Dan Aguilar, former ACM miner, interviewed by Teresa Jordan at the Butte-Silver Bow Archives, April 10, 1986. Dan is brother to Angelina Costello; half-brother to Lulu Martinez (see other interviews).

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

Dan's father migrated from Mexico; he was a 'wetback.' He met Dan's mother here. There was work here, the mines needed men. He is buried here. Dan has two older brothers, three older sisters; one younger. Dan's father was hurt when Dan was 6; he later died.

Dan was aware of the difficulty, growing up in a large family without a father. It was tough. They had to scramble to make ends meet.

In the early days, there were not many women in Butte. Dan has always found the history interesting. He wishes he had listened to the old guys talking, telling stories. But he thought that the mines were forever, that he didn't need to listen.

He started working when he was 17, for Kenwood Construction as a laborer. He dug sewer lines with a pick and shovel. When he was 18, he went underground, both as days pay and contract.

Q: Your mother had lost two husbands in the mines; what was the attitude toward your working in the mines when you were growing up?

Dan never consiered anything else. He worked underrground 15 years until he went to the Berkeley Pit in 1968. He was born in 1934, started work for the ACM in 1953. His record indicated that he started in 1954. He got credit for 31 years. There were three types of retirement: 30 years and out, the 70 plan (age of 55 plus 15 years w/ the company) and the 80 plan, (age of 50 plus 30 years). The 80 plan was the highest. He got that.

But his brother Paul had 22 years with ACM and his nephew Frankie had 16; they don't get anything yet; they will benefit when they are 65.

Dan kept his time good. If you had a break in employment, you lost your years, had to start fresh.

Dan was called back when the Company moved from the Hennessey Building. He was lucky; that gave him enough time to qualify for the 80 plan. The only problem is that he was forced out young. He is only 51; young to be retired.

Dan belonged to the Butte Miners' Union. The BMU went as laborers in the pit. At the end, he was in the control room at the crusher. He controlled the flow and the crushing of ore,

down to 6 inch pieces. He had four people helping him; a lot of his work was communication and pushing buttons. A good job.

Q: Did you like working underground?

Dan says he got scared. At first, it was a lark. But he lost some schoolmates. He was married and had children. He had three close calls. A seven ton ore car tipped on top of him. A mine ladder wedged between him and the weight of the car, or he would have been crushed to death. As it was, he was knocked out for 45 minutes. He only missed three days of work.

Another time, he was coming up the shaft; there were 21 men in the cage. The cage is steadied by guides along each side. One of the guides tore loose; the cage went crazy. There was a good hoist engineer on duty; he must have felt the change in tension; he stopped the cage. Luckily, no one was hurt; there were huge splinters of wood everywhere.

Q: Did people on the cage panic?

Dan's partner ended up underneath Dan; Dan was trying to crouch and he couldn't. He guesses his partner panicked a bit.

Another time, 21 men were being lowered and the cage let go for about 500 feet, the cage was 'wild' for about 500 feet before it braked. When they got off, everyone was shaking.

Another time, a large boulder [Dan gestures with his hands to indicate something about the size of a Christmas turkey] fell and hit him in the back of his helmet. It crushed the helmet; hurt his knees from pounding them so hard, but he wasn't killed.

Dan married when he was 17. His wife, Mary Rita, was 16. She is a teachers' aide at West Junior High. She's 50 now. She worried about Dan in the mines; she would call the office if he was late, to see if he was working late or if he reported off. She tried to get Dan to further his education. Her father had a job ranching for Dan near Malta. She tried to get him to work there. He tried it once during his two week vacation, but when the vacation was over, he wanted to come back to the mines.

"I kind of think I made all the right moves. I was lucky and I survived. Like I say, I kept my time good and I wasn't left out in the cold. A lot of my family were. They didn't have enough time to retire."

Bro Paul and nephew Frank are bartending, and they hate it. They are out in the cold. They are hanging on, but it's not easy. They are both bachelors, or Dan doesn't know what would happen. "But when the Company was running, it was OK. Well paying jobs."

Q: How did you feel about the ACM as an employer?

