Mother Lode Project Ann Pentilla
Butte Historical Society
Oral History Project
Memoir of Ann Pentilla
Interviewers: Caroline Smithson (CS)
Ray Calkins (RC)
April 27, 1979

Ann Pentilla is the daughter of Mary and Louis Skolls. The name was originally Skocilich, having been changed because of Butte Prejudice against persons whose name ended in "ich" or "vich", which made it harder to find work, also the name was hard to spell, they were natives of Bribir Jugoslavia.

Nar. They came from Jugoslavia and I think my dad came in 1906 and then he worked in the mines, I think, a year. Then he bought a home and sent for my mother. And furnished the house and the dishes and everything. And when she came she didn't even know how to use a stove because they had that open fireplace affair. So she had a hard time getting adjusted to using a stove. She talked about that.

CS: He must have been a very frugal man to have been able to save that much money.

Nar: Yes, he did. Of course, I think the house was about 150 dollars or 200 dollars, a four-room house. Two years later if was born. All my sisters were born there.

CS: How many sisters?

Nar: I have three. We're all a year apart except the youngest; she was 2 years apart there were 2 more children, girls, and they died at birth. And she did have an oldest son, in Europe, but he died at birth, so that was the only boy and I recall my mother rustling coal. She used to get up on the cars and throw out the coal, when the coal car would be switching. One woman would call the other women and say, "They're switching the coal." So when the coal cars would be switched they used to climb up on the cars and throw out as much coal as they could. Then after the cars would leave they'd carry it on their backs. And she'd have to go about five blocks. She supplied the household with coal.

CS: How often would the trains come?

Nar: Pretty often. Maybe once a week or so. We had enough coal that the shed would be full by wintertime.

CS: That was for heating and cooking?

Nar: Heating and cooking because they had coal ranges. Most of them carried it on their backs and some that were a little wealthier they had wagons; they would pull it with wagons. She would leave us home alone while she would bring in the coal. She suffered after with her neck a lot, as she got older but she lived to be 93 years old. She never was sick a day in her life. She was a real strong, husky woman, and she worked hard. We used to have a garden. We never had city water, we had a pump. We had this great big garden, we had cabbage and rutabagas and just all the vegetables and potatoes. We put a hose onto the pump so we had to take turns to pump to sprinkle, or to irrigate the garden.

CS: That was your back yard?

Nar: Yes, summertime our vacation was chopping and sawing wood for the winter. My dad would haul it this old wood from the smelter and we would have to saw it and chop it

and pile it. That was our vacation. In later years when dad had a truck we would gather the wood from the mountains.
CS: You had one from coal to wood?
Nar: Well, they had coal and wood. You had to have wood to start the fire, have to have wood to start your stove burning for coal. You'd burn more coal at night because you'd band the coal at night to keep the house warm.
CS: Was your father working full time so that your mother was having to do most of the work?
Nar: Yes, he was working full time but the pay was very poor. When he first came to this country he worked at the smelter and I think he was getting $60.00 a month.
CS: Was that before the unions started to organize?
Nar: Yes, and where the Manganese Plant is, that was a smelter, that's where he worked. What did they call that?
RC: The Colorado Smelter
Nar: And after, I don't know the name of the smelter, closed down he went into the mines. And the pay, I think in later years they were getting $4.75 a day. I don't know what they got previous to that. I don't remember. When we were in the seventh grade he told us it was up to us, we had to go look for work. We all looked for work and we all worked, and earned enough for our clothes for school the following year. We started when we were in seventh grade. There was no child labor law then. We worked at Symons Store for $5 a week, six days a week. We earned our clothes and we enjoyed it. Everybody was young and it was more like playing than working. We just looked forward to working. We had to have our lunches out of that. We used to go to the bakery and get a nickel roll for our lunch. And in our younger days we used to walk to school all the time, we never rode the streetcar very much, as we never had the money. The first school I went to burned down, it was located on LaSalle and Franklin. I was in the first grade at the time of the fire. And I couldn't talk the American language. A lot of the children couldn't. Everybody talked their own language.
CS: What language was that, Serbian or Croatian?
Nar: Croatian. So I failed, I didn't make it. The temporary school was at the Fire Hall and they had about six classes there. I think we were there for about two years. That was all in one room. Eventually, I guess, we learned something, I don't know.
CS: Do you remember your Croatian?
Nar: Oh, yes, I read it and write it fluently. My mother didn't speak very good English in all her days. When we conversed with her it was always in Croatian. I speak it fluently and I read and write and correspond to Jugoslavia. I picked it up myself by reading the Croatian paper, and all my sisters speak it, we all speak it fluently. That's all that was spoken and I was the oldest. Naturally the other ones picked up the English language from me by the time they went to school. I remember my teacher, she was so patient. In later years she became a Principal. Her name was Stella McGovern. Seemed like she just stood out in my mind from the first grade up and I always remember her. She remembered me too. She had a lot of patience with the children.
CS: Do you remember much difference with your father in the working conditions when the miners started to unionize?

