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Barry Brophy, former steelworker with Anaconda Company, current junior high teacher and instructor in the literacy program, interviewed by Teresa Jordan in the Butte-Silver Bow Archives, April 9, 1986.

Barry was born in Butte, May, 1956. His father was not a miner; he worked for Nubro Drug and for Intermountain Bus. Barry comes from Irish background; his father came from Canada. The ethnic background wasn't a big thing growing up. 'Everybody was Irish.'

Education was encouraged at home; his parents wanted him educated so he wouldn't have to work two jobs like his father did.

He went to work for the ACM the day after he graduated from high school. He was a steelworkers, basically, an unskilled laborer. He worked for the Company from '74 to '80. He was laid off in the summer and was out of work until the next march. He married in 1981, before he went back to work. Then he drove truck to Great Falls and back for three years.

He started college in '77, finished in '81. He went Montana Tech for two years; and then to Dillon. He was working full time also.

The first check Barry ever got from the Company was more than his father ever made. His high school teacher let him out of his last final to take the physical to work for ACM. It was great for the first two months but he didn't like the swing shift. In the pit, you worked three shifts--day, swing, graveyard. He couldn't stand it. It was tough; if your friends wanted to party, you had to go to work.

Then a man who had been a janitor killed a postman; Barry got his job, which was 4 to midnight; in the summer, he worked graveyard.

Q: Why did you decide to go to school?

Barry loved the money he was making, but not the three shifts. If he had gotten a better job with the Company, it might have been different, but he was shovelling dirt, eating dust. A lot of the people he worked with were stuck for life. His ambition was to become a pipefitter. He thought that would be his life. But to become a pipefitter, you have to know someone. To get the four-year apprenticeship.

Q: Did you expect to be laid off?

Yes. Barry had been laid off once before in 1975 when one of the big layoffs came. He thought it would be permenent then. As time went on, he knew the layoff would come, and being single, it didn't bother him. He knew his job in the concentrator was safe as long as the smelter was running. The smelter shutdown came as a surprise, but not as much to him as it did to Anaconda people,

and to older people.

When he was laid off, he wasn't too worried. He still had his student teaching to do, and his wife was working. But when he graduated in '81 and couldn't find a job, he thought holy cow. He substituted for three years. Now he is teaching at Central Junior High--Montana History and computers.

He also runs the literacy program at Vo Tech. It is for laid off Safeway and Anaconda workers. Some needed help to get to the GED level, or just to survive. He has had several miners who couldn't read or write. Most were in their 40's or 50's; he has worked with people 35-50. One of his students was a really good miner; he doesn't worry, he just knows he will work again. He carries the stub of his last paycheck. Barry also has a former boss; it's harder for him.

Q: Some people landed on their feet right away after the lay off; others had a much harder time. What determined the outcome?

It depended on what kind of person you were. A lot went to hell; there were a lot of divorces. It was hard to keep paying on the house when there was no money. People were so used to what they had.

It was hard for people in their 40's and '50's. The house is 3/4 paid for but you might lose it for taxes; kids are at home or in college.

Family was important for survival. If you can go to somebody when things get tough, it helps. Barry's mother died in 1978; that may be why he married so fast; he needed the security.

If you had nobody to fall back on, it was tough.

Barry began teaching the illiteracy program this year. He has 10 each time; 3 quarters in the year. He feels good to see them come along. He had a guy who didn't know the alphabet; now he can read a little bit. Another saw his reading rate go from 35 to 110. He sees people's confidence increase when they get on the computer; it's tough to keep people interested in books, but on the computer, they don't want to leave at the end of the class. They are scared of it at first, but once they started you can't get them off.

The people he deals with have been out of work since at least 1983. Many have the attitude that there is nothing out there for them. $20,000/year jobs where you don't need to know how to read or write are just not there. He tries to instill in them that they can go out there, find something.

It's tough. Barry has a friend who went to 200 places in a week in Butte and Anaconda. He now works for a contractor in town; non union. He was laid off in 1980; it took him four years to get a job.

Q: How do people survive that?

Barry says that they don't. Their attitudes are very poor. But they do survive; they are from Butte.

Barry understands how hard it is to keep a good attitude. When he was interviewing for a teaching job, after the first three or four interviews where he didn't get a job, he struggled with it. Some guys know they are going to get work--like the miner in Barry's class--and they don't worry about it.

Q: Do you see attitudes change in class?