"I would say they were good to work for. They were there when I

needed them. I raised my family and they were there. It's no different than any other place you went to work. They are there to make money. Being inexperienced, I found I had a tough time of it, but once I got experienced, it was no problem then. There was a lot of labor problems, you know. I don't know. It wasn't personal (laughs). I know that after I was experienced, I got a lot of hassle when I was inexperienced, but once I was experienced and I had a problem, it was no big thing getting it solved."

Q: Was there racism in the mines? Did you have trouble because you were Hispanic?

"No. I didn't sense any. Like I say, the only problem I had with any of the bosses--they were tough in the mines, but if you were experienced, you know, no problem. The only problem you had was if you were a green horn, they called you, didn't get the job done. No, I didn't have no problem like that. Of course, being born and raised here, I knew most of the fellows anyway."

Q: When they brought the West Virginians in in the 1960's, did that cause problems?

No. They were a different breed. They were brought in because the Company needed manpower. They fit right in. A lot of them said that mining hardrock was easier than mining coal. But they were a different breed.

Q: What variety of work did you do over the years?

He ran motor; ran muckin machines; laid rails; worked on the shaft, changing guides. He would have to hold on with one hand, chop timber with the other. He would usually do that on Sunday or for extra pay; he didn't like hanging in the shaft. He did blasting both underground and in the pit. "I think fate was kind of looking out after me. I think back on all the things I've done and I'm still walking around. A lot of my friends have been long gone. Acquaintances."

He lost three school mates; maybe 8 guys that he knew were killed at different times.

He also worked on the conveyor belts, picking wood and iron in the crusher. When he first went down there, he started on the shovel and worked his way up to the conveyor belts and then into the control room. He loaded bins, ran the conveyors. Would fill a bin, call the operator when it was full to switch over to another bin. Fill one after another. That was before they went electronic. After that they put probes down there and didn't need the man down there. When Dan first started working in the crusher, there were 18 men to the crew; at the end, there were three to four men to the crew for the crusher and the conveyor on that side; (the concentrator had it's own conveyor.)

Q: How did you feel about the Miners Union, did you feel you got

good representation?

Dan wishes Joe Maynard had been there when he was in the mines. He doesn't think the representation at that time was that good. There were so many miners, so many problems. You would have to have a real major complaint before anything was done about it. If Dan had some kind of a problem, he would take time on his own time to see the boss and work it out. That worked better than going through the grievance procedure. Dan never went too far; didn't get hot headed. The supervisor didn't want problems.

ARCO made a lot of promises that weren't kept. They were good for about three years, then things deteriorated. Dan doesn't know why they bought the mine in the first place; he figures you could probably find the answer in Denver or Los Angeles. They are an oil company; it would have to be a mining company to turn a profit.

When the takeover was first announced, Dan didn't care for it. He is not much for changes. He couldn't see an oil company taking over a copper company. The Anaconda Company was always so powerful, he couldn't imagine them getting into such a bind. "It kind of stunned me. And scared me a little. I knew there was going to be a change because I kind of sensed it."

Q: Did you ever think you would lose your job, that the shutdown would happen?

"No, I didn't, I really didn't.

Tape 1, Side B

Q: Were you among the last?

Yes. In his union, Dan had a lot of seniority, and they were laying off by seniority. There were a lot of fellows older than he who went before him. "Quite a few of them had break in service. The mines were always here; a lot of them never dreamed they wuld be gone, they didn't worry about seniority. They were experienced and always found a job. When it came down to the nitty gritty, they went by seniority and a lot of them were bumped."

Q: the mines were always here...

"That stunned everybody. Nobody really worried about seniority because if you were experienced and knew how to mine and contract, there was no problem finding a job here. Nobody really worried about seniority."

Q: You have done so many things, you have so many skills--to go from the sense that you can always get a job to a time when the mines were gone and it's really difficult to get a job, it's like you weren't prepared for that...

"I don't think we were. I know I wasn't prepared. It come as a shock. All my life, since I was a baby, they were going, going, full steam ahead. And all of a sudden, shutdown."

Q: What was that like?

"Scary. Really scary." Dan has known two people who committed suicide.

Q: Did you ever feel that down?