Nar: Yes. When there were strikes we would just about starve because there was no way of getting groceries. What we used to do was charge the groceries, the grocer would come to your house and take your order and then deliver it the next day. They were independent grocers and they would carry you for maybe five or six months, for the duration of the strike. And it was such a hardship to pay that back. It would be maybe a year or two years to get back on their feet. And it was awfully hard with us, when they had a strike. But I think the working conditions were better for them. And they were paid better. I known a lot of times my dad used to contract and he'd think he'd get paid so much and he wouldn't get paid what he earned. Well, with the Union it did help him.
CS: Did any women join in the strikes?
Nar: No. They didn't. But in later years they did. When they were a little more modernized, but in them days the women were busy with their house and children and never were in active in anything like that. But in later years, about 20 years ago in McQueen and Meaderville there was a lot of troubles and tribulations and women were very active and insulting the ones that worked.
RC: They used to hang around the picket lines?
Nar: Yes
CS: I hear now, talking to some women who have just one or two children how hard it was with children, especially if they were close in age. Did you ever get inkling that it was difficult for women to have, like, you mother having.....
Nar: Yes, I did. They had a midwife to deliver their children. She would help for a week or two weeks and do the washing and cooking and take care of the children for $10 or maybe $5. Of course, this is modern now. They're just staying for five days, she'd be up in about three days because she couldn't stay in bed. She'd have to get up to take care of her children and the housework. And sometimes I wonder how they did it. I think the winters were a lot colder than they are now. And a lot more fog and smog, due to all the smelters. We sometimes wonder, talking about all the lead and everything. I wonder how much lead and arsenic we have in us. There were four smelters and it was always foggy. We could never see outside. Our pump would freeze and before we went to school we'd have to thaw the pump out, put boiling water on it, pump water, put it in a kettle, pack it into the house to heat it for water for washing. Then as we grew older we used to help wash, on the scrub board. One would wring and one would scrub. We'd take turns. But it was sure difficult with just the cold water, there was always a large kettle on the stove for hot water.
CS: It sound like that area of the Boulevard was a real tight community.
Nar: It was. Everybody helped one another. And another thing I was going to say like if a couple was married for twenty-five years, right now, everybody would get together and go from house to house, collect money, get together and give a party. They'd have a dinner and a dance and all the kids and the grownups go and the young children with them just looked forward to go to those things and we went to many, many of them. There was a photographer that took pictures. We have all kinds of pictures where there was a twenty-five year anniversary party. Everybody just enjoyed it.
CS: No leaving the kids with baby sitters?
Nar: No. They'd come along and we looked forward to the party because the children, would get acquainted, with the other children and parents. The girls would play baseball

and marbles with the boys. It was just kind of a different way of living. And then they used to put on shows. The kids would make up shows and go to an old barn and put on shows and charge a nickel or a dime. Everybody would get together and it was just clean fun. I remember, I didn't go down there but my sister did, they used to dig large ditches or caves in the sand pit, and then they'd put a sheeting over it and then they'd go down there and build a fire and bake potatoes. The boys and girls together. We talk about it now, how dangerous it was that the ground didn't cave in.
RC: We even did that in Missoula when I was a kid.
Nar: It's a wonder they didn't get smoked out. And they'd sit in there and they had some sort of a kerosene lamp or something and bake potatoes in that hole.
CS: Every once in a while I read about all the pranks kids would play.
Nar: Yes. They had the regular sand pit and then there was quite a hill and we used to sleigh ride on old covers or pieces of sheet (iron). We never had any sleds. People were poor, and where there was a large family why there wasn't that much. And that was one thing you could say about our dad, he was a good provider, we never went hungry. But we didn't receive very many toys. He didn't believe in buying toys, he believed we should be clothed and fed. Then in the wintertime he used to get all set, we used to buy maybe twenty sacks of spuds. And then he would make his our sauerkraut. About two or three fifty gallon barrels. Sometimes we'd raise a pig and then cure it and smoke it. That would be our food for the winter. We had sauerkraut and smoked meat. He built his own smokehouse.
CS: Did you have a root cellar or just keep potatoes in the basement?
Nar: It was more or less like a root cellar right in your house. They had the basements dug out bit it was all dirt. And real damp down there. We used to have to stamp down the sauerkraut in the barrels with our feet. Stamp it until all the juice came out. And it would have to be solid. If not, it would get mushy and spoil. And it would keep all winter. And then they used to do that with turnips if they made wine. What was left of the grapes, after the wine, mix that with whole turnips and put it in a barrel. And that would sour. They had a certain cutter that you could cut it. It looked just like spaghetti when you would cut it. And, oh, it was the best tasting stuff.
CS: Just the left overs from making wine?
Nar: Yes. We had all kinds of good food. I think better than the food they have now.
CS: Do you remember any differences growing up? I've often wondered what if would be like to be a women growing up in a male town in the surge of the mining, so many men in the mines. Do you remember any differences in what was expected of men and what was expected of women?
Nar: We never noticed it. Everybody was respected. You could go anywhere. Nobody ever bothered you or said anything to you. I mean, you were safe no matter where you went. Where we lived it was near the Milwaukee (Railroad) and all these transients would jump off the railroad cars and come through our alley and then they'd come to the house and ask if they could have water to cook coffee. And not once did they ever bother or steal anything or say anything to us. We had no streetlights and sometimes coming home there'd be thirty or forty of these transients coming through our alley and not one ever harmed us or said anything to us. We used to be a little afraid because all you could see was the light of their cigarette coming toward you because it would be dark. Nobody

was ever beat or hut or robbed. Those men didn't have the matter of transportation. That was their transportation. They were looking for work. That was the way they traveled, but we never had anything stolen. They'd knock on our door and if they didn't have anything to eat sometimes they would ask and they were always fed. We'd give them money, a quarter or a nickel, they could get a sandwich. Give them what you had. And they had a regular hobo jungle where they'd cook their coffee and things like that. But they'd knock and ask if they could have water. We were not a bit afraid. And our doors were never locked. We never had a key. The doors were open because my dad worked different shifts. And the doors were never locked.

CS: Were there things that happened then, like mining accidents, like tragedies or, maybe, acts of passion where somebody would get mad and slug somebody?

Nar: Yes, but when there was a mine accident, if the man was killed it was sure hard on the woman because she had to go out and scrub floors, that's about the only thing they could do to raise their family. And it was really hard. In fact, there was one woman she had twenty children and her husband died when the children were very young. She was a midwife, and she rustle ties and she had a cow and she baked bread and she used to take in washing and then the children would deliver the washing. And that's how she raised her children. In later life she married before the children were grown. But yet she did all that work.

CS: What was break ties?

Nar: Ties. Those were railroad ties.

CS: Like breaking them up?

