

## **The Verdigris Project**

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Oral History Transcript

Dennis “Dinny” Murphy  
Interviewed by Teresa Jordan on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1986  
Digitized and Transcribed by Clark Grant

**ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT – DINNY MURPHY**

**Interviewee: Dennis “Dinny” Murphy**

**Interviewer: Teresa Jordan**

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by Clark Grant**

[Tape 1, side 1]

**TERESA JORDAN**

If I could get you to just say something so I can get a level, anything—

**DINNY MURPHY**

Well I hope my answers are good answers for you.

**JORDAN**

Great. We’ll just turn that on and let it run.

**MURPHY**

Ok.

**JORDAN**

Well, I’d like to start out with just some basic background Dinny, and you were born in Butte but then raised in San Francisco?

**MURPHY**

I was born in Butte and I stayed here until I was about 15 and I moved to San Francisco ‘till I was about 22.

**JORDAN**

And you worked in hotels in San Francisco?

**MURPHY**

Uh huh.

**JORDAN**

Clift? Clifton?

**MURPHY**

Clift.

**JORDAN**

And you worked there as—

**MURPHY**

As a page boy and then as a bell hop.

**JORDAN**

And you were making about what at that point as a bell hop?

**MURPHY**

About 20 dollars a day at that time.

**JORDAN**

What year was that approximately?

**MURPHY**

Huh, hate to go back so long, but it was the year that the golden gate bridge opened, when I was a bell hop, and it was the first time that the hotel employees were organized and we were on strike when the Golden Gate Bridge opened. And that's where the TV series hotel was.

**JORDAN**

Oh in the Clift?

**MURPHY**

No at Mark Hopkins is where I had one picket duty, but I worked at the Clift Hotel. And then after the strike, I went back to work for a while and I came to Butte for a vacation and I decided I'd rather be in Butte than San Francisco.

**JORDAN**

Was that a matter of the work that you'd rather be in the mines, or was it a matter of Butte, that you'd rather be in Butte than San Francisco?

**MURPHY**

After I left Butte I just always missed my friends and my mother and I lived together on-- and I had a tough time meeting people you know, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years old at that time. I guess I just didn't want to probably meet them because I wanted to—I thought my friends in Butte were more important. So all during that time, I always kept in the back of mind that I'd come back to Butte. And I met my first wife and that cemented my decision to come back to butte.

**JORDAN**

What year was that when you came back?

**MURPHY**

I came back in 1939.

**JORDAN**

Times had been pretty hard here during the depression, in the mining industry.

**MURPHY**

That's why my mother left Butte in the first place, around 1936 or whatever, I forget now when she left, but anyhow, she worked in the laundry and in boarding houses here and my older sister had been in San Francisco so she went down there also to see if maybe it would be better for her health because she was short and heavy set and had high blood pressure. But as bad as the times were, it just didn't seem like-- it seemed like people were more caring and then when they came out with, when Roosevelt you know was elected, and came out with the WPA and jobs for-- and it was just not really as bad as some of the things that you see now with homeless people. They had soup kitchens and soup lines and bread lines as they called them but you didn't see as many homeless as you do today.

**JORDAN**

How long did it take you once you came back to get a job in the mines?

**MURPHY**

Well, it didn't take me no time. As small as I am, I was even a lot lighter then. I weighed probably 100 pounds so as they had rustling lines that you used to go through, and every mine hired individually. And they'd have lines that you had to go through. And the rustling lines, as they called them, sometimes were very long and pretty rough sometimes. And I knew one lady whose brother was an assistant foreman at the St. Lawrence mine. And I went and talked to her and told her that I wanted to go work and she tried to discourage me of course, that I should go back to San Francisco. And but anyhow she spoke to her brother and I got in line and I went up and I got my first job at the St. Lawrence mine.

**JORDAN**

And in what position was that?

**MURPHY**

I started as what they called a motorman.

**JORDAN**

Just what exactly does a motorman do?

**MURPHY**

Well, they have a little battery-run motors and at the St. Lawrence, they had what they called manshee motors. And they had little 1-ton cars.

**JORDAN**

Now what did you call those motors?

**MURPHY**

Manshee. Manshee motors.

**JORDAN**

How did you spell that?

**MURPHY**

Boy I don't even remember. And you would pull the ore from the inner workings on the mine out to the station in small 1-ton cars. And you would dump them in the skip pocket on the station. And then you would return back in and load these cars, and the reason-- the St. Lawrence was an old mine, and it was probably next to the last mine to do away with horses and mules. And that's why the drifts were small and they couldn't use the bigger motors like the other mines did because-- so they went to these small little manshee motors as they called them, and they didn't pull only probably 6 or 7 car trains, where the bigger motors would pull--

**JORDAN**

Now what did those cars, what did those motors look like. Essentially what you would call a manshee motor would be an engine, a small engine that would pull cars?

**MURPHY**

Yeah, it was a square looking little thing and it had a little seat at the back end and a control handle like you used to see on the old street cars, where the conductor would run the handle around and these were small and they were able to be put on the cage. They used to pull two pins and they'd pull the seat up on top of the motor and they could run them right up the cage and take them to surface. Where they bigger motors at the other mines they'd have to dismantle them and stuff. But--

**JORDAN**

How many horsepower would that be?

**MURPHY**

Oh, boy I have no idea. But they were powerful little things. I mean they would really--

**JORDAN**

They'd haul 6 or 7 tons.

**MURPHY**

Oh yeah, easy with no-- but they were kind of dangerous because they were so small and if the pins weren't in the seats and you hit something, it could fold the seat back and up on you, and you know, and it had happened where they hit something alongside the drift and would push the seat up, broke the guy's pelvis.

**JORDAN**

What was the situation when you first go into a mine and you're green, you haven't been under there before. Was there a sort of hazing you went through with the other miners?

**MURPHY**

Oh yeah, they used to really really really tease ya. You know, getting on the cage and you're just shook with fright because you never know what to expect and the older men would tease ya and tell you stories about big wrecks they had going down and just anything to frighten you more. But then once you were down there, they were very very concerned for your safety, with all the harassing and teasing, but they made sure that there was nothing going to happen to ya because they--

**JORDAN**

Can you remember an example of that, of somebody sort of taking you under their wing or looking out for you?

**MURPHY**

Ok, I'm 5'5 and I weighed probably 100 pounds, and we used to have to dump these one-ton cars and the man that I was put, he was a young man too, that I was put to work with, was a big husky kid and was very good to me and showed me how it's easy if you do it right and uh, you have to dump them and be sure they don't tip all the way over on ya. And then after I got down to that a little bit, the station tenders, they were the guys that haul the timber down the mine, and the tools, and bring the men down the mines, let them off, and then after all the men are down, then they go about hoisting rock, these station tenders. And if I'd be on the station and maybe be behind a little bit, these station tenders would stop and help me dump rock so I wouldn't be too far behind. And-- other men that were on, like pipemen that took care of the water pipes and the air pipes, if I was having a tough time, they could come and give me a hand in loading these cars to bring out to the station. If I had a chute that was hung up or something and I was having problems -- uh they didn't ridicule you about 'look shorty get out of the way.' They used to just say 'here I'll give you a hand,' because I wasn't the smallest guy in the mine. There was lots of guys that were a lot older that done a lot heavier and harder work that were small. And then there is heavy timber at the station and you were trying to load it on timber trucks to take inside, they'd do it for ya without making you say 'here, weakling, let me do this.' 'Here' I'll give you a hand, Murph.' And just the camaraderie, that's probably what made working in the mines half as interesting or whatever. I just could never explain why I liked the mines. I guess it has a smell. Every mine probably smelled different between the surface and fresh air-- go down-- it had a real different smell.

[12:27 on the tape]

**JORDAN**

How would you describe that smell. Does anything on surface ever remind you of it?

**MURPHY**

Never. Whether it's humidity from some of the hot places and the smell is from copper

water or from decaying timber in certain places, but it just has a different aroma that-- it's uh, just hard and-- you know you could never understand how hot, really hot, and humid it would be in some of these places where some of these men worked. You know, you're out in your yard and sweat will roll down your face. Well, down the mine, it was nothing to take off your mine undershirt and ring it out. Or to take your mine boots out and dump the water out. And when you take your mine hat off and sometimes from the band, the water would just really fall right down. And uh...it's just people would-- people would probably think that you couldn't really sweat that much, to pour water out of your boots. But in some places it was so hot that the men would get cramps from loss of salt in their system and they used to take salt pills and drink lots of water.

**JORDAN**

What mines were particularly hot here?

**MURPHY**

Well the Belmont was noted for being a hot box. And then the Con, towards-- when it got down 5000 feet, it had some pretty hot spots. And then like the Emma and the Travonia and them, well they were cool mines. But then the rest of them-- the Steward had, was noted for some really hot boxes. In some of the places that they had names like the Chinese Laundry at the Steward mine was supposed to be-- if you worked in there you could work any place because that was really one of the hottest spots and--

**JORDAN**

Do you know what makes it hot in one place at the same level where it might be hot at the 5000 at the Con, and not hot—

**MURPHY**

I guess it's the water, you know. Some of that water, I wouldn't, could never— must have been over 100 degrees, some of the water, probably without exaggerating, it must be more. In the Anselmo they had a drift that they called the New York drift that was a mile inside from the station, with no other exits out. And it was so hot in there they brought in a cooler half way in. But it was so hot that these miners could only swing a pick to dig a tie hitch maybe five or six times before they'd be weak, and then his partner would take it. And they had sprays in the fan bags where the cool air was brought in from these coolers. But—and the water in there gushed out of a 2 inch pipe full force. And that's about the hottest of anything that I can remember. As a motorman, just servicing these two miners in there, just doing little odd jobs to help them out, and just sitting while they loaded the ore cars, I would pour sweat out of my boots, so you can imagine with them—and they had to drill and— it was really a tough place to work for the miners.