"I feel kind of--after working all my life and all of a sudden stop, I guess I do. I feel kind of lost. I've always had that umbrella over us; now it's gone. It's kind of like you are just left out there on your own alone. You don't got that security. The Company was always there. I'm fortunate in a lot of ways. They were there all the time I needed them. My family is raised and gone already. My wife is still working. It's a personal feeling that I feel lost. I've always been on three shifts and all of a sudden I don't have no shifts."

In the mines, Dan worked afternoon and day shift. When he went into the pit, he rotated every seven days from one shift to another. Graveyard was hard on him.

Q: Were there any support systems that helped after the layoff?

The Company gave you SUB pay for 52 weeks and then after that, another 26 weeks. "They helped all they could."

Q: Did you feel they were fair?

"I think so. They done what they could. The only thing I got against it is why they went bust. They shouldn't have. They made enough, they could have kept this place going. I think bad investments. I don't know. I'm not an analyst. But I know that enough come out of here to go against lean times and good times. I think, in my opinion, they started showing interest other places. That got them in trouble.

Q: Some of the earlier layoffs got more in a settlement.

Dan didn't 'luck out' in that respect. Some got TRA for a year and if they were in school, they got it for a second year. Dan didn't get any of that; it was all gone before he got laid off. SUB pay was $52 a week; then it went up to $90.

Four or five were called back to help move out of the Hennessey. that was about seven weeks, but for coming back, they got a year in seniority and pension rights. That made 31 years for Dan, and qualified him for the 80 plan.

Q: Have you worked at other jobs since?

No. He is 51. He has been doing the housework. It's different.

At first he didn't mind it; he wouldn't mind it now if he was going off to another job. He's also been doing lots of donating work. He helps his sister Angelina with her plumbing, her car; he helps his nephew with his car.

"If there are any jobs are available, I'm kind of waiting for the fellows that aren't getting anything to take them. I'm getting something. I don't want to take something from somebody that probably has to pay a mortgage or feed his family. That's what is holding me back."

Q: Do you see that in others who have pensions?

"Most of the fellows I know are. But they are older than I am. I went out young. I belong to the retirees club up there, and they are all old timers... Like I told my president, Maynard, when I went back, no matter what happens, I said, I'm going to cash her in. So if they do call somebody, they can call somebody behind me and let him qualify. And I did do that. Once I got laid off again, I put in for my pension. ....I didn't want to take it all, ever, even when I was a kid. If there was some left, I wouldn't take more than my share. And being 50 even, I told Joe, when they called me that they needed me, I told him that that's it. I'm going, I'll do what they want, but when I get laid off, I'm going to cash it in. Because even Joe didn't qualify for nothing. So I was hoping the next guy behind me would be called, give him a chance to try and get his pension. It didn't work out that way, I don't think. We were the last they called back."

"But hopefully this other outfit will start something up. I think
a lot of the boys are waiting to see what happens there... But I don't think it's going to be the same. They are going to do it their way."

"If somebody needs help, you help. And if he can't ever return the favor, he'll do it to the next fellow. I've always felt that...If you didn't help somebody, you didn't have nothing, you were nothing yourself then."

Rita was working at the time Dan was laid off. She has about 13 years with the school district.

Q: What was her response?

Shock. She was in the process of buying a $3500 boat. Dan stopped her. She wasn't prepared for it. "I married her when I was 16, I always had a job. We raised our family, it was always there. And all of a sudden, nothing. Cut back, economize. I thank the good Lord our family, I raised five daughters, and my baby is 28 now. They were all gone, on their own. Working, taking care of themselves, going to school."

Q: If you had had a boy, what would you have told him about

going into the mines?

"I would have told him not to. I've told a lot of young people that I'm glad I went in there. I've learned something underground. But I don't think I would want him to go through what I did to learn what I did. As far as I'm concerned, it was worth it. The miners underground are a different breed. Whether they know you or not, they will risk their life for you. I've seen it. I've done it. How do you explain it? It's a togetherness under there. You are in there. If you are in trouble, they are there, whether they know you or not, or whether they've seen you. They stick together pretty good. And that helps you in everyday life. In the walks of life, and on the surface, that feeling you get.

Q: Did you miss the underground when you went into the pit?