Nar: Yes, sawing. They used to take care of their railroads. It wasn't like it is now. They were forever replacing the railroad ties. And then they'd just leave them there for the people to take. So everybody would rustle the ties. That was what they used for wood. Then later on my dad had an old Dodge, I think it was, 1916 model so he would drive to the mountains for the wood. Then we'd pick up the dry wood. That was our job, we used to go up and help and pick. We were raised like boys, we weren't raised like girls. We had a ranch, dad decided to buy a ranch which was just dry land farming. That was starvation. So we'd go to the ranch in the summer and come back in the winters. All we'd raise was potatoes, it was dry land farming, no water. So we'd have to dig the potatoes by hand and sort them and put them in the root cellar. And then we'd miss about a month of school. So then we'd have to go to summer school. And we'd have to walk all the way from the Boulevard to the Emerson School for the summer school. And we weren't the only ones. You know in them days if you didn't have passing grades you'd have to make them up. If you didn't go to summer school you failed. Maybe there'd be about nine or ten of us and we'd just kind of look forward to it. And we'd have to go through the swamps where the Highway goes through there now. Stop and kill frogs. Get to school. And the boys and the girls were always together. The families had more togetherness and the children were brought up that way. It wasn't "oh you're a sissy" if you were a girl or you're a tomboy, with the boys but it was just like everybody traveled together.

CS: That's something because I always had it like growing up with girls.

Nar: we always had a gang and walked to school together. One would wait for the other.

CS: Was there any courting going on?

Nar: Well, sometimes my dad used to kid us. There was a family of boys; I think there was seven. There was four of us and my dad used to always kid us that we should get together. We used to go around together but there was no seriousness or courting with the children that went together. Wasn't that strange? It was more like brothers and sisters. I don't think of anyone in that vicinity marrying anyone that lived there.
RC: The same thing happened in the Kibbutz's in Israel. The marriages are outside the Kibitz.
CS: How would you meet someone? Were there big town dances?
Nar: There were dances but my dad was very strict so we didn't go to very many dances. Then as we grew older and went to work, we went to dances but in our younger days he would not let us go to dances. He was always worried that we were going to get in trouble. He was too strict and we didn't mix that much. He was trying to keep us at home. Going to work at an early age we learned a lot about life and a lot about people. And that helped us a lot because if we didn't we'd probably have been backward. My sisters worked doing housework for $25 a month and board and room. After we finished eighth grade. We didn't go to High School at all. We went to work. I did educate myself, I went to Business College. It was located at the Medical Arts Building that had burned down. I worked as a cashier from twelve to eight in the morning, went to night school. Took me about two years just to finish my bookkeeping course. I did learn typing but I didn't have time for shorthand. My first job was at $10 a week as a bookkeeper at the Peoples Fuel up by Montana Tech, for three months. And then from there I went to work, as a bookkeeper for the Taylor Laundry and my highest pay there was $35 a week. And I worked six days a week and no vacation with pay. There were no vacations, then, yet. We didn't have all these benefits they have now.
CS: Was that the Women's Protective Union?
Nar: Yes. The bookkeepers had to form the union because we had to handle the laundry that came in. I worked there until I got married. I was always saying I was going to quit and go someplace else but I got to be the manager for a big $35 a week. But, I enjoyed it. And I enjoyed the girls that worked there. In fact I still have a lot of friend that worked there. They remember me.
RC: What about your church?
Nar: Church? We were baptized at St. Pat's and everyone that resided on the Boulevard were members of St. Pat's because there was no St. Joseph's Church at that time. I don't recall when that church was built but after it was built, we were members of that Parish. So, now I am a member of St. Pat's.
CS: What about special ceremonies other than Mesopust? Were there others as well?
Nar: Really, there wasn't any. That's the only ceremony that people looked forward to, to go to. The only special ceremony as the wedding anniversary, parties that they used to have. And then people used to visit people, like play cards. But, you know, certain families but not in a great group, two or three families would take turns and go in their homes and play cards. And the children went along. They didn't stick at home, children entertained with the other children. And we looked forward because there were always desserts and games. So we looked forward to all the home-cooked food. They always had a nice snack. About midnight everybody went home. Everybody made the wine. We had wine with our meals. That was more for health than to be drinking. And then we

had whiskey too. We drank whiskey in the morning and wine in the evening. We still drink it and we're no alcoholics.
CS: It was to keep you healthy? It didn't prevent anything?
Nar: It wasn't preventing anything, but it kept your healthy. And we were fortunate when there was an epidemic of the influenza in 1918, and we had it but very mild.
CS: Were there other home remedies that people used?
Nar: Yes, putting turpentine on your chest with some lard. Melt the lard and turpentine and put it on your chest and talk about burn.
RC: No goose grease?
Nar: No, goose grease is good, too, but we could never get hold of it at the time we'd get sick.
RC: Onion syrup for coughs?
Nar: Yes
CS: Oh really, what do you do with that?
Nar: You chop the onion up and fry it, mix it with sugar and water and make syrup of it. And another thing we used to do is boil wine, drink the wine and then crawl into bed. Sweat it out and be well the next day. I think we were tougher in them days, we never took any medicine. Never had any medical care, never went to doctors. Flaxseed was used to put on the outside of your throat for sore throats; it was boiled like a mush and placed on a cloth. It was supposed to be like a poultice, it would draw out the soreness.
CS: Did you use garlic for anything?
Nar: Yes, we had garlic. We used garlic in everything, in fact my mother cooked a lot with garlic. My mother flavored everything with garlic. And now everybody used it but in those days just the Slavic people and the Italians used garlic. It was really stronger than it is now. And you can't get rid of that odor. My mother made blood sausage and put a lot of garlic in it. And then that would be our lunch. Well, when we'd go back to school, after lunch, why it would be pretty potent. (Laughter) She used to make a slav dish out of stockfish. You'd have to saw it and then soak it overnight and then boil it all day. After the fish was boiled it was drained and broke into pieces. Then fried in garlic and olive oil and then she'd have boiled potatoes added it to the mixture. Oh, that was delicious. But that is very expensive. We used to get one piece of stockfish for 35 cents. Now its $6.95 a pound! It's dried fish, about 14 to 16 inches long.
RC: Is it salted?
Nar: No, just dried. You can get stockfish at the Terminal but it's $6.95 a pound. There was an Italian store on East Park that carried it. It was called Bonninos and they had all the Italian food, like, macaroni, spaghetti and all other imported foods. That's where we used to buy the stockfish all the time.
CS: Were there a lot of little stores?
Nar: That's all there was a lot of little stores.
CS: Were there wagons that went back and forth selling things?
Nar: Yes, there was. There was a fruit wagon and there were Lebanese but we used to call them Syrians. They call them Lebanese now, and they're the ones that used to sell all the fruit and they would go from door to door and they had their little scale and their little bucket. And women never went to the store to buy. There was always wagons and they always bought their things from wagons. Mostly fruits and vegetables.

