

Outline of Bernie Lazzari interview
By: Matt Moore
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Questions for Bernie Lazzari

1. When and Where you Born?
2. What did your parents do for a living?
3. What was your childhood home like?
4. Tell me a story from your childhood?
5. Where were you when WWII started?
6. What were your parents like?
7. What was your life like until you were deployed?
8. What did you do in the war?
9. Could you describe the Butte you remember?

These question were a guide I tried to follow but we just talked and the questions were covered anyway.

MR. MOORE: This is an interview of Bernie Lazzari on November 27, 2005. I am Matt Moore. Where do we start?

MR. LAZZARI: Well, let's see, I'll just tell you where I was born. I was born in Meaderville, Montana, which is where that Berkeley Pit is. They moved us all out of there. But anyway, I was born in Meaderville. And we lived in McQueen in the area just above Meaderville. And I lived on Cotton Wood Street. I went to a school there, Lincoln school -- not "Lincoln", but Franklin school. It was a public school. I started in the first grade. And I used to -- for recess, they'd let me out. Instead of going back to school, I used to go home. So they got kind of anxious about that, so my folks sent me to Holy Saviour, which was the Catholic school right next to the public school. And at that time, we lived in McQueen, and my folks lived in 2205 Cotton Wood, I remember. And they made their living by moonshining. So they used to moonshine, and gosh, they used to make really great business. And they had a big house, and they used to have parties almost every weekend. People would come in. And you could smell the mash, you know, that they would make the whisky, and that, in. No wonder we were caught. But anyway, when I was 11 years old -- 10 or 11 years old, I came home from school, and there the FBI was banging in -- knocking over the stills and breaking into the doors and; a beautiful copper still Mom and Dad had. And they just got it. And they were doing very well. But Mom still thinks somebody squealed on them. But I think everybody knew that they were bootlegging because you could smell it in the neighborhood. Anyway after that, my dad got about seven months up in the county jail. And they confiscated our Buick, our car, because they found a jug in it. But that's a long story, too. At that time, O'Leary was the mayor of Butte. So they used to sell those cars uptown that they confiscated, you know. They would sell it pretty cheap. When my mom -- she was so disappointed. She wanted that car. It was a nice car, so she wanted that car back. And they were going to bid on it. They have, oh, several people that bid. So she went around to all the people to tell them not to bid on it. But she didn't talk to the mayor, Barry O'Leary. So they were -- they got bidding there; and, of course, she couldn't go as high as the mayor did, so the mayor got it. And my mom was mad ever since at him; never talked to him. So anyway, they lost the car. Well, after my dad spent seven months in the county jail, he came home. He was a miner by trade. And we had -- we never did go hungry. He always had food for us. But my dad used to work in the mines. And then the one time, he worked in the railroad down at Galen, Montana, which is just below Melrose. And he did that for awhile. As a matter of fact, we lived there in one of the cars, the railroad cars, for some -- for a time. And my aunt used to always worry about us because we would always play around there and afraid the town would hit -- there was a train going back and forth, you know, every day; worried about us getting hit. But after that, why, then we came home, and he worked in the mine. But then he got sick, and he passed away. He was only 32 years old, my dad. Anyway my mom, my mother had raised three kids. I had two brothers. And she went to the beauty -- beautician school. And she opened up her own beautician, and she did very well. She had two people working for her -- two or three. And that was up at the Murray building. And they used to call it

the macen Murray beauty shop. And she did that. In the meantime while she was working, she had to board us around town. So we went to several schools. I think we went St. Pat's at one time, St. Ann's. But I finally graduated from the mac, mac -- (inaudible.) I stayed with a family up there. They used to run greyhounds, and they would have greyhound races at that time. And I graduated there, mac. And then we went to, went to boy's central after that. Then at boy's central, I graduated 1943. And I started school after that, but I tried out to get into the Air Force. So I took the test for the Air Force, and I made it. So they sent us -- that's where I ended up in the Air Force on B-24s. We finished 50 missions over in -- we were based in Italy. And we used to fly through Germany and Italy and --

MR. MOORE: Where at in Italy?