"Yes. It took me a year to get used to surface work. Like I say, when I was 18 I went underground. I was like 34 when I went to work in the open pit and I felt like the whole world was watching me then. Underground, you are more or less on your own except for your partner. Sometimes you didn't see the boss for eight hours--or anybody. You were either alone or with your partner. On surface, it was quite different. Especially in the wintertime, it was so cold and I was new down there, working on graveyard shift. Freezing to death. I'd come home and it took me til noon, sit by the heater to thaw out, before I went to bed. I kept telling my wife, I'm going back to mines; "no you're not, no you're not. You stick it out down there, you're safe down there.' I'd say, but I'm freezing to death.

"But after a year, I started getting used to it."

Q: Did you like the people n surface as much?

"It was closer underground. The people you associated with were close compared to when you come up here, it was more loose, a looser companionship. You had your real close friends, but nothing like underground. And the ones that were close to you up here were the ones that did work underground. I could tell the difference between the people that never worked underground and the ones that did. I could tell without ever knowing them. Just the way they worked and their attitude."

Q: How would you describe that?

"They [the one who had never worked underground] were more belligerant, argumentative, like they were used to having things their way or something. Spoiled, I would say. Underground, you got so you worked hard. And inch by inch. You didn't expect nothing. And most of your underground people felt that way. They were used to working. Working class people. Hard working."

Q: did shifts seem longer one place than the other?

They were short underground. They felt long in the pit. "It was so hard to get anything done underground. By the time you got anything straightened out and got anything done, it was time to go home. Down in the pit, they got you to the job right away, and it seemed like a long 8 hours, 12 hours, whatever they needed. but like I say, pros and cons. You were safe down in the pit, a lot safer. There were a lot of dangerous things you had to do, but in the long run you were safer. But underground it seemed like such a short time and it was time to go. I guess it was because you were so busy trying to get something done...I learned to adapt. All the shifts seemed long, but I learned to adapt, kept myself busy. Because you get bored on the job, it's bad."

Q: Some people complained about the work rules, that you might have to wait 2 hours for somebody to come cut a bolt. Was that a legitimate complaint?

That was total nonsense as far as I'm concerned. That wasn't right. I never believed in that. Underground, we done all our own work. We were our own bolt cutters. They more or less looked over it because it was hard, like on night shift, to get an electrician or a welder. We done most of that on the day shifts. We got by the best way we knew how...But down in the pit, they pressed that jurisdiction lines a lot more than they did in the mines. Like down in the pit, we didn't want to step on anybody's toes, hurt anybody's feelings, we'd go around it. We'd let that go and get something else done... But I could see their complaint.

Q: Was there a hierarchy in town based on where you worked? I've heard the underground miners were king.

"At that time, yes. I felt--how can I put it--little in the pit. You had your electricians, you had your boilermakers, your pipefitters, and they were the kings down there. Where I went, I was a laborer, I felt like nothing. I had to work my way up into the ranks down there, make myself--they asked me several times to be a supervisor. Down there [in the Pit] they wore the white [hard] hats. I wore them quite a bit, mostly taking someone's place. ...I befriended my supervisor and they would recommend, when they went on vacation or were off sick or called home, for me to take their place. I got along good with management and that. I didn't have no problem. Even when I got in an argument with somebody, I didn't take it personally. ...There was a foreman there, he was higher than a regular boss. He was in charge of the crusher where I was at. One day he come out and told me, he says, 'Dan, we haven't argued in a long time.' I said, I come out here to work, I didn't come out here to argue. He just looked at me, smiled, walked away. Course he was an Irishman. ...If they were in charge and they told me to do something, and I didn't see no sense to it or didn't like it, I done it. Like I say, a lot of the guys would argue. I didn't do that. Whether they were right or wrong, they were the boss. I done it. Thinking that way, I didn't get in too much hot water."

Q: Did you see that attitude more in those people who had been underground?

"Yes. In fact, a lot of the supervisors down there commented that if they got underground men in their crew, they knew they were going to have a good crew because them miners are used to working. And if you got a partner that worked undergorund, you knew you were going to have help, you weren't going to have somebody over there reading a book or leaning on the shovel, letting you do it."