Yes. At first, they say, "I can't do that." Then they do it, it feels good. Guys say, 'I can't read any faster.' Then their rates increase. Barry tells them they can do anything they set their minds to. When Barry started the class and said he wanted to use computers, he was told, you can't put these guys who can't write on a computer. Barry said, if they can operate a drill, they can sure operate a computer. We put kindergarten kids who can't read on computers.

What usually happens is that half way through the program, they get a job.

Q: That's pretty significant--these guys haven't worked for three years or more, and they start the class and get a job.

It didn't happen in the wintertime; now the weather is good and there is usually more hiring in the summer. Barry doesn't know if the jobs will be permanent.

Barry enjoys the class; he gets jacked when he sees someone read who hasn't been able to before.

Everyone in the literacy program is in Project Challenge.

Q: In any shutdown, there are always a lot of peole that, within a year, are back to work. but there are many that 2 and 3 and 4 years later aren't. That's a loss to the individual; also a loss to society. How do you minimize that? How do you get ahold of those people who have had the toughest time and help them turn it around. Or is that our responsibility?

The biggest problem is getting ahold of those who need it. Barry's union, for instance, Local 6002 of the Steelworkers, is disbanded. "There was 1000, 2000 members. So if I wanted to get hold of those members, I know some of the guys I worked with, but you can never get ahold of all those people. Now that the union is disbanded, and the International is surely not helping any, it's just not there anymore.

Tape 1, Side B

"It should have been done three years ago, or in '80, that something should have been done. The International or our union really didn't have the money then, but something should have been done--the city or the state. They all should have come in and went through everybody and said, 'what can we do to help you.' They gave us $7000, which is, what's $7000 going to do for somebody? You can't go to school or you can't raise your family, or you can't do anything. I think it's society's responsibility, not the people. I think that society should have done something about that, and given those people a chance. That's all, just a chance. If they didn't want to take advantage of that chance, that's fine, but they should have been given that chance."

Q: What about the union response to the problem once you weren't working?

Barry doesn't think there was one. "It was non existent. There was members working until '83 in the Steelworkers, but it was all for one. Everybody in that union who was there had 20 years in, or they wouldn't have been working. Or a lot of years. So they really didn't care about anybody but themselves. And I probably, if I had 20, 25 years, I might have felt the same way. They didn't care about anybody else but themselves.

Q: Have you seen, over time, a change in the attitudes of unions over what their role might be in time of unemployment? The AFL CIO, for instance, is involved in surveys, in Project Challenge.

AFL CIO saw it coming. The Steelworkers didn't, or didn't do anything to help. It depends on the union. Organization within the union is important. They should have been putting money away for help for eventual job loss. Unions now are looking at options.

Q: Do you remember the Plant Closing Initiative in, I think, 79 and '80?

Barry remembers the initiative, but didn't think it applied to him. He didn't think that a company with so much money as ARCO would shut down.

Q: Some people have talked about frustration with the International and Big Table bargaining which took place someplace other than Butte. What was your response?

Barry didn't think there should have been a strike in 1980. They were making good money before 80. Young people didn't want the strike, didn't think it should have happened. They felt that they didn't have to go on strike. The working conditions were not that bad, the money was excellent. Young people used to go to union meetings in Anaconda which was largely older people. Young ones would say, I don't think we have to go on strike. The older members would say, we have to give our pledge to the Internatinal. "That was a bunch of garbage to us then. There was some hard feelings over that. Because these guys were

wherever they were, making the contract, and they would send us a $20 check while we were on strike. It was just wrong. These guys were making $80,000 a year to be our leaders and they didn't do anything for us. It would be different if they came in and helped you, but they didn't, and that was what was wrong. I'm sure if we had a strike and they gave us $100 a week for food, it would have been a whole different story, but the feeling wasn't so good when you were getting a $20 food check [a week] to feed a family... Our union dues weren't great but ... you do have to have the International to have power, but I think they went too far at the end. They could have backed off a bit.

Q: Why do you think the older guys wanted to strike; conditions had come a long way during their life.

Barry doesn't know. Maybe it was tradition. To the younger ones, it was insane.

Q: Do you think if that 1980 strike hadn't happened that the outcome, the smelter shutdown, would have been different?

Barry doesn't; he thinks that ARCO had already made up their minds.

In 1974, the Company wanted to relocate Butte; if they had done that, the town would still be booming. Some business people fought it.

Q: Do you think, with the decrease in copper prices, that the Butte Forward movement would have saved mining here?