MR. LAZZARI: In Canossa, Italy, right across from Bari, Italy. And it was okay. I spent a couple of years there. They went to the Isle of Capri and went to Rome a few times for a rest camp. But that was - and then we got back here. And sent us back to the States after we finished. They were going to train us for the 29th bomber wings they used for Japan. But then they dropped the bomb in Japan, so that was over with. So they got -- they let us go. So Fort George Wright in Spokane, they sent me up there. And that's where I got out of the service there and came home. Well, I had the GI bill coming. You know, they furnish you a GI bill if you go to school. Well, they'll buy your books and give you so much a month. So we decided to go to Missoula, and I get in pharmacy. So I went to Missoula, and we finished four years there. So I finished in pharmacy. And first -- but, first, I'll tell you, while I was going to school in Missoula, I joined ROTC, Reserve Officer Training Corp. So I graduated from that. Then they sent me down to California. From California, they needed someone up here in Montana, so from California, they sent me up here at the 29th Air Force Base. I used to work in the Surgeon General's office there. And we used to go in and inspect the sites along - (inaudible) - and Cut Bank along the Canadian border. But I mad my license, pharmacy license, in Great Falls. I worked at the medical clinic there in my spare time. And I finally got my experience, and I opened up a store here in Meaderville. Mr. Bill Fagen's store. He was an old-time druggist. And he was a druggist -- when I grew up, we used to go over there, and he'd give us pills, help us with our colds and sickness. And so I -- he says, well, he wanted to retire. So I says, "Okay," I says, "We'll buy you out." And it was just a dinky little place. It had bars on the front. The people -- the main thoroughfare used to go right through Meaderville and up Woodville hill. And so they had bars on the front of the window, because people get drunk there. There's all kinds of restaurants and nice places to gamble, so you're always afraid of breaking into the pharmacy. And so I fixed that up. And after that, why, they were going to cut out that road going to Butte, so we figured: Well, God, we had to do something, get out of there. So then me and Jim Murphy, he owned the P and R drug uptown, and we went in partners out here at the IGA. And that's why we moved our -- we used to call the store in Meaderville the village pharmacy. So we moved - the village pharmacy, we moved out to the IGA, and we started our -- it used to be called Bernie and Jim's pharmacy. But we had a little trouble there, so I had to buy Jim out, and we called it Bernie's Pharmacy. So that lasted for about 40 years. And then

we decided I was going to retire; to heck with it. My wife didn't want to retire, so my daughter and I - there was a place empty across the street being, it used to be an Arctic Circle, and so we asked the landlord if we could rent that. And so he said "yeah", we could. So my wife didn't want to retire, and my daughter wanted to work, so we moved everything from that -- from the pharmacy over there. We got rid of all our pharmacy drugs, and things, and we sold them to Osco's. And then after that right, why, we started a business. That's where Bernie's Hallmark is now -- And that's about the story of my life there.

Oh, let's see, when we were -- my grandmother had a place in Melrose, Montana, a ranch. So we used to go down there in the summer. We used to go down and help hay. And they had horses, and they had cattle. They had to do the milking. And they had the -- as a matter of fact, I got the pictures of the old place where the workers used to live and my grandmother used to live. I couldn't believe how shabby it looks now. And we used to go down there. And, mainly, we'd pray for rain so we could go fishing in the Big Hole. So every day, almost, we would go fishing in the Big Hole. And, oh, fishing used to be great in those days. I must have been about 15 - 16, I guess, yeah. And we'd go down there and hay and fish, pray for rain so we could go fishing. And we used to hay. They had wild hay and alfalfa hay. But we used to pitch it in with the pitchfork. They didn't have the automatic things they have nowadays. And then we used to unhook the horses and hitch them to the derrick. And that pulled the horses. It pulled that derrick up, that up. Well, the wagon had a -- underneath it, a skirt that held the hay. Well, you attached the horses to that and you would pull it up, and it would raise the -- on the derrick. And then you would let the derrick swing over, and then you snap, and it would release and opened up, and the hay would come down. So you would get in there, and then you had to make your haystack. And that was a tough job. I tried to get outof that; we never could. And then so we did that for awhile. But one time -- now, this is going back. My mother and her sisters were born in the -- below Melrose. But they used to have a place across the river. That's where their farm was. And one day, it was the 4th of July, or something, they were -- drinking, you know how the families got to together, the cousins and aunts. And how they used to get them across the river is they would pull them on a boat. They would have a rope across there, and pulled the boat across, that way. One day my cousins were going down, going across the river, and they were pulling it. And all of a sudden, one of my aunts, my aunt Isabelle, said -- went back to her dad, and says, "Dad, there's people swimming in the water." And, of course, her dad ran over to the river, and there they were, going -- they tipped over the boat. And they lost two cousins, drowned. That was when the water was --

MR. MOORE: Oh, no.