Q: Why was it so different above ground

"That's difficult. Hmmm. It all stems, if I was working on a job and these guys had a hard time getting theirs done and I had to wait for them to get done to get mine done, I would go help them get theirs done and therefore they would help me get mine, we'd get it done. Down here, if somebody had a bottleneck down there [in the Pit], that's where it stayed, a bottleneck. I've been there, when I first went down there, I'd be picking up a heavy load and there would be people from different unions, that wasn't their problem and they stood there and watched me struggle. That was the difference. I wouldn't do that. Whether it was my job or not, if a guy was lifting a heavy electrical piece of equipment and he was there alone, I'd go help him. I wasn't an electrician, but I'd give him a hand. But there wasn't that down there. There were a lot of bottlenecks. I don't knokw why. But that was the difference."

Dan liked days pay better underground that contract. Days pay, you could set your own pace. The pace was too hard on contract. contract miners only lasted 12 to 16 years, then they fizzled out, making those dollars.

Q: There seems to be a paradox here. In Missoula, you get the feeling that a man's worth is measured by what he's made, his nice house or whatever. You don't see that as much here. And yet a contract miner's worth was measured by how much money he could make; yet you don't seem to see the same emphasis on material wealth...

Tape 2, Side A

"They didn't work that hard for the money itself. They didn't do it to feel big. It wasn't that. They were no different than me, you know, making the regular wage. And they lived the same way I did. I don't know where their money went to, but it wasn't to be better than the Jones's or the Smiths. It wasn't that attitude at all."

Daughters: oldest, Vicky, is single, 34, in Fairbanks, AK, going to college. Toni is married, a housewife in Butte; her husband is unemployed right now, he did work on a ranch. Dianne lives in Harlem, MT, married to a carpenter, she works part time. Debby

is here in town; her husband is a painter. She works parttime as a waitress. Dana works part time as a waitress, her husband is a carpenter.

Q: None of them married miners.

No, Dan wouldn't recommend that they did. He wouldn't want them to worry like his wife did.

"But like I said, something good come out of it. I wouldnl't probably feel or enjoy -- everyday I wake up and I don't expect nothing from life, I enjoy the whole thing. Except for being out of work, everything is rosy as far as I'm concerned. I kind of look at it a different way, too, sometimes. I survived. I'm one of the survivors, and that's good to know. I stop and think of all I've done and the close shaves I've had, and I'm still walking around and I have all my sense. I'm still here. And I benefitted something from my work."

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

Dan thinks there will be mining, but not what it used to be. His son in laws will benefit. The 'new breed' will benefit.

Q: Has harship brought the community closer together or torn it apart?

People were lost at first, but it has brought the community closer together. You have time for things, for looking into things deeper. Before, you were so busy, you didn't have time for your family, for your church. Now the whole family goes to church; we have time for each other. You have to have time for your kids and family, and Dan thinks the whole commuity is doing it.

Q: Is the Hispanic community closer?

During the 50's and 60's, lots of Hispanic miners left when the open pit came; they were strictly underground miners. But at one time, it was pretty wild. Lots of jobs, lots of money, lots of Spanish.

Q: The Irish community was famous for drinking. Was there much alcohol in the Hispanic community?

Yes--pay day was big; most went to the bars. But the guys were miners--it was not like it is now, where people just get drunk, rowdy. Miners didn't just go do destruction for nothing. If they got into it, it was private, for a reason.

Q: How do you think Butte is doing?

Dan thinks it is doing great, considering the blows. He thinks she'll survive. "I know she will. I'm going to stay around and

help and see that she does." Butte will survive. We still have a lot of natural resources here.

Q: Butte is experienceing a change from a blue collar economy to white and pink. Do you see that changing the character of the town?

A little. You can see it changing. "We might end up like Missoula, a guy with a new car, new house is better than the other guy. I hope not. That's the kind of change I sense. The new jobs, computerized, the technology, that's going to change the people too, and their attitudes."

Dan has grandchildren, two grandsons, four granddaughters, from 8 down to 8 months. He tells his grandson stories about mining, about Big Bad John buried at the Con. His grandson is really interested. Dan is lucky that all his grandkids are still here. He thought a couple of his son in laws would have to move away for work; they got jobs here. They don't pay that much, but at least they are keeping the wolf away from the door.

Q: Every father probably wants his kids to have it easier than he did; yet it's probably harder for your son in laws to find as good a job as you had.