Barry thinks yes, because they had so much capital invested, they would have to keep mining.

Q: What did you think about the Chilean expropriation?

Barry thought it would increase job security here. They wouldn't have to compete with Chileans mining copper for $2 an hour.

Q: What did you think when ARCO took over Anaconda?

Barry thought it was good. ARCO had so much money; Anaconda was small time in comparison. ARCO could run at a loss. Again, he thought it was good for job security. And when ARCO came in and invested money, he thought that was good. His job stayed the same under both companies.

Q: After the layoff, were there any support systems that helped you?

All Barry remembers is going to a couple union meetings telling how much they were supposed to get.

Q: Did people lean on each other?

At the beginning. And some still do, have the additude, "it will all come out, we'll all do good.

Q: How many do you think are still left out, floudering?

Barry thinks maybe about 30%. the rest have been forced to go out and do something.

Q: Have the hard times caused people to draw together?

Yes. Butte people are a different breed of people. People thought Butte would be a ghost town, but it isn't. Business people realize that time are tough; they pull together. McDonalds had a 'day for John', for a boy with cancer. People lined up with $1.50 in hand to buy a Big Mac, even if that was the only $1.50 they had. You don't see that someplace else.

Butte is friendly. If you have a flat tire, someone will help you change it; people will stop and talk to you. Barry was brought up that way; your praents brought you up like that. The doors in his house weren't locked for 30 years; his wife locks them. Barry was brought up to trust people.

Q: As Butte changes away from being a blue collar town, do you think that will change?

That is changing slowly. Butte has been the sort of place where people would rather help a friend than paint their house; now people who move in don't have that attitude. Some kids don't have that helpful attitude, that 'I want to help.' They just say, 'I want." You see changing economy in the changing attitudes of kids. Kids from parents with office jobs are different than kids from parents who worked in the mines. Now, whoever has the nicest car is best.

Barry has two kids--Matthew, 2; and Melissa, 4. His wife, Pam, works at First Bank. She was born and raised in Butte.

Q: Would you ever move from Butte?

Barry would move from Butte to make more salary. He wants to be able to retire at a decent age. His father died before he reached retirment age. Barry wants to be able to say he is done. Yet, he says he would move from Butte for a better job, but he doesn't know if he could. It's like being tied to your mother's apron strings. He likes walking down the street and seeing the mountains; he likes knowing 90% of the people. He has family here, but the biggest thing for him is the community and his friends rather than family; he wouldn't have said that before his folks died.

Q: Are you surprised at how well Butte is doing?

Yes. He thought that a lot of stores would close; everybody thought that. The Company had people buffaloed about just how

much business they did here, just how indispensable they were. The shutdown was so gradual, over so many years, that there was time to readjust.

Q: What hurts Butte?

Barry thinks that people from out of town are hired too much--at Tech, the schools, the city of Butte. He doesn't know why they are. Also, Butte has an image of a big mean place, which hurts it.

Tape 2, Side A

MHD and NCAT people make big salaries and pay taxes. A lot more of those jobs could have gone to Butte people. A lot of them are double dippers--retired from the government with new, big paying jobs.

Q: What helps Butte?

The area. The mountains. It's cold, but its nice. Just being around here is nice. And there are so many skilled laborers--Our Lady of the Rockies couldn't have happened elsewhere because there wouldn't have been the skills needed.

Butte people are the hardest working people. They like to party, but no one will work harder. They will work 24 hours a day until the job is done, and they won't do it half way; they will give it 110%.

Q: Critics of labor, of course, say that unions breed laziness.

People who worked for Anaconda could be lazy; through the years, there was less work to do. but when there was a job to do, they did it 100%--they used the best material, the best workers.

Q: Did you feel there was slack?

When Barry started, his job was to shovel dirt for 8 hours a day; but you can't shovel dirt for 8 hours a day. The Company should have shuffled jobs around, given people a break.

Q: The problem was one of management, then?

Probably 70% management. They weren't about to change things from the way things had always been done. A guy on the hose might have been there, 8 hours a day, for 20 years; and he starts to sluff off a bit.

But Barry doesn't know of any town that has, per capita, more skilled labor.

Q: Did you find the Anaconda Co fair to work for?

Barry was treated fairly; not everybody was. His brother in law

was a superintendant. He would have treated Barry the same as anyone else, but the bosses wouldn't take the chance of ticking him off.

Q: Could you give me an example of them not treating someone fairly.