MR. LAZZARI: Yeah. So from that day on, they decided that they would move on the other side of the river, on the north side of the river. So that's why we ended up on the north side of the Big Hole river. But that was a sad experience for them all. They were all just little tykes. So my mother met my dad, Sam, out there at the farm, farming, and that's when they got married. But my dad got sick when -- he was only 32 when he passed away. And then my mother took on from that.

MR. MOORE: Do you remember any of the mines he worked in?

MR. LAZZARI: Oh yeah, there was the Leonard mine, the mountain con. Mainly, with the -- as a matter of fact, before I -- while I was going to school before that, I was a student miner in the Leonard mine.

MR. MOORE: Oh, really?

MR. LAZZARI: Yeah, I spent two weeks in the mines. That's all I could stand. It was -- the student miners, young kids, they'd put you -- give you a pick and they'd say, "Now, solid rock. I want you to dig" -- you have a hole down there about that deep. God, you'd go picking on that. You know, it's solid stone. And the copper water would come down and end up right in the hole and up in your clothes and your face. And you can't get that smell out of you, yeah, that copper smell. So that's why I only lasted two weeks. "That's enough of that; I'm going to school." Yeah, and they had a lot of bars in Meaderville. And there was -- everybody knew everybody in Meaderville. Everybody was in everybody's business. I had aunts, of course, in Meaderville, and uncles. And Meaderville was mainly Austrian people. Meaderville was most Italian; a few English, too. But the Austrians were up -- and we lived with the Austrians up in there. My next-door neighbor was an Austrian. I used to run around with him. And I forget what year it was when I was living in McQueen. I'm kind of going back, trying to remember things. But when we lived in McQueen, I wasn't too old, maybe about 10 or 11, 12. The boy next to us, I used to play around with him. His older brother one 4th of July -- jeez, and I can't remember the date. It must have been about in the '30s, 1930 - '34, they had -- out there playing. It was the 4th of July, so when they were out there shooting fireworks. And somehow, about six of them went out into the mine and found some dynamite caps. So they said, boy, they're going to have a big -- (inaudible.) They took it over across from Franklin in a ball field, and they started -- they -- I don't know what they do. They put some, some rope to it that will burn, and then it will go off. So they got -- (inaudible.) And they did that. And they sat back. Pretty soon, they noted nothing happened, nothing went off. So they went over, they all went over to look at it, and all of a sudden, it went off and killed them, all six of them.

MR. MOORE: Wow.

MR. LAZZARI: And, boy, when I was a young kid, you could see they had a back stand a baseball backstand. And you could see blood on the wire there, yeah. So that was a boy next to us his brother, his brother passed away, died. So that was a tragic 4th.

MR. MOORE: They don't have fireworks like that anymore.

MR. LAZZARI: Yeah. Oh, jeez. But darn kids, you know, they could get into the mine yards, no trouble getting into the my mine yards, and they would steel that blasting caps. Of course, it's all over there. Yeah, but that's the main things they had to worry about in the mines, too, was the blasting. They drilled holes into it. And then when they'd drill holes, they would put a blasting cap in there, or a dynamite stick, and they'd attach it to it. Well, once in awhile, they would go around drilling; pretty soon, someone will forget to -- where they put the dynamite in. So they would be drilling

that, and all of a sudden, it would go off; killed a lot of people that way. So it got so they had to keep track of all their dynamite holes.

MR. MOORE: Yeah.

MR. LAZZARI: Well, a lot of people died then, that there.

But Meaderville was a great place. They used to come in and -- that's when we went -- there would be a lot of bootlegging in Meaderville and McQueen. Everybody did it; not only us. But we were caught. And they used to bring in the grapes. They'd bring them from California on railroad cars. They'd come into Meaderville, they -- they had tracks coming right into Meaderville, railroad cars there, and we would go and help them with the grapes. They would back up their trucks. We'd load them up in their trucks; and, of course, we'd eat more than we loaded, I think, sometimes. We used to get pretty sick sometimes. But that's all -- they used to bring in the grapes, and they would make their wine. Yeah, the good old days. And it seems like the weather in those days was a lot colder than it is now, because I remember 40 degrees below.