"I think if this company would have kept going like it was, I think my kids' families would have been better than what we had. We hit the peak and now it's kind of dipping down. Like I say, they are just barely holding their own. It's not good."

Q: Is that hard for you to see?

"Yes. I don't like it. I worked hard all my life to see that my children had it better. And it didn't happen. It's the American Dream isn't it?. It went down. They are not having it as good as I did. I've always had a job, a steady paycheck, security. Like I say, that umbrella was there. They don't have that. From one week to the next they don't know if the husband will be working. ...nothing steady, nothing you can count on. It's tough for them....I talk to them. We get together and I talk to them. I tell them, it isn't all that important. We're passing through here, I says, in life, and what you do with what you got--I call it the fickle finger of fate--you do what you can with it the the best way you know how, and use common sense, and you'll make it. Never lose your sense of humor. My mother was poorer than a church mouse and she always had a sense of humor. Could hardly talk English. And probably that distilled a lot in us. ... If you lose that [humor], and lose pride in yourself, you just about got nothing."

Q: Can you give me an example of that humor?

The fruit peddlar used to live a half block away. Dan's mother would yell down what she needed; he would holler back.

Dan's wife is from N. MT, Chinook. She came from a ranching family. She's very dedicated to Butte. She came down to visit with her sister, who was married to a miner. She met Dan.

Dan remembers an episode of Laverne and Shirley. They come home, say they have been laid off. The guys ask why; they say because they were ahead of quota. The guys goof off all the time; they say they got put on overtime because they were so far behind.

Dan thinks that if the Anaconda had been managed better, it wouldn't have gone down. They were so far flung. They invested in Chile. He helped train Iranians for an operation they had in Iran. He thinks they made bad investments. This is where it all started. He thinks that we could have kept going. Phelps Dodge is still going, even with all their labor problems.

Dan didn't like it when the Company took Columbia Gardens. They said, when they took it, that they guaranteed 20 more years of mining. It didn't happen. "They guaranteed us, if they could take the Gardens and the Woodville Hill up there, the highway, that would guarantee at least 20 years more mining, and it didn't materialize. We lost Columbia Gardens. My grandkids are deprived of that. Beautiful. I used to walk out there, spend the day out there and walk home. Beautiful...

Q: How were those promises made?

"At one time they came around where I was working and talked to us, they wanted the workers' signatures so they could show them up there that the workers were for it, and I was. For 20 years, at least 20 years or maybe more, I figured, well, I'll be out and gone by then, but maybe the other generation can take over. If that's what we've got to sacrifice for that, it's worth it.

Q: It was a petition to give to city government?

"I think so, because they got names. I signed for it. At least 20, maybe 24 years. I don't know what happened about that. I think we lasted four years after that and they fizzled out."

"We lost a lot of neighborhoods, Meaderville, McQueen, East Side, Parrot Flats. But it was all in progress. Them neighborhoods paid for the Berekely, since '54. It's progress. Hate to see them go."

Q: It seems there was so little protest.

"I think back now, if we could do it over again, once mining got so expensive they couldn't do it they should have stopped. The Berkeley Pit took all that, one neighborhood at a time, eating it up like a cancer. I think we'd have our town here. But then there'd be so many people, there'd be no jobs to support them. We lost half our town for jobs. I guess that's the only way it could work out. Because mining did start to get too expensive to make a decent profit, I guess.

Dan doesn't think Copper will ever be big like it was, with plastics and other things now.

The air underground had a smell sort of like rotting timber, like three bad basements. Food got that odor on it. You got used to it.

Your clothes didn't last a week; the copper would eat the knees of your jeans like acid. Turned them yellow. Dan wore levis--he would buy old ones at rummage sales; they didn't last long. He wore rubber boots, which would last six months if it was a good pair; he found that nylon football sweaters lasted well. Wore a canvas rain slicker. It was hard to keep up with clothes because it didn't last long.

Some places were hot. Air was piped down in fan bags. Most work areas were ventilated. It was expensive to run the mine.

Jack Debble was an electrician; lives on Warren. He is a good talker. He worked his way up to foreman.

Norman Kenenan mined and was in the pit. A finlander.

Tom Mihelocich lives on A st; a pipefitter, now a security guard at MHD. He didn't qualify for pension. He would know about pumping.