RC: I can remember as a kid a Syrian vegetable peddler stopping in front of the house selling vegetables to my mother and there was a little kid hardly big enough to walk sitting up on top of the wagon chewing on a raw cucumber. My mother thought that was going to kill that kid.
Nar: And another thing, there were Syrian women that used to make housedresses, aprons, and all that and they had a great big suitcase and they'd have all little novelties like combs and needles and anything you'd want to buy. Women never had time to go to the store. And it mostly was the little Syrian women that used to do that and carry it. And my mother would get so mad cause Saturdays would be the day, you'd be forever answering the door. People coming to the door selling their wares. Lots of times she'd get a broom and chase them away. She'd get so mad, sometimes they wouldn't take "no" for an answer, they'd insist on coming into the house to show us what they had to sell. They were very persistent. They didn't take "no" for an answer because it was hard work and they wanted to make a sale. I can still remember that Syrian woman that used to sell her wares. And they'd be walking. They had no transportation. They'd pack those suitcases from door to door. Sometimes you'd wonder how they could carry those heavy suitcases and they were always pleasant. She'd say, "You want to buy something, missus?" And they always bought because they needed it, so it was a living for them. Of course, my mother made clothes for us, but I don't know when she found time. Besides all her other work.
CS: Did different ethnic groups have different specialties like the Syrians? What about the Chinese and other different groups-Italian-did they all have different things they'd do?
Nar: Well, not so where we lived in the Boulevard there was mostly all French people that lived there and Croatians. There were a few Finns but mostly all French. There's still some French people that live in the Boulevard. And they didn't associate with the Croatians. They had their own little colony. They were friendly. When they had the Mesopust, the people from different parts of the city would come to that. Everybody looked forward to going to the Mesopust. Like Italians lived in Meaderville, where ours was kind of a mixed colony.
CS: Would there be much crossing back and forth, like between Meaderville and the Boulevard?
Nar: Not too much. They all had their own colonies and their own fraternal lodges. Were they would all have their own meetings and entertainment. It seemed like each nationality kind of stuck to their own ways.
CS: Was the fraternal lodge for men and women too?
Nar: Yes, it was for men, it wasn't for children, it was for men and women too. In fact, I'm still the officer of our fraternal lodge.
CS: Which lodge is that?
Nar: Hrvatska lodge, eighty-nine. I'm the secretary, treasurer, and manager of Junior Lodge. Nobody wants it and nobody is interested, and the younger people don't want it. And the older people don't want it. I've had it since 1960 so that's nineteen years. We only have seventy members so it isn't that much work. But I enjoy it. It kind of keeps you in contact with people. Makes me do a little adding and keeps my brain operating a little bit.
CS: Do you still get together?

Nar: Well, we had meetings once a month but nobody's interested. The older people are all gone and the younger ones don't have anytime. So we have a meeting maybe every six months for discussing our financial dealings, which is not very much any more. When the older people were around, they looked forward to the meetings. They'd buy wine and have sandwiches and get together and have a good time. Just too many other things now where there wasn't much and they looked forward to going to those lodge fraternal meetings. It was an honor to hold office. So now we're affiliated with the headquarters in Pittsburgh. All I do is take in the dues and about it. We had a meeting before Christmas and there was just five members. You see, the younger ones are all busy and the older ones are gone, that were interested. They still have the fraternal lodges. In fact, I was delegate to the Convention in Pittsburgh. It was just like I was in Europe, it was beautiful. I was there a week and I thoroughly enjoyed it. Then they had the caucuses and tamburitza music, people dancing polkas and kolos. (Tamburitza an orchestra playing folk music—Kolo a fold dance). In fact, they're having another convention in Toronto. I hope I am elected but I don't know because you have to have two hundred members for one delegate and we only have seventy and we formed with four lodges for election of delegate. I would like to go. They have it every four years. It's nice and it's very interesting. I learned a lot. The children in Pittsburgh all speak Croatian and they have schools where they teach the children their language. All the members get the newspaper from Pittsburgh. I should give it to you. All their doings and their parties and their picnics are published in the paper. And all the lodges get together and they're always having dinners and dances. And they have all these Tamburitza orchestras that all the young play the older people teach. That's in Pittsburgh.

CS: I like that. I think that when you're talking about the sauerkraut and all that, none of that gets passed on. It's a skill that will just die, unless there's some way to record it.

Nar: When we were going to school and walking, they'd have these express wagons with horses. They were real low, and we'd ask the driver if we could ride, we would all pile in, maybe twenty of us, so we wouldn't have to walk and we could walk faster than the horses. It was just the idea of riding. And it was really hard in the winter because there was so much snow and there was no snow cleaned, you'd have to wade maybe in two or three feet of snow to get to school. We went to the Madison and that was about ten blocks from where we lived and then up from the fifth grade on we had to go to Webster. The Webster School was where the Radio Engineering is now. It was in the rear and it was condemned.

CS: Oh, really?