**JORDAN**

Boy, now what sort of facilities would be down under there in terms of water. Where would you go to get a drink of water?

**MURPHY**

They brought down water cars. They'd load the water cars with ice in the center of this tank car, this water tank car. They'd throw ice in there and then they'd fill the car, that surrounded this hole in the middle, with water, and each man brought his— they all had water bags. And, there was ice down the mine and you could fill the water bag with ice and then they'd-- there was places where they had big boxes with water from surface and they kept them loaded with ice and then during the day, as the men needed ice for their water bags, they'd come out to these, and that was ice cold water all the time. Because the coils were surrounded with ice.

**JORDAN**

So that would be at the station, where you'd catch the cage...there'd always be a big—

**MURPHY**

Well they had these water cars. They'd bring them into different places in the mine. And then different places they'd have these ice boxes, or these drinking places where they'd have ice and the cold water and there was some places they didn't.

[18:18 on the tape]

**JORDAN**

How about sanitary facilities underground?

**MURPHY**

They had toilet cars and they were two-seaters, and they had a lid and they had the little step that folded back up so they could put them on the cage. And they'd bring them up and return 'em to surface once a week, and they'd be cleaned and disinfected.

**JORDAN**

Now in the earlier days, they really didn't have any sanitary facilities underground did they?

**MURPHY**

Now you see, that's one thing why the poor old miner got knocked about, about being on strike all the time. I mean you hear so much about Butte, you know every 2 or 3 years there'd be a strike, but you know a lot of it wasn't just for increase in wages. For instance, the toilet car. If the toilet car was down the union had grievance men underground, and a miner could complain if he wanted, about working alone or about no ice, or a dirty toilet car, and you could go on, when the grievance men would meet with the mine foreman, you could bring all these grievances up. You know, like the dirty toilet car hasn't been moved out of there for three weeks, or it's terrible, and there's been no ice down here, or the fan bag is all torn and going into such-and-such a place. There's somebody else was working alone, and this was all brought on through union negotiations that, uh. And they had, in the hospitals here had places they called miner's wards. And they were always pretty full. My idea is, I remember when I was working on WPA when the very very first strike, when they reorganized the miners union, probably

36 or something in there, maybe before 34, thirty..uh—and uh that's when they brought in strikebreakers and the union just reorganized after all the troubles that they had from years before, like the miners union being blown up in 1917. But these things brought on good changes. I mean, before, it was work or else, I mean if you don't like it—you know. Other jobs were really hard to get in them days, than before, and so I mean some of these guys sacrificed a lot of days work to get things that they didn't have, I mean the company wasn't always that gracious that the fellas—you know from stories I heard from the older miners, when I started was W.A. Clark was a more thoughtful man for the miners that worked for him. I guess he gave them bonuses on Christmas, like a turkey or whatever, uh...but then we never knew how good Anaconda was until they left us.

[22:30]

**JORDAN**

Now, how about drainage in the mine, and the water system underground?

**MURPHY**

You know the ventilation and water drainage is, it just fascinates me sometimes. If the ventilation from surface ever stopped, I mean, nobody could be underground. I mean it would be just virtually impossible because there'd be no air and the heat [pause] and like at the Con they had a great big cooler and that forces all this cool air down the mine and then they have other coolers throughout the mines and they have air doors and these ventilation men would come down and they'd know where to put an air door to force the air to go a different direction, up or down, and they'd have double air doors. I just never could understand, you know, because—and then they had water ditches. And all this water that's just amazing, all the water that would come up out of the mine. And all these ditches were so the water would all go to the pump station, would be like at the 2800, at that time, and then they made 'em lower, and all this water would go to this pump station and then they'd pump this water to the big pump, where it was pumped to surface and went through the precip plant, and that was the—you know it would be so green, and so strong, that if you put a shovel in the ditch, in a couple of days the shovel would be gone.

**JORDAN**

Wow. Wow, and it was green, rather than—in the pit now it's that deep red color, but this water underground was green?

**MURPHY**

Just real deep deep green.

**JORDAN**

Sort of a jade green or?

**MURPHY**

Yeah, and then they would pump that to surface and then run that down to the precip plant. In the old days they used to have tin cans and iron rails from the mines and from the old street car tracks, you know, wherever. And towards the later years, they used to

have guys collecting tin cans, and you bring them there and they'd put em, dump it in this, and they had sweepers and these guys would sweep all the tops, all them looked like sediment off the top of the rails, and it was pure copper. And then they'd have these little overhead cranes with the magnets that, so that was 90%, it was. I don't know how much they used to say a gallon of water was worth, because that's all the overhead there was, just run the water and sweep the—

**JORDAN**

Now with that leech and precip. The way that worked was that if you put something like iron or tin into the copper water, it would cause the copper to precipitate out, and there were rails at the bottom of the vats? Or what would the copper grab on to then?

**MURPHY**

Then they would just sweep it. They had these sweepers. And they would sweep it to the very end, and this magnet would come down from this overhead crane—it would go back and forth and pick this up.

**JORDAN**

Now, what it picked up was copper?

**MURPHY**

Mmm hmm...and just put it in the—

**JORDAN**

And what did the sweepers look like?

**MURPHY**

Well, in the old days before they moved the precip over to where it was, they had men walk with brooms and they used to just walk down and sweep off—but it was shallower, the box would be probably—the water wouldn't be so deep. And it was build on kind of an incline, and it was over where Meaderville used to be. And they'd run the water down through there and these guys would...and the old timers that had the grey mustaches, would have green mustaches. And in the winter time from where the hot water, you know the water was hot of course coming up from the mine, and you could see in the winter time all this, every place that the copper tanks they called them in them days, so these guys they'd have their gray hair would be green.

**JORDAN**

Boy. Now these brooms, were they a metal in the broom?

**MURPHY**

No I think it was just a regular big sweeping broom, like street broom.

**JORDAN**

Like straw essentially or whatever that straw material is?

**MURPHY**

Mmm hmm. I should have—I never been around the precip or the copper tanks too much, but I knew the guys that worked there and you know, I knew that it was a good job, sometimes if you could get a job at the copper tanks sweeping and stuff, but in the new precip plant, then that was much more advanced. And I really don't know an awful lot about it, except I was down there a lot and I seen how they—

**JORDAN**

Now that's the one that's still up there. They have a bunch of trucks lined up there now. I was up there one time and they had stored a bunch of trucks up there.

[28:15]

**MURPHY**

And that's where they now, where they have to put the lime and the—of course there's no line, no water coming up now, but the company used to have to put lime and stuff to take the acid and stuff out of the water, I guess what it was, so the environmental, the EPA, I guess was one of their rulings. This water had to be treated before it could be discharged down Silver Bow creek, and it I never did understand what that...but it was a profitable thing even in the old days, the precip plant was probably one of their best money makers for the cost per—

**JORDAN**

Just the, you know the basic technology of getting air down the mines and getting water down the mines. It seems it would be like running the New York subway system or something. Getting the doors in the right places, knowing, they had to essentially know how to move air through the mines didn't they?

**MURPHY**

Yeah. You know. Course, they were mostly—

[End Tape 1, Side 1 - tape flips]

**MURPHY**

You just really load up. It would really take you a while to quench your thirst. And they had salt pills there if you wanted to take salt pills. But you would drink a tremendous amount of water, I mean if you didn't, boy, you'd dehydrate pretty fast.

**JORDAN**

Yeah, and that's they say that dehydration is one of the worst things you can do in terms of getting tired.

**MURPHY**

Yeah you see, I seen these guys who get out and go to take off their mine shirt and they'd get cramps, where their fingers would snarl and that was from the lack of salt I guess.

## **JORDAN**

Now you just look at that, look at working such hard physical work and sometimes in places that were so unpleasant, that were so hot. Nobody would want to do this! And yet a lot of people talk about mining, I mean they just loved it. How do you explain that?

## **MURPHY**

I just really don't know, I can always remember some days I used to just hate to go to work because I knew where I was gonna be and it would probably be gassy and I knew it was going to be hot and used to get a pounding, pounding headache from the powder gas after, where they would have blasted. And even though these miners would go, when I was servicing a drift like, or even pulling out of a raise, and the minute you start letting that ore, or that rock into the mine car that you're pulling, that gas would come up out of that rock and it would start, the headache would start at the base of your neck and go—and it would just pump. So I used to kind of hate to go work sometimes, thinking boy, I gotta pull this place tonight. And I worked as a motorman in that New York drift for quite a while, and I used to really kinda hate it sometimes because going in there, it was so, the rails were—it was—if you had a wreck you'd just, there was no air. Because the air was in the fan bags and you'd have to cut a little hole in the fan bag, and you're always afraid that...and there's so much water in this New York drift that the rails just floated almost, so you had to be very careful. And coming out you'd pull six car trains and uh...if you had a wreck sometimes you'd have to walk out to the station, and even just walking out was a chore. And get help to come in and sometimes the other motorman hated to come in there because it was that hot. But, then you'd get on surface and go up to Big Butte tavern and have a beer and a hamburger sandwich, talk it over, and be back again the next day to hate the same thing all over again. But—my wife really didn't like the mines. Really, I mean. Right at the outbreak of the war, I never worked overtime, ever hardly, and one night they came down and they wanted us to work over, so you couldn't go, there was no way to call home. But when I came up out, I'd worked four hours over time, and when I came up, they'd just put guards at the gate at that time, and we had ID cards. And they had security guards at every gate then. And as I came up out of the mine I heard somebody holler, Anybody seen Murphy? And I couldn't imagine, went over to the tank. And he said oh Christ, your wife's been up here 100 times. And it was snowing. And I went out after I showered, went out, and my wife was standing out by the guard shack. She wouldn't go in. and when we were walking down Excelsior street from the Anselmo, she just looked and said, I hate those things. But...I stayed.

