AC doesn't think that Don Peoples has helped at all. She says that once they get up there, with power, that's the end of the community. There are programs for youth, but she suggests I talk with her nephew Joe Chavez. His daughters have applied, but have gotten no jobs; People's own son, however, was hired. At the recent Indian Pow Wow, the first woman mayor from Browning attended. They were excited about her being there, asked Don Peoples to come meet her. He said he would, or would send a representative. But no one came.

Q: There is a lot of work with historical preservation going on around town--the facade improvement program uptown, the Mine Yard Plan. How do you feel about those projects?

AC has had her house on Granite and Idaho for 14 years, and she hasn't gotten any help with it yet. She bought this house with her work in daycare. The city won't help you with your house unless you own it free and clear and your taxes are paid up. They are helping some people; AC thinks that's where money should be spent. She thinks they should help people with back taxes. AC might be lucky next year and get some help. None of the programs so far have been in her neighborhood.

Q: Could you tell me about your day care work.

AC is licensed for six children. She only has two right now. She has been doing it for 17 years. She used to get \$2 a day/child. Her insurance used to be \$86 a year, then it went up to \$120; now it's \$308. And that is just covering the children; that doesn't cover AC. AC has no insurance on herself at all. Her house insurance is \$190.

The numbers she cares for vary every month. She charges now depending on income. She gets \$9/day per child through the state. If parents pay privately, she charges on the basis of their income. The state sends her kids, also, some come through 4C's. There are 32 daycare providers in the Butte community. AC is licensed for kids two years to six years. One of the kids she provided day care for has just graduated from Butte High school.

About Welfare--AC's family is embarrassed to go through it. Some others abuse it.

Her brother Dan has a book that talks about how lazy the Mexicans were in Butte.

Tape off.

Angelina's half-sister, Lulu Martinez comes in. She says that

Hispanics were given the most dangerous jobs in the mines. But that backfired in a way because they then became the most knowledgeable, the most aware, expert. Traditionally, it was the Californians who worked in the mines. People came up from New Mexico in about 46 or 47. The older ones were from California or Mexico.

Lulu says that her mother was conned out of Lulu's father's death money. (Lulu's father was her mother's first husband.) She didn't get death benefit for Aguilar because the first year he was hurt, she cared for him at home. He was taken to Warm Springs because he went out of the house nude one time and it scared the neighbors. But he was entirely harmless. He was like a child.

Butte was a Hispanic town. Yet, there were never any bilinguals in politics, or even in the churches.

Butte, says Lulu, has always been racist. Civil rights put a blanket over the racism, covered it up. But it is still there. As an example, when the BCU was conducting the survey of Central Butte last year, Lulu trained several people. She would take a trainee out in the field with her; they would go to a house; Lulu would ask the questions, but the people would answer to the trainee, who was white, rather than Lulu. They weren't even aware they were doing that. Lulu volunteers at the BCU. People will want to come in, talk to somebody in charge; Lulu will say, I'm in charge, they won't talk to her. Lulu is a good friend of Sister Kathleen. They will go to church together. Lulu can see prejudice on people's faces when they come in and people see Kathleen with a Hispanic.

Lulu and Angelina talk about how, if they go into an employment office, they will be told there is no domestic work or farm work. The job service people never consider that they have other skills until they are presented with their resumes.

Their mother told them never to marry white kids. And AC told her children that. Some of them did marry whites, and AC loves them.

The Hispanic community gets no support from the churches. They are having the Mexican breakfast on Saturday at St. Josephs, and St. Josephs wants to charge them \$100 for the use of the hall for half a day.

Lulu says that Butte will never overcome its racism because the reins are held by the most racist. Larger communities have people in contact with many other cultures, people who have been away and come back. That's not the case here.

Prejudice is still rife in Dillon, Billings. Those in office set precedents. It starts with government.

In the 30's, there was the WPA in Butte, and the National Youth

Administration. Lulu lied about her age to get a job. She want to work. Johnnie, her stepfather, worked with the WPA.

At this point, the tape is turned on. See Lulu Martinez and Angelina Costello interview.