Nar: Yes, so we had to walk there. And the people from Williamsburg had to walk all the way from Williamsburg to that school. And cold. We used to be all frost and we'd be all white, and we didn't have the warm clothing. Of course, we had it underneath. We wore those long union suits, knit socks, shoes and overshoes. We wore union suits that were buttoned up to the neck and, oh spring would come, we'd be so hot. You see, we didn't have slacks so that was just like slacks on the outside we had underneath. The heavy wool socks my mother would knit to wear with the shoes. You know, with that on all buttoned up and you couldn't take it off. Long sleeves and long length right to the top of your shoes. We had high topped laced shoes, you didn't have no low shoes at that time. And we used to go barefooted in the summer and then when winter came and we

had to put on our shoes it was really torture for about a month until we got our feet back in shape. We went barefooted all summer and we'd wade, there'd be a rain and we'd wade all the pools and get cut with glass, step on metals and everything. Get a hole in your foot and wipe it off and it'd go away.
CS: That's interesting. When you went to a dance or anything would you be escorted? You were talking about your father being strict.
Nar: No. But if we weren't home on time he'd go looking for us. We went to a fraternal gathering and I'll never forget, it was a New Year's Eve and oh, we were having the best time. Twelve o'clock rolled on, didn't pay any attention to the clock. One of the boys was playing piano, we were singing and having a good time. Here comes my dad in the doorway. Well, the four of us were so embarrasses. He just raised his finger, never spoke a work. And we left the party.
CS: He probably didn't have to give a whack or anything like that?
Nar: We used to get whacked with a strap that was made out of leather that they used to sharpen the straight edge razors. He cut it in fine strips like a cat of nine tails so it wouldn't ham you but it would burn. Sometimes I thing we got it and didn't have it coming.
CS: Were most fathers like that?
Nar: No, they weren't. I don't think we knew enough about the birds and bees until we went to work. He wouldn't let us put make-up on. We used to put it on but before we got home we wiped it off.
CS: Was that something that when girls got to a certain age they did?
Nar: Yes. Your make-up and high heels. Your first pair of high heels, you were grown up.
CS: There was no sort of coming-out party or anything like that?
Nar: No. No such a thing. Some children used to have birthday parties but we never. My dad was from the old school, from Europe. He left home at a young age and I think maybe he carried that chip on his shoulder. He didn't get along with his father. I don't know much about his father.
CS: He didn't talk to you about him?
Nar: No, he didn't
CS: That's like my father. My father left when he was around fifteen and started working in the fields. It made him a lot more reserved.
Nar: He was a good provider but he wasn't sentimental or affectionate.
CS: Neither was my dad.
Nar: He wasn't affectionate or sentiments. But he was good. I mean he provided but there was no sentimental feeling toward you, to show his love. My mother was so different. She showed her love and she was so loving. She was just the opposite. And if we did anything wrong she would try to smooth it over. So we wouldn't get beat. She knew and understood us. She was very loving. To her dying day she was.
CS: You mentioned something about her having lost a couple of children. Was that in childbirth?
Nar: Yes. They were blue babies
CS: Was that rather frequent among women?

Nar: Yes. They would lose a lot of children. I remember the midwife putting the child in the oven, a certain temperature, in the blanket to keep it warm but it didn't survive. Because the midwife did take care of them if something happened there wouldn't be no time.
CS: When you didn't have it at the hospital.
Nar: No.
CS: One woman was telling us about bellybands
Nar: Oh, yes.
CS: Did they have that very often?
Nar: Oh, I'll have to tell you. I'm glad you brought that up. When we were infants, my mother used to wrap us up as mummies every night, with our heads to our side and our feet together and we wouldn't go to sleep until she wrapped us. I think it was up to six months. And she said if we weren't wrapped we'd be restless. And that was a tradition in Europe. So the children's limbs and arms would be straight. So they wouldn't be bow legged or crooked. I think we all grew up to be straight, the four of us were all tall and straight.
CS: Was the unique to her or were there other women that would do that?
Nar: That was unique to her but I don't know whether they all did it. I don't think everybody did it, cause when I talk about it with some of the girls nowadays their mothers never did it. But they had it for the bellybands, which were a wide deal that they wrapped up their little bellies, and their belly buttons, so they wouldn't go out. But she wrapped our whole bodies.
CS: I love stuff like that. I'd never heard of bellybands before.
Nar: Well, she wrapped us all up so we didn't have bellybands. They were real wide. I still recall they were about eight inches wide and rolled just like an Ace bandage. They she just unrolled them. And she brought all that with her from Europe.
CS: Could you tell much difference, like the women who didn't have to work, the wealthier women, what did they do?
Nar: There really wasn't any wealthy women in our community, most all the husbands were working in the mines. There was no wealth. Everybody was poor.
CS: I was thinking about the Depression too. Did that, was that a really hard time?
Nar: Yes, it was. I wasn't married and I was working as a bookkeeper at the laundry and I was only working three days a week. I was getting $9.50. My sister didn't work and dad didn't work and I had an uncle that we were keeping and we lived on that $9.50. We had our own house. We tried to get a ton of coal from the W.P.A. and they wouldn't give it to us because I was working. We had a furnace, a stoker furnace.
CS: And the coal trains weren't coming in?
Nar: No. No. There was no such thing. They stopped that in later years. In the olden times the women would just take the coal and that was it. Well, in later years there were different people that moved in the neighborhood an they started breaking into the freight cars and stealing. So they stopped it. They wouldn't allow the women to rustle coal anymore. On account of a few that were stealing. And then we used to go picking dandelions, not much green, just the root. We would go to a place they called the Brick Yard where the Pickling Plant is now. They made bricks there. We'd pick a tub of dandelions. We'd eat it for a salad. And wilt it, with bacon. We're still going out for