## **JORDAN**

It must have been hard. I grew up on a ranch situation and I know there that we would be out riding and often come in so late. And when you're there, when you're out there doing it, you know what's going on and you don't worry. But it was really hard on my mom, because we'd be four or five hours late and all sorts of things go through your head. I always thought here it must have been hard for the wives because the underground was dangerous.

## **MURPHY**

Oh yeah.

**JORDAN**

When you're there and it's hands on, you know what the dangers are, but if you're not working under there, your imagination can just go crazy with you sometimes or—

**MURPHY**

Well you know I think in earlier days, until they really started getting safety conscious, you know one time—my belief was life didn't mean a lot to the profits of the company you know. Not only in the Butte mines, but any mines or any steel factory or anything else. You know, life was pretty cheap for the money that some of these companies are making. And until they started really bearing down on them to make things safer, that's what I said about these miners wards. It was nothing to go into a miners ward and see all the beds full. Lot of broken legs and broken backs and—before they had hard hats. It was nothing to see guys going up the hill with white cones. They looked like, it was—they'd get probably maybe 5,6,8,10 stitches in their head. They used to just shave around it, put the stiches in their head, put the—I don't know how they made it but it would foam and then turn hard. And then they'd go to work the next day.

**JORDAN**

Hmm.

**MURPHY**

But yeah. So them women in them days, I think, really had it a little bit tougher than towards the end, it really and truly wasn't that bad you know. I mean there was guys that got hurt, but I think I can always remember, it was, where I lived was what they called Corktown, and it was all Irish people, not only all Irish, but the main, they were mostly all Irish Catholics. And it was nothing to see when the women would walk the husband to the door, and they'd always kiss 'em, tell 'em god bless ya. And some of them would flick holy water on 'em. And when they come home, they were entitled to their shot and their homemade beer. This is places that I'm thinking about. This didn't happen to everybody because some poor guys went home to nothing you know. And the kids were good to their fathers.

[38:15]

**JORDAN**

Did your father mine?

**MURPHY**

No my father was a policeman, but he died when I was a year old, so my mother was a widow when she was 29. And she never did marry. But now he mined when he first came to this country, when he first came to Butte, he worked at the gray rock here for a couple of years until he went and got on the police force. Because I got his rustlin' card when I was—I, the union one time I got to know. So they gave me his rustling card.

**JORDAN**

Oh what a wonderful thing to have. Now what county did he come from in Ireland?

**MURPHY**

Cork. County Cork.

**JORDAN**

And was your mother an Irish immigrant also?

**MURPHY**

Uh huh.

**JORDAN**

And was she from County Cork?

**MURPHY**

Yeah

**JORDAN**

Had they known each other before, were they married before they came or did they meet here?

**MURPHY**

No they came here to meet. Oh boy. I don't know, tell you the truth. My dad, she became a citizen through my dad. My dad was born in Leadville, Colorado, and his father took him back to Ireland. So I guess being born here, he was a citizen. So my mom—because where my mother got her social security, had to get all this stuff for her—but I think they were married in the old country.

**JORDAN**

So you're 100 percent Irish.

**MURPHY**

Mmm hmmm.

**JORDAN**

Now, underground at the time that you were in the mines, did you find that the different ethnic groups did different things, or was it pretty much—were the majority of contract miners Irish for instance, and the majority of smelter men Cornish?

**MURPHY**

I think—the way I found it was—mines, like on the east side of the hill, they used to call, would be over for the Leonard, anything east of the hill, and so that would take guys from McQueen and Meaderville and maybe South Butte and so they wouldn't have to walk all the way up to the Con or something. They'd go to these mines close to their homes, so the Leonard and the Tramway and those mines in there, uh, the Rarus and all up, they

would be within walking distance, so they would be the Slavic people, and the Italians from Meaderville, and Austrians and stuff from McQueen, and Yugoslavs from McQueen, and on and through there. And then up north, they had a lot of, as they call them, cousin jacks, in them days, worked up in mines up around Centerville and stuff. And then I guess then as people started to get cars and they'd...you know it was nothing to, when times were really good, you could get a job, you could quit in the morning and go out again that night at a different mine. So, but most of the old timers were pretty steady and they stayed pretty much to one mine and then as their kids started, they had cars and they'd go to the Anselmo for a while and you'd quit and go some place else, just to try it I guess or maybe you'd get mad at the boss. But you know, I hate to hear anybody say, they call 'em bow hunks and harks and cousin jacks, but you know, I could never understand why people would say—I never did hear much around here. Some people probably didn't like to be called a bow hunk, but underground you know I mean these men, they were loving guys and I used to work with a guy, and he was a Montenegrin, you know from Yugoslavia, and he was an orthodox, and he used to grab me by the cheeks, and he'd said 'good kid.' And he'd swear, he'd say 'good kid son of a gun. Too bad you're Irish.' I was invited down to his home for their Serbian Christmas and, same way down when I—I never did like to go to the east side of the hill until I came back from the service and I started down at the Leonard. And all those people down there would always want you to come home to eat, or they'd send you a piece of povitica with their husband to work, so there was—there was different ethnics, but they were all just really, really neat people.

[44:00]

### **JORDAN**

Now did, um, did a new ethnic group that would come in, did they have to become assimilated, or did they have to sort of earn their stripes in the mine? For instance the Mexican miners came later than the Irish and the Italian. And did they have to go through a period before they were accepted fully?

### **MURPHY**

Well yeah because you know, they used to get places that nobody else would take. And the Filipinos the same way you know, they'd get, at the Belmont, I mean there was places there that was really hot and they couldn't get anybody to work 'em. But these Filipinos and these Mexicans would take em. Because I don't know whether they could stand the heat more or what. But I used to see a Filipino come down to the ice box and put ice in his hat and put it on top of his head. I mean, you'd think that'd—but they were treated really good. And newcomers in the mines were, when the war started and guys were coming from North Dakota and South Dakota because they were hiring so much and the pay was a little better, they were really taken right in. They were shown the ropes underground right away. And when they brought these soldier miners from Pennsylvania, I don't know if somebody else may have told you, during the war they brought soldier miners because they couldn't get enough men to work in the mines, and some of them are still here. So when I wanted to join the Navy, I had a heck of a time because the guy at the draft board told me that we're not bringing in soldier miners to let our own boys go.

So I quit and I said I quit and you'd have to classify me 1A. He said well, you don't have to...I went to the union and the president of the union at that time went to the head of my draft board. And so he said well ok, so I joined the navy.

**JORDAN**

Butte has always been very patriotic. I mean Butte's always had a higher percentage of people from butte have gone to the wars than they have from—

**MURPHY**

I don't know why. I would come home and read the paper and I'd probably see a name that I recognized or probably knew and it used to really bother me. How can I sit here? And you know—they're out there trying, giving their lives and I'm just staying here. It's all it is, I used to just go up the mine and come home and everything's hunky dory. It used to bother me. My wife didn't want me to go. Then after all that trouble, to get in to the Navy and I could have served my country better by staying home on the mines. I wound up on a beautiful Caribbean base for— [laughs]

**JORDAN**

What were some of the slang terms underground, for just, for instance one term several people have used is 'punching a hole through rock' for the sense of mining. Or instance, when you were in good ore, what did you call a really good—

**MURPHY**

A good vein?

**JORDAN**

Yeah a good vein?

**MURPHY**

Oh geeze, you think I can remember? I really can't, I can't even think. You know I just don't ever remember hearing anybody saying, you know, it's probably the same ones. After they went back in after they blasted and they found [inaudible] they'd say, oh man, found a hell of a vein in there. Did you see how thick that vein is. Or how wide a drift, when they'd be drifting, and they'd be following a small lead, and the next two or three blasts later, they'd come out and say oh boy, we're hittin' there, did you see that. That's 8 feet wide or that's 5 feet wide.

**JORDAN**

Would there be excitement then, when they'd hit a big—

**MURPHY**

Well, there probably would be because, you know, it meant that their probably contract prices would be a little better, because they were in a pretty rich. But after they found that vein, it was nothing you know, because when they raised up on that vein, then it was just following that vein up. Then when they stoped off the raises, it was the same thing, so you know, I really and truly can't ever remember anything. There was only one time I

saw concern of excitement was in that New York drift. They blasted one day and went back in and there was a hole—and you could look up from the top of the muck pile, and you could see oh god, as far as your light could see. And they brought down some lights from surface and shined it up in there, and as far as you could see was just one great big cavity. And so an engineer, when they was telling me, you know, he said you know that probably was at one time, his theory now, was probably [church bells ringing], when Big Butte was a volcano, because it was over that way, that maybe all that molten rock just probably was shot out of there or that's probably a fault that when that lets loose, causes this. And you could see places underground where you could understand where the fault was. It'd be, they called it talc. It'd be probably that thick and solid rock on top of it and solid rock on the bottom of it. And sometimes I would slip, because the Leonard mine had places where one level would drop right down to the next level.

**JORDAN**

Hmm.

**MURPHY**

And, but there was things down there that would kind of amaze you. I've always thought you know, I wonder—too bad they didn't have the kind of lights that they do now so you could just see where it really, really did go.

**JORDAN**

Because you just couldn't see the top.

**MURPHY**

They call, what they call a hangin, and the foot, you know. The hangin is where they had, they tell you when you walked into a place you had to watch the hangin wall. That's where they had what they called Duggans. You've probably heard what they called Duggans already.

**JORDAN**

They explained to me a Duggans is a rock that comes down and hits you on the head.