MR. MOORE: Wow!

MR. LAZZARI: Yeah, lots of times. But we didn't have much. I think my birthday, I remember getting a red wagon. I thought: Boy -- that was the biggest thing, a red wagon. Oh, I was in heaven. And it was a secondhand. They couldn't afford anything new. But we never did go hungry. Mom always took care of us. My mother -- my dad -- brother, my poor brother, he stayed a few places, you know, but he'd get mad at them. Boy, he had a temper on him. One day, he was staying over at a lady's over on Oregon Avenue, Mrs. Demerz. And he got mad at their daughter. Their daughter was a big husky gal, and she used to sit on him when he was fighting, you know. Well, he got mad one day, and he went right out the screen door. He didn't even bother opening the screen door; ran right out of the screen door, and that was the last time he was there. He used to be a bugger. Then we stayed at the Paul Clark home. That's up there at the west side. And she had us going around. People would keep us for about a month or two, and then they'd get rid of us. But Gill and I went up, and we stayed there. And that was kind of a nice and a sad place. She wasn't very nice, the landlady. And the kids who were up there were older kids. They used to tell you to go and steal stuff for them, you know, over in -- 15 cent store (inaudible) And one day -- and we used to wash our hands, and I didn't dry them very good. Gee, they used to crack, you know. And the landlord got me and brought me into the bathroom and started scrubbing with a brush. And I was crying. It hurt, you know. And my brother came up and ehind him and kicked him in the rear end. And that was he end of us, so they got rid of us there. But, oh, Jack, he was a musician, my other rother. He was four years younger than me, and Gill was wo years younger. My brother played music. He was a usician. And he was in that there Butte High band that ent to Pasadena one day and played in the Rose Bowl.

MR. MOORE: Oh, really.

MR. LAZZARI: Yeah.

MR. MOORE: Wow.

MR. LAZZARI: He was a member of that band. Then he still has music in -- but he's in Arizona and California. He plays all around at the Elk's Lodges. Yeah. Was there anything else? Because I'm trying to think of other things to tell you.

MR. MOORE: Is there anything you remember of the mines and some of the strikes, maybe?

MR. LAZZARI: MR. LAZZARI: Oh, the strikes were terrible, yeah. were a lot of strikes in Butte. And the poor people, the families of these strikers, they used to give them a hard time. I remember over there, I think it was on Galena Street, a family was living. And the people -- he was in the mines. They wouldn't dare leave the mine. They'd stay in the mines because they would get killed if they left the mines. So they used to keep them in the mines and work them every day. But they're family used to take the brunt of it. One day I was watching, they came by one of the homes, and they threw out their -- all their furniture out in the street; and the big piano, they threw out in the street. And the poor people were crying. And it was sad for the -- yeah. And my dad never -- he was -- he wouldn't go -- the strike. He would work - (inaudible) - the strike. He was a union man. And then one of the boys walking by, one of the -- someone shot a gun off there on East Park Street, and a boy was hit and killed -- and I don't know if he was killed, but he was hit. I think he was shot and killed.

But a lot of things happened there. And we used to have streetcars when I was younger. Well, we used to be in McQueen. They used to have a trolley go over to the main line going up to the Columbia Gardens. So we'd get out there, and we'd go over on the trolley, and go up to the Columbia Gardens, spend a day up there. Then we'd come back and get on the trolley, and it would take us back to McQueen. And, boy, we could always walk from McQueen, we could go up to the gardens and walk. So I used, every once in awhile, walk up there. And they used to have the horses, the merry-go-rounds. We used to go up there, and we used to go underneath and find money dropped through the holes, you know, in the -- so we'd go and get the money. But, eventually, when I was in high school, I got a job out there, by gosh. And I used to run the horses and the biplanes. They'd have the biplanes right next to the horses.

MR. MOORE: Oh, really.

MR. LAZZARI: Harry Lambert and myself;

harry Lambert. We used to trade off one time. It would be the horse; and the next time, it would be the airplane. When I finished that, then that must have been about a couple years before they closed her all down, yeah. That was a beautiful place, yeah. They had flowers, beautiful flowers; yeah, and games for the kids. And we used to picnic up above the area where the biplanes were and the merry-go-rounds. And they had the roller coasters there. I never did work the roller coasters, but the kids used to love of the roller coasters. And at one

time, that was before my time, they used to have bears up there, kind of a little zoo --

MR. MOORE: Oh, yeah?