dandelions. I love it. And another thing I was going to tell you—that's still on my mine, is when the Chinese buried their dead. They'd have a regular feast. And have their ceremony around the grave. We were always hoping that we could go there and help ourselves but we would just look on the side and sneak away quietly.
CS: They had a whole feast?
Nar: They had a whole feast, a regular ceremony at the grave
CS: You never got invited in?
Nar: No, and another thing I can tell you about the Chinese. There were Chinese selling vegetables from door to door. He had a stick across his shoulders and a basket hanging on each side.
CS: Did he have a queue?
Nar: Yes. Their gardens were at the nine Mile. Where all the homes are being built now. You ought to see the beautiful gardens they had and the straight rows of vegetables.
CS: They could grow what?
Nar: Vegetables, mostly all vegetables.
CS: Tomatoes?
Nar: No tomatoes. Mostly lettuce and carrots and turnips. And another thing there was a man who would do soldering at your home. He had a big container, it was made like a big coffee pot and he had a fire under it. And a soldering iron. He'd go around every day from house to house. Packing that hot, burning bucket. He'd have coals in there. I remember that.
CS: Would they have calls that they used to make?
Nar: No, they'd come at certain days.
Some conversation missed here. Reference made to tamale seller.
You've heard of him.
CS: Outside the movies?
Nar: Yeah. He'd pack that and he had hot tamales there. In this day and age I don't think there'd be any. The kids would dump them over. Nobody ever bothered him. Nobody bothered anybody. Really. Of course there were a few that were boisterous. There was a gang that they called the Overall Gang. My husband talked about it.
CS: They were Finnish?
Nar: My husband was Finn. I don't know what they were.
CS: What did they do?
Nar: Fighting and robbing and going into houses, stealing and beating up on people. They use to wear overalls, that's why they called them the Overall Gang.
RC: That was Depression times?
Nar: Yes. In fact, my husband said when he was home, they ran through his house and he got a gun and shot at them. But he missed them, he was nervous, he thought maybe he'd killed somebody. Ran right through the house, cause nobody had their doors locked.
CS: Do you think that some of that everybody trusting everybody else broke down a bit during the Depression or was that later on?
Nar: I don't think it did.
RC: No, people were just a little more desperate.

Nar: They were just desperate. My dad used to walk to work. Everybody walked. They had streetcars but they'd prefer walking. Everybody walked. There was no riding. In fact, I walk a lot now. I never take the car. Just for grocery shopping. I walk a lot.
CS: Was going up town a big affair?
Nar: Yes, it was a big affair to go to town, there were many large stores and the casinos were opened 24 hours. It was just like a big city. You could go uptown two or three in the morning, there was just as many people in the early morning as there was in the day because the miners would be coming off shift and they'd stop and have a drink and some would forget to go home. It was just packed uptown, day and night. It was the highlight of the girls, to go walking around, from street to street. See who you could see. Talk to somebody you kind of liked. We looked forward to parades and meeting everybody.
CS: One woman talked to me about when she was little, she'd go uptown and they'd have those saloon doors that go in and out. Her mother always said, "Now I don't want you looking in some of these places." She'd have her little pennies for the movies and she'd drop one of them and have to reach down and she'd look under the door.
Nar: But you know those women who were prostitutes were really nice, they weren't hard or hard-core. And they were easy to deal with. That was their living, that's all it was.
RC: They were the best-dressed women in Butte.
Nar: When I worked as a cashier in the restaurant they used to come there for breakfast. They were very respectable and they paid well and they tipped well. They weren't the scum of the earth that was their lilving.
CS: That's a different image today. Did most people in town feel that they were accepted?
Nar: yes, they were accepted. They used to have their boyfriends come with them, their lovers. Of course, they have a different name for them now. They were all well dressed and they didn't live in their place of business. They lived in the hotels, downtown.
CS: I hear some of the madams were quite dressy.
Nar: Yes. I never went to those dances where they had beer gardens. We weren't allowed to go there so I don't know much about the beer gardens. They used to have open beer gardens. I never went around too much. My sisters did. They went to Lake Avoca to go dancing there. They had a big dance hall at Lake Avoca. That's where all the golf courses are now, there was a big lake there.
CS: Where's that?
Nar: Country Club. And they used to go boating there. My two sisters, they had a little way of sneaking out because they lived in the houses where they worked. And my dad would not know anything so they got to go and come home when they wanted to. But my other sister and I really had to suffer.
CS: Did they come back with some stories?
Nar: They'd tell us some stories and told a lot of them. They were the first two that were married. I think when you're young and you're not mixing you don't care whether you marry or not. When you're younger, it's different.
CS: Get more set in your ways.

Nar: Yes, you are. You have a good job, buying your own clothes and you're independent and you don't care. I met my husband when he was on furlough. And he had lived here all his life.
CS: Is that when you met him when he was on furlough?
Nar: Yes. I don't know anything else that I could think about.
RC: How about the whole Mesopust affair?
Nar: Well, to start with, a week ahead of time, the men got together, to make the straw man. They have their wines and their whiskies, having a good time making the straw man. So then, Sunday, they have a dance. Tuesday is the Mardi Gras where they have dancing, and eating, and the hearings of the effigy. Sunday and Monday they go around collecting money and honoring everybody. So, that's how they got their money for their dances and their food. And then Wednesday morning, everybody is still out; nobody goes home, mostly, all the men from the band and the ones that are in the party go from house to house collecting eggs, butter and flour. So that they could make homemade macaroni, cause it's a fast day Ash Wednesday. So the women all get together and get enough flour, butter and eggs and make homemade macaroni. And they cook it and put a lot of cheese and butter on. They cook the fish and macaroni and then they have another big party Wednesday. And after the party, they have the burning of the straw man.
CS: And there's just a little ash left.
Nar: Just a little ash left. A man dresses as a woman. He's the widow. The straw man always loses out. Nor of his sins are forgiven.
CS: Are all these sins like things people have done?
Nar: Yes, everything goes on through the year that's a little bit scandalous, they write it our in a poem.
CS: I love that. Two years ago it was really nice to see that happening.
Nar: Everybody liked it and all the little kids from about three years and up would follow the band of men. Oh, they just looked forward to it.
CS: It sounds like most all the food for Butte came locally.
Nar: No, a lot of people didn't raise their food. But the poorer ones did and we had rabbits and chickens. And then later on there was a law where you couldn't have pigs and livestock in your yard. They had to do away with that because the odor was getting terrific. My dad used to go to the Metropolitan Market and he'd buy a whole hog for about $15.00. He would cut the meat in pieces and put it in a brine. We'd hang the meat on hooks out on the clothesline and have it dried. And then smoke it. He had certain kind of wood that he used for the smoking and he had a real huge smoke house. If you have it too short the heat would cook your meat.
CS: The special wood gives it a special taste?
Nar: Yes.
CS: Do you remember what kind of wood it was? I remember going into a community that used a lot of mesquite for cooking and the smoke was so sweet.
CS: What was the epidemic in 1918?
Nar: Influenza
RC: That started in Europe. I can remember, the doctor who lived on the corner down from us in Missoula used to wear a surgical mask when he was on the street.