**MURPHY**

And puts you in Duggans mortuary.

**JORDAN**

Right.

**MURPHY**

Yeah.

**JORDAN**

Ok, ok.

**MURPHY**

And uh, but these guys, these miners could tell. They could hear a creak or a crack and they knew. And when they barred down, anything above their head, of course the foot wall would be the bottom and they didn't mine that. But, they could pound that hangin wall with their bar, and they could tell by the sound if there was loose or if it was solid. And they'd keep chipping away until they got all the loose stuff down you know, and I seen 'em barred down and they'd get rock fall off as big as that fireplace there. And they took big long bars and after it was timbered, get that timber and they'd say the timber's talkin' too much. They'd know the ground was getting heavy. They knew. The good miners, the ones that were at it.

**JORDAN**

Ok. Now there's several terms here I need to—now when you say bar down, what does bar down mean exactly.

**MURPHY**

Getting all the loose rock above your head.

**JORDAN**

And that's the hangin, essentially the ceiling is the hangin wall.

**MURPHY**

Mmm hmm. And they bar that down, they go and get all the loose rock off. And they look. They don't just scale the little pieces. They really look and then they pound it and hit it to get the sound and if there's a hollow.

**JORDAN**

If it's loose then, the sound is going to be more hollow

**MURPHY**

Drummy. More drummy. Mmm hmm. And if it's solid, it rings the bar. The bar rings you know. Pinnng. So—

**JORDAN**

Now, and then when loose ground, um. That would be up above, when the timber were talking too much, you knew it was getting unstable up above, essentially. And it could come..

**MURPHY**

When the ground is real heavy is when the timber could creak and stuff. And then, this really comes to mind at the Anselmo. We were bringing in timber to this stope, and we call 'em the two Eds. They both names were Eds. We walked in where we wanna holler down that your timbers here. And as we looked down the man way, we could see their lights, and they were hurrying up. And we got out of the way of course and we thought they were just, maybe one of them was sick or maybe one of them as hurt, but they were coming out of the stope because it was getting ready to cave. And that's what they call

cuttin fills, or they called 'em cuttin kills. They called em weed stopes, for the head of the mining company. And that's where they went in and didn't timber. And they then fill with sand and stuff. But they, it was so far, some times it would cave so far that they couldn't bar down.

**JORDAN**

Now....

**MURPHY**

That whole thing came while we were there. And you could just feel the swoosh up the man way.

**JORDAN**

Boy. But they got out?

**MURPHY**

Yeah. And then went back.

**JORDAN**

That's—

**MURPHY**

And that's when it gets so high, see, that they couldn't reach it. Then they raised their chute, where they bring the slush, the rock, down to the chute so it'll go down to the level below. And they had crib raises as they called 'em. But they'd bring these, it was just like a log cabin house and they'd fit together like that, just a square. And they'd crib up, all the way up. Besides they could go this way. And they'd bring in that fill, and this was their man way over here, the other old raise would be over there, and they'd dump the fill down that raise over there. And it was sand and then they'd just keep bringin this, they'd slush it back in this way. And then they'd get it up high and they'd bring their raise up a little bit higher, and then they could drill again. And they'd just keep filling underneath them as they went up.

**JORDAN**

Just stair stepping up sort of—

**MURPHY**

Yeah.

**JORDAN**

Now these drifts that weren't timbered were called cut and kill?

**MURPHY**

No the stopes were cut and kill.

**JORDAN**

Cut and kill.

**MURPHY**

The drifts were always, as a rule they were timbered, and in later years they used to do what they call rock bolting. They'd drill holes in the rock and put long, 8 foot bolts up in there. And they'd put sometimes, kind of screen, heavy metal. But they were false security because, you know, they didn't know how deep—you know I've seen rock fall out with the whole rock bolt in it. But as a rule they were pretty safe because they'd—but they'd drive all these rock bolts up in these bad places, and they had this mesh and they'd, you know line the whole place. But they were, some places I thought they were false security but they held up pretty good. Timber was better.

**JORDAN**

The cut—was it cut and fill or cut and kill?

**MURPHY**

The proper name was cut and fill. And then the miners after so many fatalities and so much—they'd call em cut and kill.

**JORDAN**

And in calling them weed stopes, after Weed, was that derogatory towards him?

**MURPHY**

Well I think, I think it was because it was—the idea came from him, a new type of mining instead of you know timbered stopes or whatever, that they come up with this new cut and fills.

**JORDAN**

But it wasn't—that was named in honor of him rather than—

**MURPHY**

Yeah they thought—

[Tape 1, Side 2 ends]

[Tape 2, Side 1 begins]

**JORDAN**

Now what is somebody would be underground, what if a miner did things that the others didn't approve of, if he was an unsafe miner, or if he was lazy or if he was just ornery, or if, if he just did something that other miners didn't like. How would you go about changing somebody's behavior underground?

**MURPHY**

They just wouldn't work with em. I mean they'd just refuse to work with them. And we had a guy that changed alongside of us and coming up at nighttime, you'd go in and you'd shower and shave. I mean, you'd shower and shave [laughs]. You'd go in and take your shower. This guy would come in and he wouldn't shower. He'd put on his street clothe. So one day we just opened his locker and threw his street clothes out the window. Because, you couldn't stand the smell of him. And he'd wipe his mine boots out with a towel and wear his mine boots home. But if a guy was too safe, he couldn't get a partner. Or if he was too ornery, the motorman wouldn't pull his chute . There was ways, you know. You had to compromise.

**JORDAN**

It seems for it to work well underground, everybody had to cooperate. It really was a job of cooperation.

**MURPHY**

And then they had guys that work, and they were just specialists, like in cave block, or in caves. They would go in and work places that they had to take miners out of, to catch 'em up, as they used to say you know. And these miners were pretty uh, good men. They knew all the dangers that were there, and they knew how to timber it, and they knew just exactly what to do. And hardly any of 'em ever got hurt, but they got their bad places, but they were given what they call 900 contracts. A guy could guarantee a wage. They didn't have to do so much, break so much ground you see. They just got a 900 contract, and they'd get paid pretty well.

**JORDAN**

Were there heroes underground? Were there some men who were just sort of, um, almost what's the word I want...they were so good, everybody knew who they were?

**MURPHY**

Ohh, there was men there that you knew that—you know, if something bad happened like, that they'd be the first ones in to help you. Most of the guys that were on first aid teams, that worked around underground. The guy that I worked around was a guy by the name of Walt Foresty, now he was a pipe man and he was on 4 or 5 first aid teams and I was on two of them with him. He was cool and, we had an accident one day. They came and they got Walt and a rock fell on the guy's leg and so they came and the got me and I went up. I was a little more excitable, where Walt would tell me, ok take it easy. I got to, we put the guy's leg in the splint and got ready to move him and I had the air hose tied into the splint. And...where somebody would have hollered dummy, Walt said for Christ sake Murph, take that off. So I would leave it to guys that were a little more cooler, but they had all kinds of them around there. They were really, really good at first aid. They would—

**JORDAN**

What was his last name?

**MURPHY**

Foresty.

**JORDAN**

Foresty?

**MURPHY**

Mmm hmm. He was a really, really neat guy.

**JORDAN**

And how about the contract miners. Were there a couple that just always topped the board?

**MURPHY**

Oh, I always believed, every mine had their—uh, what do you call ‘em, pets, but every mine had the guys that topped the board every—the Con had a crew and every time you could go up and what they called the Ouija board, and every day after measuring day that board would be posted. And you would just, without even, just go over there and you’d find these guys topped the board here, and guys at the Anselmo topped the board there. Guys at the Leonard topped the board. And uh, that was kind of a thing you know. You’d go down into town after work or something and it was measuring day and they put the board up. They’d say how’d you do? Oh we topped the board this week. And more didn’t even make day’s pay you know? But it was always the same men, the boss’s [inaudible] topped the board I believe. Most of the guys that you talk to now tell you the same thing.

**JORDAN**

Who were some that you remember, some of the names?

**MURPHY**

Boy, I’m telling you. I couldn’t even begin to name ‘em now. But there was—I can’t—and that’s another thing. People used to always think that miners—you had to be really dumb you know? You couldn’t have an education. It was nothing to go down and drill a round and—but I seen some of these old country men that probably couldn’t read very much or maybe didn’t speak too good of English. But on measuring day, they could figure in their way faster than the graduate of the school of mines could tell ‘em how much they were getting paid for their timber. They’d say oh no, no no no. That’s wrong. And they’d have their own ways, if they had to use matchsticks probably, to figure it out. They’d done it. And, so they weren’t—everybody down the mine wasn’t just an ignoramus you know?

[07:20]

**JORDAN**

There’s so much involved in it. It seems to me it’s a highly involved sort of work.