MR. LAZZARI: -- in back there, hm-hmm. Yeah, that was all gone. That was sad that they left the -- that's what they do, I guess. Too bad the mines took it over, but that's the way she goes.

MR. MOORE: And what was it like when the mine took over Meaderville and McQueen and all those places?

MR. LAZZARI: Yeah.

MR. MOORE: Those people were --

MR. LAZZARI: They moved all the people out. They lost their houses, of course. And the school, they just wrecked it, caved it in. But they all gave houses out here around the flats. They gave them a house to live in, and they closed them all up. But they closed -- finally closed the roadway. And, yeah, it was kind of sad for a lot of the older people in McQueen and Meaderville. But they all got rid of their houses, but they were given houses. So that was nice, yeah (inaudible) - that did that.

MR. MOORE: Yeah.

MR. LAZZARI: Yeah, we used to always go get chokecherries up there, going on the way up to - past Meaderville on the main highway up to Walkerville - not Walkerville, but Elk Park. We used to go up that way, and there would be chokecherries. We always used to go up there and get chokecherries and -- on the side. And then we used to always go up to Nez Perce. There used to be a little creek called Nez Perce creek.

MR. MOORE: Where was that?

MR. LAZZARI: That was up there just past the Elk Park.

MR. MOORE: Oh, really.

MR. LAZZARI: Hm-hmm. And we'd get a ride, hitchhike a ride up there. And we'd hitchhike a ride back. But we used to go up there, and we'd fish the day. And we used to catch, oh, maybe five inches, six-inch fish. And we thought that was the greatest thing, that was. Then we'd take the fish home. And Mom was working most of the time, so, you know, I -- I didn't even clean my fish I fried my fish. I didn't even clean them, think about cleaning them at that time. That's how young I was. But my buddy and I used to go up there a lot. They used to have a swimming pool up there. One of the fellows lived in McQueen, and he used to take us up there, swimming, in his car. He'd drive us up. And then another fellow/pal, used to go out hunting gofers right in back of McQueen. We'd get up in the morning, and he'd take us back, and we'd go gofer hunting. And he'd always have me -- he'd shoot a gofer, and then if it went back in the hole, he'd always have me stick my hand in to see if I could reach the gofer pull him out. I was kind of dumb. I

did that, too. Good thing I wasn't bit. Yeah, I think squeaky, we used to call him, Tim O'Leary, just about three houses up from us. And that's -- across the street, there used to be some families that used to make bread, saffron buns. You used to -- you could smell them in the neighborhood. Where would we go? We would go right over there, as soon as we smelled them, sure enough, he would give us a saffron bun. And we never did get much of that. Mom didn't do too much cooking; although, when she did cook, she did -- a really good cook. And after that, my mom married my stepdad, John Conan, the Conans from Butte. And he was a miner, too, and a truck driver. He used to truck driver for Care Garret. And he used to work out here at the leather shop out here in -- past Butte. I can't remember some of the names anymore. But he'd go drive for Garret. And he couldn't buy -- couldn't have any riders, you know, they -- (inaudible) -- riders. So Mom would drive over and -- next to the highway there, and then he'd stop and pick her up there and take her over to where you had to go; although, he wasn't supposed to do that, but they did. And then she used to ride with him.

And after that, they -- after all of that, they moved to California. They bought a place in California. In Coyote, California. And they had a bar then in the grocery store. My brother, Gill, went there and worked there for awhile. And Mom got kind of sick. And then the place burned down. It's on the main thoroughfare between Los Angeles and San Diego, the main highway. And it burned down, the darn thing. It was used to be a saddle stop, an airmail stop, airline stop. And so that's all gone now. And then they moved up to Kalispell -- or -- Kalispell, Flathead Lake, they bought a place there. Mom got real sick, got stomach cancer, and came back to Butte where she passed away. And right shortly after my mom passed away, my stepdad passed away about a year after. Yeah. Mom would always tell me: Down there in Melrose, where she was raised, she used to ride the horses to school to Melrose, which was about five miles, to go to school. And they would ride the horses and have the horses out there in front of the school. And as soon as school was over, why, she'd ride the horses back. And then her and my sisters -- her sisters used to do that.