Nar: We had little sacks of garlic around our necks that were supposed to ward off some of that. Everybody was sick. There were very few that got it and survived. It was something like cholera. That's how fast the people died. We just had a mild form so we were fortunate. People were just dying by the hundreds. Everyday. There was no cure for it.
CS: Did World War II have much effect on Butte?
Nar: On no, not so. Well, it was hard to get men to work in the mines cause the men enlisted or were drafted. And then we had a bunch of colored guys came in but they didn't want to work. They left.
RC: The miners didn't accept them?
Nar: Oh, they didn't accept them.
RC: They were mostly from the coalfields back East.
CS: They had to move them out again?
RC: They just left. But technical workers with Anaconda were accepted. They had a classification. You wouldn't enlist even if you tried. You couldn't enlist without the Company's approval.
Nar: Well, they had to have somebody to man the mining and the metals. For the war, they were essential.
RC: Don't you remember the searchlights on the headframes?
Nar: Oh, yes, they had searchlights on the headframes so they wouldn't be bombed.
RC: To keep people out of the yards. All the yards at that time had high board fences around them and everybody was kept strictly away. You couldn't go into the yards unless you had business there.
Nar: Yes, They used to go around. I remember. And you could just see the beams going around.
RC: Well, there were all kinds of rumors, you know. You remember when the Japanese paper firebombs came over?
Nar: Yes
CS: Japanese paper firebombs?
RC: Yeah. Japanese balloons. Released in Japan when the winds were right, came over with time bombs, either explosive or ordinary. And they did start a few little fires here and there. In the woods.
CS: In the Butte area?
RC: No, mostly in the Cascade Mountains and that country.
CS: That's amazing. I can't remember any of my history teachers telling me that. I know in San Francisco it was completely barricaded off.
RC: I wouldn't have thought of that eight except I read something about it quite recently. I don't know there were a few of them got through to Montana.
CS: On the trade winds. I wonder how long it took them to get over. That's amazing.
Nar: There wasn't too much activity. I mean like the serviceman had to be out of the taverns by twelve o'clock. It was pretty quiet.
CS: Butte was so big then, wasn't it?
RC: It was booming. There was no open pit there, it was all underground.
CS: Is that one of the major factors of Butte Beginning to lose population?
RC: Yes. One truck driver hauls all the tonnage that one mine would put out in a day.

CS: And how many would be at mine, about?
RC: I don't know. Maybe 150 or 200 men.
Nar: Wasn't there 20,000 miners at one time?
RC: In World War I there was supposed to be something like that. There was supposed to be 60,000 people in the city, 100,000 in the whole area.
Nar: You should see them come from work. There was just trails of men just coming down, getting into the streetcars. I know my uncle used to get so mad. He'd say "Shy do the women have to shop at the time when we're going home from work? They'd be occupying the seats and the poor miners would be tired with no place to sit.
CS: Once in a while you see the tracks poking up down underneath. I wish they'd come back.
RC: Maybe they will.
Nar: When the streetcar went down Montana Street from uptown we used to get some of the conductors who were a little bit reckless. And we'd go so fast and would I get sick!
CS: Did they turn at Front Street then?
Nar: No. They used to turn on Front Street in earlier days. They didn't have enough passengers on that route.
RC: Well, they served Clark's Mill. That was running.
CS: Clark Mill was a ---?
RC: Clark Mill. You know you go down Montana and then you go up the side of Timber Butte. Over at the right there's a concrete block structure. That was part of the old mill building.
Nar: There was a locomotive running through there with the cars. Going on the streetcar tracks, going into where the Manganese plant was.
CS: There was a brick company out there too?
Nar: A brickyard. They used to make brick
RC: That's south and east way out on the flat and I think the old kiln is still there.
Nar: No, it's where the pole plant is now.
RC: You mean Oaas' Timber Plant?
Nar: Yes. There was a brickyard there. My father worked there. We used to pack his lunch there in the summer time. That's a long time ago. Right back of the cemetery.
CS: And to the right? Over that way?
Nar: Yes.
CS: Well, that was a lively area because Hansen's Packing was going. I know the fellow who lives in that big concrete—(conversation about conversion of ore bin structure to living quarters at former Clark Mill).
Nar: You mean at Timber Butte up there?
CS: Yeah
Nar: I've never been up that way. That used to be awfully bad when they had that mill. We used to have a lot of windstorms and we didn't have grass. Everything was sand. People didn't have lawns like that have now. We used to get a lot of dust storms. And when we'd get it from those tailings, it was terrible.
RC: It was the tailings from Clark Mill?
Nar: yes.
RC: You know the ore is ground up to the consistency of flour, almost.