## **MURPHY**

Sure you know, you just didn't come down and start to mine. It was just all kinds of things to look for. That's always something that always bothered me. I mean, people always thought that you know, you took that job because it was, you didn't finish high school. It was easiest job to get. You didn't have any ambition or go any farther to look for something. I looked for other things. I found my likings in the mine. And I just worked until I got better jobs than the New York drift. When I was mining, I worked at what they called an intermediate, and the air was bad in it. They had, and they take these intermediates and they're like a drift between two drifts, between two levels. Like the 36 and the 38. And you have to climb up them, and you could come out and then you go up to the next level, but if it's closer to the bottom level, then you climb up. Actually if it's closer to the top level, then you climb down but. And this is hand mucking in these places because they don't bring up the—And I worked with a guy by the name of McGarvey, and when you go up in there, they actually they have to take the fan bag down when they're going off shift when they're gonna blast because the concussion of the blast would take the bag up all the way. So they roll the bag up and they take it away. So when you go up, all that smoke and gas is still lingering in there because, and then you have to string you fan bag out and do what they called a wetting down. And that was, some guys would wet down for an hour and some guys would wet down for just a little bit because they were hungry and wanted to get going. And then you'd set up a bar in this place, with the drill on it, with the, they called 'em liners. And then one guy would start to drill the top holes because he could get on top of the muck pile, and these bars are kinda heavy. And uh, then he'd set up his machine and while he was drilling the top holes, then his partner would stark mucking. And before they'd drilled and before they blasted, then the other shift was supposed to put down what they called a floor, so when the rock came out and landed on the floor, it would be easier to muck. And they had these one-ton cars that you see on people's lawns now. And you would muck into there. I mean, you'd hand-tram that out to the chute. And then that would go down below., And you'd have to muck pretty fast because you had to be done mucking by the time your partner had the top holes drilled. And then you'd help him tear it down. And then he'd give you a hand to muck. Because you had to muck, I mean you muck all the way around, and then sometimes you'd find missed holes. That's holes that didn't go off during the blast and you'd see the fuse sticking out like that. And you'd try to dig 'em out. Sometimes you couldn't dig 'em out. And that's the only thing that used to kind of get to me, is this McGreevy would say well, we know there's a missed hole here, so we'll drill here, over a little bit. Because you have to, you know...and I used to, while he collared the holes, you hold the steel so the hit doesn't bounce off. He asked me, and I'd collared the bottom holes for him, and it's shake. But I used to always just kind of wait you know. Is this gonna go? But, I come home out of there that I couldn't eat supper because it was such a terrific terrific headache.

## **JORDAN**

From that gas, that powder gas?

**MURPHY**

Yeah, and having to muck and every time I took a shovel up, oh I went out lots of times and threw up into the chute you know. And I'd come back and go in. But, it started to take its toll because I wasn't very big anyhow to begin with. I never weighed 130 lbs until I was 35 years old. And, so that was at the Anselmo and I knew the foreman pretty well, and assistant foremans pretty well. So I just told them I said, it's too much. I can't stand the headaches and the gas. My partner wanted me to stay with him. He said, well we'll quit and we'll get a stope or something you know, at the same mine. But, and the best part about it was we made a dollar above day's pay, which wasn't worth my sickness, so when I asked for a change, then this assistant foreman wanted to give me a stope, or give us, he said I'll give you a stope. I said no, I think I'll go back motoring. Then I started nipping, and from then on I was a nipper.

**JORDAN**

So you had been a motorman and then you did contract mining and then back to motorman and then you were a nipper?

**MURPHY**

Yeah.

**JORDAN**

And how, what all does a nipper do?

[13:45]

**MURPHY**

Well, you bring all the tools down from surface. Axes, saws and sharp picks. And you take care of all the machines, the buzzies, and years later they came out with jack legs, they were drilling machines. And you have to see that there's nails and fishplates for rails for the drift miners and hoses, air hoses and you have to have water hoses and you have a tool shed and you have to keep it stocked because you know, if a miner can't drill because—if one machine breaks you have to have another one there for him. And your good miners, you have good machines for them, like they have buzzies that they had a ping machine that was smaller and lighter, and you used to give that to your good miners that took good care of their tools. And these big heavy old beam machines, just give 'em to the guys that didn't take good care of stuff. They'd bang them around.

**JORDAN**

So really your success as a contract miner would depend to some degree on your relationship with the nipper.

**MURPHY**

Oh, I'd say yeah you know because, if you've got a dull axe and you're trying to frame a piece of timber, and the axe is as round as your fist, then it's not gonna cut much, so you know. Of course, he can make things tough for you. He could tell you, go to the boss or you know, if he's a good miner, gets a lot of—one of the lead men why, if he goes to the

foreman, and says look I'm not getting any tools, and then you're not there no more. You have to kind of, you have to steal a lot. To be a good nipper, you had to be a good thief. And you cached all your private stuff. All your new axes you put in a special place where nobody knew where they were at. And when you got new hoses, you'd put them in a special place for your good miners. [pause] and you always, you know you had to have machines available. A good miner would, some of them would come down and take these machines and, or you know, if they were far away, I used to get a motorman to give me a hand, throw them in a car and take them into his working place and I'd either put them in a man way or if they were good guys, I'd get in touch with them or holler to them and I'd put it on the hoist and hoist it up to them so they didn't have to come down. And, so you had to keep on the ball, but it was a good job and I liked it.

**JORDAN**

Now, you know the—just, I just wish I could go underground.

**MURPHY**

I wish you could too.

**JORDAN**

I wish I could see it because it's so hard to visualize it. Where, on the station, when you come down on the cage, and that's a big room like two or three stories high would it be?

**MURPHY**

Well, no. Some of them were you know, probably two stories I guess, you know. But they were all timbered real good, with great big square 10x10s and they're all—and some of them aren't so awful big, but most of them are pretty big so they have to have room to pile the timber in. Posts are 10' high I think, and they'd have to have room to haul all this stuff on and bring out the potter cars and then the toilet cars.

**JORDAN**

And then, where would you have, as a nipper, would you have sort of a station yourself or an office.

**MURPHY**

That's what they called the toolshed you know.

**JORDAN**

Toolshed

**MURPHY**

Yeah.

**JORDAN**

And that would be right there at that main station?

**MURPHY**

No they was always a ways inside someplace, close to the workings you know, where you didn't have to—

**JORDAN**

Would that move then, as they moved into different—

**MURPHY**

No, but you had to bring out all the old stuff. That was your, you know, when they break a hose an stuff, you had to, I'd bring it down and coil it, and tie it. Everything you know, so it'd be in a neat pile. And all the dull steel, and all the dull axes and the dull picks, and all the broken machines. An you have to tag them all, and then I'd put them in a car, or sometimes they couldn't get anybody, I'd put them on a timber truck and bring them all out to the station and I'd throw them all at the station. And then they'd have, on the day when they bring down the new tools, they'd have tool crates. You'd put everything in the tool crate. Then if you have a good dry with the nipper boss, you'd get an extra couple axes, and certain steels are kind of hard you know. If you don't have a starter steel for the miner, he can't start to drill. Because he can't start with the big long—It's important that you have, you know, things like that, and you have to cache some of them because sometimes they'd break into your locker. So you have a supply of axes and picks stashed someplace else.

[20:00]

**JORDAN**

So, for the mines to work, for it just to work well under there, the nipper had to have a good relationship with his boss to get the tools he needed, and then he had to have good relationships with the miners. Miners had to have good relationships with him to get the tools they needed.

**MURPHY**

Yeah it comes down to that you know, but I really didn't—I guess it's like anything else. I mean you have favorites, but not that you didn't like the other men,. But if some guys, you know, if they have a machine and they take pretty good care of it, then it makes it easier for you, so you wanna see that they get—and then there's jerks and like everything else that don't car what they do or how they do it. Throw a machine down the man way or something, let it get broke.

**JORDAN**

Now what all machinery was involved?

**MURPHY**

Well, they had jacklegs. That's a machine on—it's on a leg that's a hydraulic. And they have air and water goes into them. And they can raise up, can get higher and then they come down. And then the buzzie is mostly for like, in raises and stuff.

**JORDAN**

Now what does the jackleg do, what's its purpose?

**MURPHY**

To drill the holes.

**JORDAN**

To drill.

**MURPHY**

Like, in a drift, they can go straight in, or in a stope, some of them use them in stopes, and then the Kelly is a different type of mine. The Kelley didn't have raises and stopes. They had cave block system, so they called them undercuts. So they just went up and drilled, and let everything cave in. And they used jacklegs and buzzies in different places there. And, but that was the only, you know, true drilling machines, was a buzzie or jackleg.

**JORDAN**

And then the buzzies were hand drills, or what were they?

**MURPHY**

They're a big machine like this, and they have a leg, or, it's a hydraulic too. And when you turn the air on, it has a point on the bottom, and you put it in the board, if you're gonna drill at a slant, maybe you might have to put something down to hold the leg, and you turn the air on, and that pushes the machine up. And then as the steel goes into the ground, the machine keeps, you know, pushing it up. And then when that goes in, then you pull out and they have a starter steel in them, the first, second, third, fourth. And then the hot shots have what they called long steel. They'd drill a hole a mile long if they could.

**JORDAN**

And the buzzies were primarily for drilling raises then.

**MURPHY**

Yeah, and they'd—so that's why you gave a good, these little beam machines were smaller and a little bit lighter but they were good working machines. And these big beam machines were kind of big cumbersome things. But you didn't give anybody something that would make life miserable for them, that wouldn't work. Every machine you got would work. You just, they have water needles in them and they would get bent or closed, where the water wouldn't come out. So you couldn't let a poor miner drill with no water. And he wouldn't anyhow, but some machines were just a little easier and better to work with than the big—

**JORDAN**

Now both the jacklegs and the buzzies came in both the Ps and Bs?

**MURPHY**

No, the jacklegs were just the machine. But the buzzies—a B-machine was probably one of the first ones, the older ones, then as they came out with these little ping machines, they were smaller and lighter.

**JORDAN**

And what size is a buzzy, like how much would one weigh? A p-machine for instance.

**MURPHY**

Oh, a p-machine would probably weigh 60 pounds. I used to throw them on my shoulder and walk out with them you know, so—the B-machine was really a heavy thing. That'd probably be 70-80 lbs. This is an awful guess. But I used to carry them on my shoulder, but I'd have to stop and rest, and then put it back on. But uh, and the you have to...they had that contest and these girls at the school of mines with these jacklegs. My old partner's granddaughter was one of the girls. I asked him [inaudible] how to run the jacklegs. Because you know, when you turn the air on, they could get away from you and they'd pull you. But that's why I still, right today, I think you know these people say well, you know, oh he was just a miner, but who could go up to know where to drill the holes and where to put the holes in a drift, you know? He has to drill his holes, he has to know just exactly when he loads these holes, which holes are gonna go first.