Barry remembers once when a man went in to go to the bathroom, the boss followed him in, told him to get off the john, get on the mill. He did.

Some bosses threatened you, rode you. Barry doesn't know why. One boss was really bad. His windows were busted out of his car several times. A lot of guys are nice as workers, but different when they get to be bosses.

Q: Do you have tenure? Is your job now pretty secure?

Barry was told last year that his contract was not renewed; in the end, it was. But he doesn't feel secure. It all depends on enrollment in the Catholic schools.

Barry says that laborers were treated a lot different in the ACM than were the crafts. Crafts people were asked nicely to do things. They were treated like a different class. Yet, several crafts didn't have to go through apprenticeships. Laborers handled unemployment better--they could get any sort of job. But the craffs had more opportunity to work, but they expected more. A lot got work at Colstrip. But it was harder on those who couldn't get a job.

Q: Did this separation continue off the job?

No, there wasn't a difference socially. It was just the work aspect. Some crafts made good money, could afford the really nice houses on the West side. But the majority lived the same. But on the job, crafts people treated laborers as if they were lower; management did as well.

Q: What do you see as the future of unionism in Butte?

Barry thinks it will stay. Unions have done so much, he can't see them leaving. If work standards are raised, you won't see unions. But you have got to have them. Without them, you have no help when problems arise.

Q: What do you think we will see with Washington Corporations?

Barry thinks we will see nothing, that the man is in it for himself. He thinks he will take things out of Butte, sell things off.

Q: Would it be good for the mines to be going again?

Yes, if it was small. But a lot of people have their hopes up.

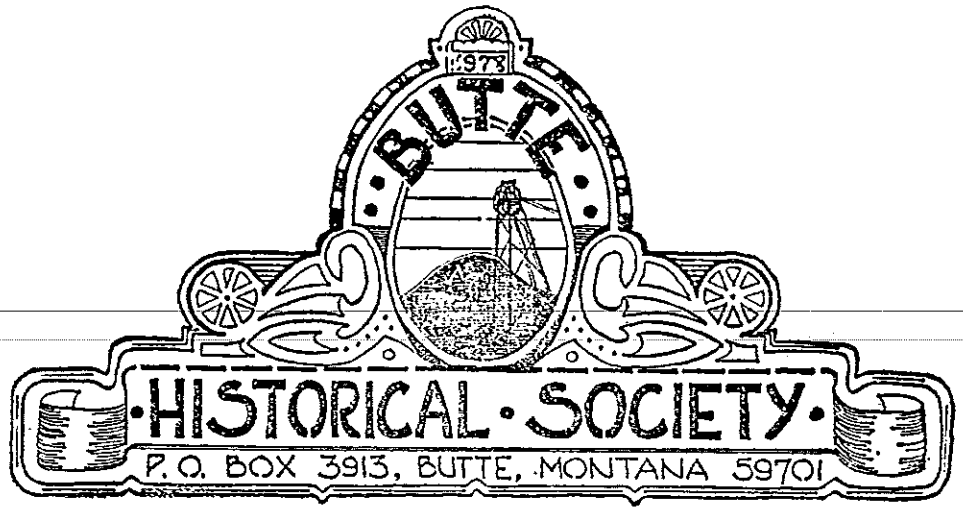
And at the most, it will be 200 or 300. That would be good, but it isn't going to turn the town around.

Q: What would you like to see your kids become?

Engineers. He doesn't want them to have to work those jobs he had. He wants them to be happy with their work. Would like to see them as lawyers or doctors, but not just as laborers. He doesn't want them to live week to week, pay check to pay check. That's not happy.

All Barry wants to do is be happy. If he could make $25,000, he could be happy. He doesn't make enough now to support his family. And he's not going to get hired by the school district. He makes $9,000 now from the Catholic schools. He made $20,000 as a janitor for ACM, and that included full benefits. His first child was born while he was covered by ACM--he got $40 back. The second child, they owed $1000.

[After the tape is off, we talk awhile. Barry says that for three years, he took care of the kids while his wife worked. He knows why women go crazy. He used to pray to be called as substitute teacher so he would have someone to talk to. His wife wants another kid, but he doesn't know if he can go through it. She worked full time except for three months maternity leave; she doesn't know what it's like to be a mother. His kids are closer to him than her; they come to him when they want something. He likes that. He wonders if that's why so many Butte people are so close to their mothers; he never saw his father, his father worked two jobs.



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Restrictions:

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