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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
11-25-02
DEREK ALT INTERVIEWING ARLENE KOUGIOULIS

Derek Alt: Where were your grandparents from – town and country?

Arlene: My grandparents were from Ireland, County Cork it's in the southern part of Ireland. My grandfather was from Achilles Parish and my grandmother was from Eeryies Parish.

Derek: When did they immigrate to the United States?

Arlene: In the early 1900's. I'm not sure the exact date.

Derek: Where did they meet, if you know that?

Arlene: They met here in Butte. My grandmother came here to join her sisters and my grandfather came here looking for work.

Derek: When was that?

Arlene: Early 1900's. They married in 1912.

Derek: What did they end up doing when they got to the US?

Arlene: My grandfather worked in the mines. My grandmother was a housewife and raised her family.

Derek: How many kids did they have.

Arlene: There were five children; three boys and two girls.

Derek: What did your parents do for a living?

Arlene: My dad worked for the ACM Company and my mother was a housewife while I was growing up. Later she worked in the hospital.

Derek: When and where were you born?

Arlene: I was born in Butte in 1937.

Derek: What was Butte like when you were a little girl?

Arlene: Very busy. The uptown was always busy. There were always people uptown even in the evenings. A lot of theater uptown, a lot of cafes and it was just real busy all the time.

Derek: Was there a lot more people back then or can you tell?

Arlene: I don't know. I think there was. The mines were going full-time and I think there were more people.

Derek: What part of Butte did you grow up in?

Arlene: I grew up in the Silver Bow Homes on the east side.

Derek: Is that the same place were it is right now?

Arlene: Yeah, it is.

Derek: Describe what this part of town was like when you were growing up.

Arlene: Uh, the Homes was a fun place to grow up. We never had to leave the neighborhood to do anything. You had a lot of kids in the neighborhood. There were basketball hoops. We had a skating rink in the summer and we could sleigh ride down the middle of the Homes and there was always somebody around and always something to do.

Derek: Are some of your childhood friends still around Butte?

Arlene: Yeah, several of them are. And the ones that aren't, we still keep in touch. We write or visit when they come to town. We were all very close.

Derek: Describe what the part of town you grew up in is like now compared to Butte like the stores – are they still there?

Arlene: The Silver Bow Homes is still there. A lot of the buildings are gone. The east side is gone. There's a few residential places. There's not many businesses past Arizona Street. The biggest part of the east side is where the pit is now. There were a lot of small grocery stores; a lot of residential places. There were a lot of bars and cafes. And then the Company bought most of the houses when they started the pit in the 50's. So there really isn't a lot left there now.

Derek: Do you have any brothers or sisters who grew up and are still in Butte today?

Arlene: No, I was an only child.

Derek: Ok, what was your favorite part of growing up in Butte?

Arlene: Uh, just my friends and things we used to do. We used to walk up to the Gardens in the summertime. Go uptown, go to movies. We used to go out to Gregson a lot which is Fairmont now.

Derek: What kind of movie theaters were there back then?

Arlene: How many movie theaters?

Derek: Yes.

Arlene: There was the Montana Theater on Montana Street, the Mother Lode, at that time, was the Fox, there was the American Theater on Park Street, the Rialto Theater was on the corner of Park and Main and the Park Theater was further down on East Park Street.

Derek: Are any of these buildings still up today or being used?

Arlene: The only one that's still standing is the old Fox which has been remodeled and now is the Mother Lode.

Derek: What were the prices like back then to get into a movie?

Arlene: The Park Theater, I believe was a nickel or dime. They were a quarter, I think, when I was in grade school and then gradually they just raised every few years they added a little bit on until its where its at now.

Derek: Can you share with us one or a few memorable events from your childhood.

Arlene: I remember one exciting thing that happened when I was in grade school. Um, a group of my friends were digging in a field on East Mercury Street and found money that apparently was buried there by some Chinese men who ran a laundry in that area and as the word spread throughout the neighborhood, there must have been between 50 and 75 kids came with shovels and spent the day and part of the night digging in this field. And finding money and they continued into the next until they were pretty sure all the money was gone. Some of the kids found as much as \$200 and we thought that was pretty exciting. And one of my most memorable things was when I was in high school when Central beat Butte High after many years and we had a big celebration after the game. We did a snake dance up Wyoming Street and through town. It was probably the biggest event of our high school years.

Derek: Describe the atmosphere around the football game since they don't have it any more these days and kids these days growing up in Butte don't really know what it's all about.

Arlene: It was a big rivalry. There was a noise parade before the game. Kids from Butte High driving their cars one way on Park Street and honking their horns. And the kids

from Central going the other way. Sometimes there were pranks the night before but it was a big rivalry. Um, it drew a big attendance. The stadium was always s packed for the games and it was just a good time.

Derek: What kind of pranks did Butte Central pull on Butte High and vice versa? Like the week leading up to the game or the night before.

Arlene: I know sometimes the kids would go down by the high school and let air out of some of the tires. Just little pranks like that. Nothing serious or damaging to anything. Just being annoying to each other. Throwing water balloons on each other as the cars passed on Park Street. Once in a while someone would put ink in one of the balloons and throw it on the car.

Derek: How long have you lived in Butte for now?

Arlene: Uh, my whole life with the exception of two years in California.

Derek: Describe like the bar scene and stuff back then 'cuz I heard so much about there being lots of bars back then.

Arlene: Uh, there were a lot of bars from the M & M was there at the time and there was a place called the Board of Trade and the Crown. From Main Street east as you went towards Meaderville, there were several bars in each block. Meaderville had a lot of cafes and bars it was known for its cafes mostly, but there were lots of bars there and it was just a lot of bars in Butte at that time because you had a lot of miners, single miners that lived here and they after work would stop in the bars and that was their entertainment I guess.