**JORDAN**

There's a science to it.

**MURPHY**

Sure, you know, you have to break the, what they call the lifters and then, and then the metal hole that comes out first and that shoots it out this way. And then all the other holes break to where that [pause] where the first hole came out of, and they really have to know what they're doing. And I seen those missed holes like I was telling you about. I didn't see 'em, but I know of two miners that drilled into a missed hole. One of them lost part of his arm, his wrist. And the other guy got partially blind. And then a sampler one day walked into this hole and just where his glasses were, was the only thing that saved him. But it just peppered his face, but he was just far enough away where it peppered his face like raw hamburger. With his safety glasses. So they had to watch for all those things you know.

[27:15]

**JORDAN**

So what sort of distances were there, like from that station how far might it be...I realize every situation is different, but how far might it be from the station to your toolshed for instance?

**MURPHY**

Ooooh, probably 400 feet. I think that New York drift, from the shaft into the, that was over a mile. But, that was pretty—that was a New York project. I mean, what they meant

by New York project, why they called it the NY drift, it meant no expenses. They'd get anything they'd want. At that time, because the orders probably came from NY. I guess that's why they call them the NY drift. It was an experimental drift that was supposed to go from the Anselmo to the Con at that time. And I think they did all that way later from the Con. And they got in there, oh probably half a mile and they put in a new cooler in there. That's where there was some along with the water, so they piped all that in. And, but the mine foreman had no problem getting anything for that New York drift, because it was a special [cough].

**JORDAN**

You know, one thing that's always just intrigued me is when they would take a drift from two different directions and meet in the middle.

**MURPHY**

Yeah.

**JORDAN**

Now I don't understand. I can't even get my fingers to touch when my eyes are closed. I just don't know.

**MURPHY**

That's another thing that kind of amazes me. Like, you know how they really, they really got that down. They know when they're going to hole a drift into another working. And they know just exactly where it's gonna come out you know. And they take a raise from the 34 to go to the 32, and they can tell you just exactly where it's gonna come out. It's just—I was always hoping that I could have been around when they holed that New York drift, but it was quite a few years later before they ever—

**JORDAN**

When the, essentially the two directions joined up—

**MURPHY**

Yeah, but they went so many directions in that New York drift. They came in to where they had that big cave I told you about, so they couldn't go ahead any more, so they turned off and they went this way. I don't know why they went this way. They went to the left for a while and came back out, and came a ways down and then they started in another direction. Now my directions, sometimes when I got underground, I would lose it. I knew I was going south, but then after I get so far in and I couldn't imagine just about where I'd be on surface.

**JORDAN**

Seems to me that it'd be really easy to get lost underground because you wouldn't have that, you wouldn't have landmarks essentially. You couldn't look up and see big Butte and know it was to the West.

**MURPHY**

Yeah, but you'd really—

[Tape 2, Side 1 ends - tape flips]

[Tape 2, Side 2 begins]

[31:00]

**MURPHY**

The main ventilation man.

**JORDAN**

Huh.

**MURPHY**

They came down the Badger, and they were going to go down the Granite Mountain, and they ran into a bad pocket of air. When they found this one, he was sitting like this. That's just the way they brought him.

**JORDAN**

I guess it's an easy way to go.

**MURPHY**

Just no air.

**JORDAN**

You just don't even know what happens.

**MURPHY**

Get sleepy. Yeah. [pause] But that was kind of ironic, that a ventilation man get caught in his own trap.

**JORDAN**

Yeah. [pause] They were going from the Badger to—

**MURPHY**

Yeah, down to the Granite Mountain for something. See, the Granite Mountain at one time was owned by the – even during the war, second world war, Granite Mountain was an Anaconda, Granite Mountain was Butte mining company. And they had their own bosses and they opened that up at the outbreak of the war. I worked there until I got in the Navy. That's when I quit the Anselmo. I went up there, and that's when they were just starting to go down in the mine. And they had one of the most modern engine rooms in Butte. It was all encased in glass.

**JORDAN**

Oooh. You were in the engine rooms around, in the mines here?

**MURPHY**

Mmm hmm. Well, they were out in the open and you could hear all this shouting, but up at the Granite Mountain, at that one, it was all closed in, so no one could distract the engineer.

**JORDAN**

Is it still there? Is the GM engine room still there?

**MURPHY**

No, but the Granite Mountain is the one that's in that hole. Have you ever gone up, you know, go up Walkerville, and then you turn east like that, and you see that mine that's down. That's the GM. But in days that you couldn't work outside, they used to put us all inside at the engine room, and wiping all the engine off. It was fantastic. It was just the neatest engine room I ever saw. And after you got that all wiped down, it was just neat and clean. All the brass on the rails. All the containers were shined after...it was a really nice place. And that was a good mine. I guess they tell me, and a good company you know. But when I worked there, it was for the North butte Mining Company. And then I got going.

**JORDAN**

Were there superstitions in the mines?

**MURPHY**

Oh boy.

**JORDAN**

What were the superstitions?

**MURPHY**

Well, if you forgot something, you wouldn't go back out to get it. You know?

**JORDAN**

Now why was that?

**MURPHY**

It was supposed to bring, you know, bring bad luck. I think maybe the Irish were a little more superstitious about things that a lot of guys, you know, would scoff off and never never even bother with. [birds chirping] Or you know, if some place was working that maybe two men had been killed in different times, uh, a lot of guys were superstitious. They wouldn't go there. [pause] I think they brought a lot of the superstition from home.

**JORDAN**

There's so much of that in Ireland and that rich mythology.

**MURPHY**

Oh yeah, if you come home and put a new pair of shoes on our table, my mother would tell ya. But—my mother didn't want me to go to work in the mines when I left her in San Francisco. She didn't want me to come back to Butte. She thought I could do better.

**JORDAN**

Had your father died a natural death?

**MURPHY**

He died during the flu.

**JORDAN**

During the flu in 1918—

**MURPHY**

It's really, it's always amazed me. When my mother was a live, memorial Day, she just—if the grave was fixed and on the step it has Murphy, and if she could see Murphy and the grave was all raked off, then she was content. But if she went out there and the grass had grown up on that cement where you couldn't see Murphy. So when I go out there now, I always say, well ma, you can see the name. But she used to tell me, and she pointed out to six graves, and all these six men, were pall bearers for another man, in that same area. And within a week or two, all those six pallbearers were buried out there.

**JORDAN**

And your father was one of the pall bearers?

**MURPHY**

Yeah. It's—my mother always, I guess she—I don't know whether she lived with. She always used to say "if" you know. If I'd made him stay home...he had a real real real bad cold. And in them days, policemen walked you know. And he had a beat. And they sent him home sick one night before. He told my mother he had to go to work because they were shorthanded. But he didn't last every long. I don't know I guess—what the hell—the flu was so bad.

**JORDAN**

Boy, you can just walk through any cemetery and there's just so many dates right then, so many dates right there in 19—1918. Other superstitions that you remember underground? I mean, it seems, I know it was just impossible to understand how dark it can be in a mine.

**MURPHY**

Yeah.

**JORDAN**

It must have just spooked you if you were alone, walking alone sometimes, if you were a superstitious sort of person. There's a lot that could sort of—

**MURPHY**

Well, I really wasn't, I guess I'd be superstitious sometimes if I—you know, being a nipper like at the Kelley, and the other mines it wasn't so bad, I had to go a lot of places by myself. Like, hiding tools and stuff. Boy that was kind of bad you know, foolish in a lot of ways, because I'd go to places where nobody would go to because I knew the tools would be safe. But the Kelley had cave block and I used to walk across some of those places and come out where there would have been an old cave block worked and I used to walk out and come down and you could see up there for miles, you know. And I just kinda, superstitious. If there was 13 rungs on the ladder. I shouldn't have taken that ladder. Yeah.

[39:00]

**JORDAN**

Those things were generally considered unlucky? For instance, it was always considered unlucky on a sailing ship, on a merchant ship, if a woman would go on board. Was there anything like that?

**MURPHY**

I never saw anything like that, no.

**JORDAN**

Now occasionally, women would go down in the mines, wouldn't they? On tour or whatever.

**MURPHY**

Yeah. The Kelley used to have, I used to, sometimes, when I was nipping, I'd, and they'd be short on the cement truck, or the cement motor, I used to take the cement motor. And then they'd call me and they'd say, Newt was coming down with visitors. And he had a lot of visitors. So I'd have to meet him and I'd tail the visitors on the way in. and he used to taken them to some pretty good places, Newt did. I mean, inside quite a ways where they could see.

**JORDAN**

Newd was his name?

**MURPHY**

Newt.

**JORDAN**

N-e-w-t?

**MURPHY**

Yeah, and he had a real nice accent. And people used to always say to him ‘where you from?’ He was from the old country [inaudible] I can’t even think where he came from, but I think he was with the, you ever hear of a Clive D’amour?

**JORDAN**

Yeah, I have heard of that and I don’t know where.

**MURPHY**

Yeah it’s, Clive D’amour is some part of England. Just like, there’s another island, Isle of Wight, they’re English too. But this Newt had really a nice accent and he’d get the visitors in the visitors shack before they go underground and he’d be giving them their rules you know. And that’s when somebody would say to him, where you from, or what part of the old country are you from? But he had a nice wit and really a neat presentation. He just—And if people would be talking and he’d be talking he’d say here here now! Yeah. Here Here! Newt. He was quite a guy.