Nar: Yeah. And then a windstorm would come up and we'd get all that. It was kind of a pale yellow color.
CS: What did it have in it?
RC: Mostly silica
Nar: It's a wonder we have any lungs left. Well, you just wonder. No sidewalks. No paved roads. You'd get a dust storm and your face would be pitted from the chunks of sand. You couldn't breath. You couldn't see. We used to be really scared to go to the store when we were young.
CS: And yet people were able to grow some vegetables and stuff.
RC: Not there. This is on the Basin Creek stream. The Korean gardens were over there just east of the old highway. You know when you go around there where you can just see the bottom land, the hay meadow. That's where the gardens were.
Nar: Anyhow, the chickens and rabbits and everything thrived. We sure had a lot of pollution in them days.
CS: What's the coldest you can remember it?
Nar: I thing it was fifty below.
CS: Sometimes it gets so cold you can see the static electricity.
Nar: Yeah. Of course, we didn't have too much electricity then. We had kerosene lamps and candles. And that particular neighborhood, the last to be modernized. They took different parts of the city where I suppose there was more population and the same way with the sewage too. I remember out light bill used to be $1 a month.
RC: Well, you didn't have all these electric appliances
Nar: No.
RC: Well, you didn't have anything but a few ceiling lights. No electric washing machines or irons.
Nar: No, you had the irons on the stove and you heated it up. When it got cold you had another one that was heating.
RC: It had a wooden handle and under the handle a latch.
Nar: Yes. My dad threw all that stuff down the dumps. Now look what it would be worth. And we had a coffee mill that was on the wall, and it was glass. And it had a little cup and a stand. Yeah, that's another thing. We used to have all that smoke from burning garbage at the dumps. Where Safeway on Front Street is, there was a dump there and Silver Bow Creek used to run under. There was a wooden sidewalk at the dump there. Talk about stink. It was terrible. Where we lived over that way, we used to really get the brunt of it. If there was a wind carrying it, I'm telling you, you'd have to close all your windows. You couldn't stand it. So we were used to all those high potent odors and dust and everything. Sometimes you wonder how you existed. There was no garbage collecting. Everybody—well, there was not garbage, just mostly ashes cause you'd burn everything in the stove. So they had regular dumps and you'd have to wheel that yourself. And there was no cans, people never lived out of cans in them days.
CS: Do you ever remember any groups getting together and wanting to do anything about the pollution or was it just accepted?
Nar: It was just accepted. You lived that way. Nobody thought anything about it.
RC: It got rid of the combustibles in the dump.

Nar: And the odors. And people had cows. They'd take the manure to the dump. And Stink! I know we had pigs. To haul that out there and by the time you got out there you were half dead. (laughter) Oh, and Hansen's Packing they used to butcher and slaughter, you couldn't breath in the summer time, from the odor.
CS: Do you remember any groups of Indians?
Nar: No. There was no Indians in here, I don't think there was even any colored people till later.
RC: There was the Brown Family
Nar: That was about the only ones.
CS: Were they here with boarding houses or what sort of work?
Nar: No, they were janitors. Now they can't get it because the white men are doing it. Colored guys did all the cleaning of the buildings. But they were accepted with our people here. They weren't looked down on. They went to the schools and were in sports and everything. I know one of the boys was in the sports at Butte High.
CS: Were there any group that ever got picked on?
Nar: Oh, yes. They used to fight at Dublin Gulch and the Finns. The Irish were at Anaconda Road, and the Finns were on the East Side. That was their colony. Finntown. Where the Helsinki Bar is on Broadway Street.
CS: Your husband was in some of that?
Nar: Yeah, he was no angel.
RC: He was a tough Finn.
Nar: Yeah, he was a tough Finn.
CS: Were there many doctors in Butte?
Nar: Yes.
RC: There are a lot more that there used to be.
Nar: Oh, yes. Each company had their own doctor. The company had a doctor and the company doctor took care of you. Of course, I think it's different now.
RC: You've got hospitalization now.
Nar: Yes. That's different. They used to pay a dollar a month. To get some kind of hospitalization.
RC: The Company had a contract with the hospital. Was that the Poor Farm or what?
Nar: No, it was the hospital.
RC: Either St James or—
Nar: The Murray. They had a regular miners ward. They'd be four men in a room and they were treated with any way they felt like treating them. They didn't pay, the company had a contract to take care of them.
CS: I guess that's where the Lodges and Fraternities come in, too, a little bit, didn't they? Didn't they help?
Nar: Yes, they used to get a little bit of help. Some of the Lodges and Fraternities used to have a certain plot in the cemeteries.

Interlude
Some of the people used to make grappo. And you could smell it. We knew when there was grappo being distilled.
CS: What were they cooking, grain?

Nar: Grapes. After you make your wine. They call that the mash. And they'd put that in the still. And distill it. They'd put so much water and sugar, I don't know how much. My dad used to make it out on the ranch but he never did here cause he was afraid he would get caught. You know, he was kind of scared. But a lot of them didn't know how to make it. They'd put that mash in and it would burn. That whiskey would have a burnt smell. In Europe where my mother comes from they made a regular mat out of straw. And she would sew it and make a regular mat, about two inches thick to put on the bottom and then the mash on top and then it wouldn't burn. We used to watch that still, we used to get out little whiskey glasses, drink that warm whiskey. It's be like milk, it wouldn't be purified because he used to distill it. He'd run it down to about 10 proof and then distill it again. That's what's dangerous; it could explode, when it's all alcohol when you're distilling it. He had a little stirring on the pipe and its just drip, just drop, drop, drop. That's how fast it'd go. And we'd put our little whiskey glasses there. God, all the whiskey we'd consume. We should have all our insides burned out. (laughs) We liked to have a drink but we never cared about it. It was just like a food to us. Liquor is a food.

CS: Was it always accepted that women could drink as well as the men?

Nar: Well, the women didn't drink at the bars but they did have a drink, maybe but not as much as the men. They'd have a little glass of wine. Mostly win they drank.

RC: Some places had booths for ladies.

Nar: They'd really prefer wine. Women kind of more preferred wine. And then there were women that had boarders. They used to have boarders, men that ate there but not to sleep. And they they'd sell the wine and make money-selling wine. That was the way women made extra money. They'd have the boarders and do their washing and feeding them. And they'd maybe room somewhere else. And then they'd make wine and then sell that. A pitcher of wine would be so much with their meal. Then lots of those people used to have a little special boarder on the side. They had a little hanky-panky once in a while too. Three was always a pet one, you know. (Laughter) There was always stories about a boarder, coming in, and then getting caught. Get a breakdown in the mine, well; the shift would have to go home. If a boarder would happen to be there and the husband shows up, there was a little trouble. So usually it ends up they'd have to get rid of the boarders. There was a lot of women that were widowed who made their living that way. You know, having boarders and doing their washing and raising their children that way. A lot of them. There were a lot of boarding houses.

The End.

Butte Historical Society
Oral History Project
Memoir of Ann Pentilla
Interviewers: Caroline Smithson (CS)
Ray Calkins (RC)
April 27, 1979