Derek: Work hard, drink hard.

Arlene: Exactly.

Derek: Describe, you're from uptown Butte and you mostly described about that, what was downtown Butte like at this time?

Arlene: Pretty much, well not as big as it is now. It we didn't go out quite as far and like where the mall is now there wasn't any businesses but there was um where Albertson's was that was a big field that the CYO which was the Catholic Youth Organization played their football games there. There was a drive-in across the street um tennis courts by where the Civic Center is now. The carnivals used to set up in the area where the Civic Center is now. Um, there was Southside Hardware was where the Great Harvest is and there were businesses down along Harrison Avenue but once you got out past where Lisac's is now there wasn't a real lot. There was residential and a few businesses, not nearly as built up as it is now.

Derek: OK, describe the mining scene and what it was like back then when they were all up and running.

Arlene: Well, they worked three shifts a day. There was day shift, afternoon and night. Um, you'd always see on Main Street going up the Anaconda Road, miners walking to work and like 4:30 in the afternoon on Main Street you'd see them coming down off of the hill carrying their buckets. And there a lot it was just really busy. It was thousands of men working in the mines at the time and we kind of told time by the whistles in the mines. There was an 8 o'clock whistle there was the noon whistle and hear one about 9 or there was a siren at 9 o'clock which told us when to start home and um, you could hear whistles it just was busy all the time.

Derek: Uh, Grandpa worked in the mines. Uh, which one and where are they at and are they still there today?

Arlene: Um, he worked in the um St. Lawrence. I believe at the top well most of the headframes well some of the headframes are still there I think that one still is but he didn't work in them very long he went to the service and when he came back he worked at the Safeway Warehouse for awhile he really didn't like mining.

Derek: Ok, now describe the people and what they were like back then.

Arlene: Oh, everybody looked out for each other and they were friendly. Where we lived it was there was always somebody looking out for the kids making sure we didn't get into too much trouble or you know nobody hurt us. People really they visited a lot. Everybody used to visit back and forth and um I don't think people were as busy then as they are now. Like they had more time to spend with their neighbors or that there's just a difference now.

Derek: Can you describe the Butte reputation we hear so much about from back then in the days?

Arlene: Um, it was a wide open town. They say we like the people liked to fight. It was a mining town and I guess certain characteristics go along with a mining town and people kind of stand up for themselves and I know um when we went to games out of town we were always Butte wasn't very well liked. We always like to think it was because we always had good teams all the time and they didn't like use winning. There was a rivalry between the towns and Butte.

Derek: Tell us what the Columbia Gardens as like and what it meant to you growing up.

Arlene: Uh, it was beautiful. We used to go up every Thursday during the summer we got free rides on the bus. All the rides and that there was a roller coaster uh the biplanes a beautiful carousel and then on the playground there was the cowboy swings, slides, the umbrellas, rings. It was beautiful, lots of trees beautiful picnic area. There was also a ballfield where um some of the softball teams used to have games and then scrimmages. There was an ice cream parlor with games and the pavilion was a huge dance floor. You could walk around the outside. Proms were held there, both Butte High and Central.

And on Miners' Union Day all the miners they'd have big celebrations there. There was races for the kids and they had what they called a First Aid Contest where there was a team from every mine and they would practice first aid. They'd get they would tell them like someone hurt their head broke their leg or something and then the first aid teams would bandage them or like they were taking them out of the mine and there was drilling contests and there and that night there was a dance. It was really a great place to go.

Derek: Was it one of your favorite places as a little kid?

Arlene: Yes. I loved to go up there even as we got older and in high school we would go up a lot of times in the summer walk up there or play on the playgrounds because during the day they had people who watched the equipment and they didn't like bigger kids on them. Just to walk around. The rides were open in the summer and the evenings and families would go up there and have dinner kids would go on the rides and they had beautiful floral displays up there. There was a big butterfly on one of the hillsides all done in pansies and there was the copperhead which at that time was the symbol for the Anaconda Company. Beautiful flowers all over it was just a great place to go.

Derek: What was the atmosphere like when the Columbian Gardens closed around Butte?

Arlene: Uh, people were very upset. Committees got together to try to save the Gardens. They even tried to get the Legislature, I believe, involved to try to stop them but the Anaconda Company it was their property and there wasn't a lot we could do about it. It was really sad. I remember the last dance they held up there that summer before they closed it. A lot of people were crying when they left. And there was the lot of people up there. It was just really a sad occasion to lose it because we have never gotten anything to replace it.

Derek: When did that close down around? Do you remember or recall the time.

Arlene: Seventies, early seventies. Maybe 71 or 72 I think, I'm not really sure of the exact date.

Derek: So you have lived in Butte your whole life. What major changes have you noticed from back then to now?

Arlene: Um, the primary source of employment has changed. At one time it was all mining as the years have gone by the mines there were less mines and the pit was opened and a lot of people worked for the mining industry. And then in the early 80's that all kind of shut down and reopened but it's never been the same and not it's closed down again. Some more, the Montana Power then was after that was primary, one of the largest employers. The County and now it's kind of some technical things, but right now its we're going through a tough time again but we have before and I'm sure we'll come through it.

Derek: So you have seen Butte change quite a bit. Do you think it's for the better or worse?

Arlene: Uh, I don't know. Right now it's kind of down but we're not known as the wide open rough town any more. And we have a nice college here that I think improves our image and I think the town is quieted down a lot.