**JORDAN**

I bet. How about bosses? What did you find as a rule, what were the relationships like between?

**MURPHY**

Oh you had your real real favorites. I’d like to tell you a story about a guy by the name of Tommy Johns. He just—had really a nice way about him. During one of the strikes, he stayed behind the fence, as they say. And that’s during the strike when they tore the houses apart, you’ve heard about them. Mmm. And he stood up on the ore bins at the Leonard and he could see his house and his garage. And he could see them taking his boat out of his garage, and breaking it up. And they done terrible things that time, things that were really uncalled for.

**JORDAN**

Was that the 67 strike or was that—

**MURPHY**

No, that was in the 40-something or early fifties. I still think there was people come into town, drove into town for that. Really and truly. Because I seen a lot of strikes and I seen them paint houses or put scab on the side of the house, and I seen them serenade ‘em, go around the neighborhood where the strikebreakers in cars, and honk and shout scabs. But they threw pianos out of windows, picked up a dog and bashed him against the—But I really and truly think that was a lot of, some [place somebody from the outside come in. Well anyhow, this Tommy Johns. After the strike, the victory club was a pretty prominent place here, and he come up. Up to the Victory Club. And somebody say, you scab so-and-so. He go right on drinking, but no I never seen anybody try to punch him out or anything. So after he told me this story I thought, you know, this guy worked in the mines a long time to get to be a boss, and him and another man Walt Newman, poor old Walt, was all in. They called it emphysema I think, it’s still miner’s con, silicosis. But if

they quit, these guys that did go out on strike with the miners never got their jobs back. And the miners never fought for them to get their jobs back. So I thought, well you know, Tommy didn't do too bad. He's not scared, he came out and faced everybody. You done what you thought was right. So a kid by the name of Joe Mackovic and I were partners on the motor. And he used to blow smoke up our back, and he'd tell us he's got the two best motormen in the mine. And now that I'm getting along in years, I always thought I would like to think that, as small as I was, I was considered as good motorman. Wherever I wanted to go, I could always get a job. And so, Tommy would lie to us and say I'm gonna kill those two miners in that stope. Tommy, they got the grizzlies out. Grizzlies are things like this, that when the rock breaks up in the stope, all the big rock cant go down in the chute. And the miners are supposed to come down on these grizzlies and break all these rocks. And they're hanging you know, the rocks are hanging and the grizzly's like that. But these miner's were in a hurry, would take the grizzlies out. It wasn't hard to do. They'd just timber and lay it in there and then they'd just take these blocks out from between the grizzlies. And then they'd make a big hole and these big boulders come down. And then the motormen, down below, he's gotta go down and fight that big boulder out of the mouth of a chute. And sometimes, you know, sometimes you had to blast 'em, put paste on 'em. And you had to blast 'em where you didn't tear the chute apart. You'd go up, and the chute would be hung up and you could look up in the chute, take your mine hat and look up there. And all these boulders would be all jammed up in there because they'd be so big. And you'd have to go up and maybe even chop a hole in the side of the chute, where this man way went up. You'd stick a powder or two in there, on the stick, and you'd blast 'em down. And we told him, you know, so0and-so in that number stope, I'm gonna kill those two guys. I told 'em a hundred times. So one day, the chute was hung up, and we went up, and you could see up into the stope and there's three lights up there. And we stopped. And we heard Tommy. What the hell's the hold up? And the guy said, we gotta break some of these boulders. And Tommy said, hold the grizzly. Murph and his bow hunk partner are road beaters. They'll get it out. And I hollered up to him. Tommy you dirty cousin jack son of a—

## **JORDAN**

[laughs]

## **MURPHY**

Don't you come down here Tom. Yeah. So he come down with the big light for us. Then when he got assistant foreman at the Kelley, or at the Neversweat. That's why when he come down and asked me if I'd go with him, to go up to the Neversweat. That's when I went nippin' up there for him. And they had the two mines, the Neversweat and the St. Lawrence. But I used to have to ask him. He'd come into work and his wife was just a nice lady, it was his second wife. His first wife left him on account of that strike, but he would say to me "I gotta piece of cake for ya." And I'd say geeze. Can't you wait? Why do you do it in front of all the men? [inaudible] Then, we'd be on the sheets, and all the men would go down the mine and he'd say, oh Murph, Marg wants you and Greta to come down for supper. And I'd look at him and I'd say, you do that on purpose don't you.

**JORDAN**

What was his wife's name?

**MURPHY**

Marg.

**JORDAN**

Marg?

[48:45]

**MURPHY**

I think she was a nurse, and she died just recently too. So I always felt that wherever Tommy Johns was, I'd quit any job and I could always go back and Tommy Johns would give me a job. [birds chirping] And in fact when I had problems, with a guy I won't even name his...because I hate him so bad. He was a vicious foul mouthed man that—we had a preacher that worked there, and he used to use the filthiest language in the world, to get the preachers going. But he called me SB one day. So I told him I said boy that's one mistake you've made now. I started out and he said, where you going? I said I'm not staying here. Well you didn't do what I to—I said Tommy Johns said to be sure that car was clean and oiled before I went down on the cement gang and—he said to me, now you son of a—I said now. But when he said son of a bitch, he knew he made a mistake. So I went out and started to walk out and he came running out behind me, running up behind me, ohh Murph, ohh you Irish, come on you hot-headed harp I was only. So I said no, you've had it with me, but I never did go to the foreman, because I—but I did go to Tommy Johns. And I said call me. I want to be there when you tell him. So he said I will.

**JORDAN**

Was this guy a foreman or—

**MURPHY**

He was a boss. Just a shift boss. But he also told an old man that I was building a tool locker. He was a Swede, an old Swede, Neat guy. That he only wanted to work three, four days a week. And the pension plan wasn't what it is now. And them days, when you could get a watchman's job, you know out at the mines some times. So Faller came in and he told this guy, he said Burt, you miss one more day and you're done. And he said I'm so damn tired of you taking days off. And he'd tried to talk to Faller about this. I wouldn't mention Faller, but he tried to talk him into listening. He's surly, he walked away and he said I told you and that's the way it's gonna be. I don't give a -- how many year's you got. So later, I told Tommy, I said you know, what he said. So Tommy said, as long as I'm here, Burt's gonna be here. And in fact, you'd be gone a lot sooner, if you don't lay off of him. So this guy came to me and he said, well I can see you've been talking to Tommy again. So he never never had nothing to do with me after that. Never would tell me., If I was in waiting for the cage he wouldn't t event say where you going? What you gonna do? So I didn't like him. But I had other bosses that I sued to get mad at. Some guys that I ran around with that wanted me to go working for them, but I used to

always just tell them no. Our friendship would probably be—but they had bosses in this town that have names that will live, you know—like a guy at the Con they used to call him Did You Blast Johnson. And he used to stay at the station night-tending when the miners come out. And he'd say did you blast? And if they'd say, didn't make it, he'd say get it when you get on surface.

[53:30]

**JORDAN**

Did You Blast Johnson.

**MURPHY**

Yeah. And I mean, you talk to any guy that's my age or even some that are older that worked in the mines, been around the Con, Did You Blast Johnson yeah. I've worked for his son, but his son didn't like to be told about Did You Blast, but.

**JORDAN**

So was he a hard one to work for?

**MURPHY**

Oh god, yeah he really was. Oh there was a lot of—there was a lot of them that really really bad. Some of them got punched out downtown you know. But they'd still come back and do the same thing over. They didn't get any place. They didn't become foremen or assistant foremens. And there was a guy that got killed at the St Lawrence and he was a shift boss. But they said he was carrying powder in his bibs of his overalls. And the powder went off. But then there was also sayings that that was the only way you could get rid of them. It wouldn't have taken much, you know? Oh yeah, there was some ones that, you know, when I'd hire around they'd tell me who I was gonna work for. I used to say, no, I don't want to. Because I knew they were really rotten. When I retired, I went up to see my, to get my records. They said you worked for more bosses in Butte than half of the guys on the hill! Because I quit. And it says 'quit-failed to report off' 'quit-failed to report off' 'quit-failed to report off.' I was fired twice. The first time, the guy said I was too small and it broke my heart. I was really in a tough spot and I – and when I told the assistant foreman at the Steward why I got fired, he said, well you big mope. What'd he put you in a place like that for? It takes two men in there. The place I was in was real steep, and I couldn't push the car back off and I couldn't get a lot of cars dumped. So he told me, he said, put some more meat on your ribs Murph. But I did, it went on my records as being fired, but when I got to surface I didn't have to take it. But I took it anyhow. I rustled again. And I didn't like that guy I used to see him on the street, and I used to call him Bob the Pimp. [laughs] And he'd look around the street to see who the hell was calling him. And I didn't like him either. But that's about the only ones I could—

**JORDAN**

What was the second time for?

**MURPHY**

It was at the Leonard. They brought us down on the cage and my partner's name, I'll tell ya, it's history in Butte. His name was Chip the Blood. Chip Harrington. He was a radical. I really liked him. He just died not very long ago. And was out outspoken today about union rights and everything else as he was then. And we didn't have our wrench, and we couldn't get off at the station. We couldn't get the engineer, and we had to wait until the boss came down. So when he came down the mine, we're sitting down! And we couldn't get the bell off. And he said what the hell are you doing sitting down. And we said we didn't have a wrench. So he said, you'd better get it when you get—but we brought a grievance up about it. And I thought that we'd won the grievance because Chip was furious. And when I went up on my retirement, I said what's that fire for? He says it's at the Leonard. Hootenan fired you for not enough work. Chip[ would turn over in his grave if he knew that Hootenan got away with that. So that's the only times. But I got a lot of quits because I drank an awful lot. In fact, I was an alcoholic. But I had more quits. I'd work for two days and I'd be gone for a week. And I had my job held for three weeks one time. These stories are probably not even of interest to your.

**JORDAN**

Well, it's interesting.

**MURPHY**

I shouldn't be even talking like that, when you have more interest in things you want to know.

**JORDAN**

Well that, you know that camaraderie underground. It just --- it seems almost like there were two things going on. One is that there's this tremendous cooperation and then on the other hand there are all these snags and these—I've had a couple of people tell me that a guy could be the nicest guy working, miner, and then he'd go into management. He'd become a boss and just overnight some people would change. They'd been nice before, and turn into some sort of tyrant or something.

**MURPHY**

Yeah I knew two guys that were that way you know. They'd work on special repairs, as they called them, you know, it was a job that he didn't have to break his neck like contracting. Then he'd get on bossin' because knew somebody and boy he'd get vicious. I mean, if you didn't—he'd lay out enough work for you to last you a week. You see, this is my opinion. Each mine had a foreman. And each foreman ran that mine; it was his. Of course I mean he had to account to the sixth floor and stuff, but he hired and fired who he wanted. And he took all these bosses with him wherever he went. They didn't go no place very much after the once got foreman, they stayed there. And he'd make the assistant foreman, so then the assistant foreman would quit bossin' [inaudible] who he wanted. But I always get a kick out of these movies that show these guys handling powder, and you ought to see these miners, the way they used to handle powder. Put it in the gunny, in the powder sack, throw it over their shoulder, and they'd have powder on this arm, and a roll

of primers on this arm. And they show you them TV now, these guys, walking [inaudible]. And when they'd be loading the holes, they'd pound them holes. In fact, I used to see them pounding so hard sometimes that I used to have to walk out if I was nipping. I'd say Christ you're gonna take it off before—

[Tape 2, Side 2 END]

**JORDAN**

Testing.

**MURPHY**

--that didn't give you such a bad headache, wasn't as much gas or I don't know what that was.

**JORDAN**

Now what did it look like underground, in terms of like, were there, what were the colors underground? Were there many crystalline structures or?

**MURPHY**

Well you could find the crystals and, at the Bel- at the Leonard. You could go into places where they'd had blasted and you could look in the holes in the face, and you could see crystals in them. But they had pretty places down the mine where copper water would drip and they would form crystal icecicles like—and oh, when you touch them they disintegrate.

**JORDAN**

What color would they be?

**MURPHY**

Oh, they'd be the prettiest colors: amber green like you said a minute ago, emerald, and flecks of deep red would flicker.

**JORDAN**

And it would be metallic, it would catch the light?

**MURPHY**

Yeah, it would be at a place that was wet, and it didn't, you know, it wasn't so heavy that it ran down the side of the drift or something. It would probably come down just in little drips, and as it rolled down it was kind of an icecicle, but it was thick and syrupy you know, and it would form these icecicles and it would form on these timbers, and it was really pretty. And there was places at the Ansel- at the St. Lawrence that goes back to the days of the war of the copper kings. They had fires in there that they just left 'em going until they went out. And you'd get a piece of wood and where they knot of the wood was, it would be filled with pure copper. You know, it had been probably burning in there for years and years until it went out. And it melted the copper right out of the rock. And you'd get—but they were two interesting mines, I mean like the St Lawrence. It had a

history. It was here with the Anaconda and the Neversweat, and they had, the engineer would say well, we're gonna drive this drift 80 feet and we'll probably crosscut off of that. And this one time they got in just a short ways, and they found an old workings. So they waited for the boss, you know. The boss came, and so naturally the boss, at dinner time, went up and told the foreman. Everybody had to come down, and on the map of the mine, that workings wasn't even shown, so it went back to the days of the copper wars, you know? Somebody from the Anaconda had worked over that far, and had probably worked all of that. They went into old workings that were, been worked and left, and they went into places that had been on fire and bulkheaded off, left to burn. They had, you know, when I started there, there was guys that were working there then that were men in their sixties. And they knew a lot about the mines. They used to tell you about the horses that they had. But that was one of the most interesting mines, I thought, because, you know there was some history attached to it. It wasn't just a hole in the ground.

[04:30]

**JORDAN**

Now, you worked collar to collar? You were paid from the time you got on the cage until you got off? On your shift? Or how—

**MURPHY**

Yeah, that was a union demand, you know, collar to collar.

**JORDAN**

How long would it take you to get to your workplace, as a rule? To get down the hole?

**MURPHY**

Well you know, the whistle would blow at 8 o'clock, and they'd start loading the cage. Well, at the Kelley, the cage up there would take 50-60 men. And the cage at the other mines would take probably 8 or 6, and there was 4, so that'd be, four decks you know.

**JORDAN**

24—

**MURPHY**

Mmm. Hmm. And the station tenders would push their foot against the door and slam you in there. So then, if there was quite a few men working at that mine, then you might sit on surface a half an hour. And then you'd go down and by the time you got into your working place, it was probably 9 o'clock. And then they really had to start flying at it because it really was supposed to be a round in and a round out, for contract miners.

**JORDAN**

Now, define that. Round in, round out.

**MURPHY**

You have to blast and muck out and blast.

**JORDAN**

Oh, so you blast first thing in the morning.

**MURPHY**

No, I mean they'd muck out the blast.

**JORDAN**

That the last shift did—

**MURPHY**

Uh, huh. And then you'd muck out, and then blast out. And some places they have two headings. So they'd muck out one, blast in the other, and then come back over and muck out this one and blast in that one.

**JORDAN**

So you might get two blasts in a day?

**MURPHY**

Mmm hmmm. Now you see, that almighty dollar. A lot of guys put themselves out in the flat for it. But that's another thing you know, a lot of people used to think these miners don't have nothing, you know? A lot of them made—when 11 dollars a day was pretty good wage, some of them were making 25 and 30. And they didn't, a lot of them didn't just drink it away like you hear stories. There were good drinking men, they had their share of the booze, but a lot of them put their kids through college, had nice homes, and a lot of them got good lives now. They take their trips and—so they weren't—some of the poor guys that, you know, were single. The days of the boarding houses was when it was kinda nice. You'd see so many single men come and go. They'd be here for—when my mother worked at the boarding houses, they use to have hot beds.

**JORDAN**

What's that? Oh, where it's three men would share--

**MURPHY**

Yeah, one in and one out.

**JORDAN**

Boy.

**MURPHY**

Yeah.

**JORDAN**

Now what—oh go ahead. Please, go ahead.

**MURPHY**

You know I mean, they—The women that worked in boarding houses were real, just an awful lot of teasing. You know, they serve the men at the table. My mother worked at a boarding house where she had more boarders than roomers. So when they'd feed these miners, you know, when they'd go to go in between two chairs or something, somebody always pinched them in the hind end, or teases them, or took their apron strings and tied them to a chair. They'd get run out of the kitchen or—I can always remember I was about 10 years old. I used to get so jealous. That's my mother boy. What are you doing to my mother? She said, you know, they don't mean nothing. You just mind your business. But they were hard workers, and she fed 'em really good.

**JORDAN**

Now what year did you retire?

**MURPHY**

Uhhh, '79.

**JORDAN**

And were you still working underground at that point?

**MURPHY**

No, I worked out at the Pit then.

**JORDAN**

How was that change from underground to the pit? What was different in the pit?

**MURPHY**

Well, I was down the pit for two weeks before I decided I'd stay. I wanted to go back to the mines.

**JORDAN**

When did you change to the pit?

**MURPHY**

Oh geeze, doubt I can even remember the year. I was at the pit for 10-12 years. But then after I got—I really didn't like it when I first went down there. And I was at the Kelley and they called me downtown one day and said, we're, you know, we're closing out the 600 at the Kelley. And we're gonna transfer you. So I didn't know whether it was just a— they could have put me in another mine or put me down deeper in the Kelley. So I said well, I'll try it. So I went down and I kept telling the guy down there, I don't think I'll stay. I think I'll go back to the mines. So I went up to the office one day and they said Murph you're crazy. What you wanna go back up there for, because it's gonna be changing anyhow. Try it for a while more, so I did. Then I got used—

**JORDAN**

Is the work situation, was the work situation different in the pit, the relationships between men, were they different in the pit?

**MURPHY**

Oh, I think so. I always thought so. There were, you know. There was really nice nice guys at the pit. I really liked and enjoyed working with the kids, the younger men. But their work was so different you know, that they didn't get much time to—you don't see—down the mine, at lunchtime, there was a lot of tomfoolery, a lot of playing. You know, they'd nail your bucket to a post or if you were sleeping, and you had mine boots with lace, they'd tie your boots together or build a fire under you. And then down the pit you know, they had a lunchroom. It was just a lot different.

[12:35]

**JORDAN**

Where would you eat lunch underground?

**MURPHY**

Well, you'd pick a spot that was well-timbered and good ventilation and, like all the motormen would eat at the motor barn, because when you lean against the motor, you put your coat and your bucket there. And everybody had a laggin. That's a three inch board, probably 6 feet. And you stretch your laggin out. You put your—you sit and eat your lunch. And everybody would sleep for an hour or half an hour. Then, when you're working inside, a raise miner would probably just come down to the bottom of the raise, and find a good cool spot, and probably just eat in there. And probably by the toolshed, where it was always cool, the pipemen and the fan bag men, and some of the miners would come out and eat there. That's when the fantastic stories would—you'd hear all about their wives and fights and--[laughs] And all about their broken hearts, how tough they were, and how good of miners they were. Then after they'd good to sleep you'd tie 'em down or something. Yeah, you know, a lot of guys like to tell you their problems if you were alone. I worked with one guy that, his wife was really mean. She used to really beat him up. Just some good stories.

**MURPHY**

Now in the, one thing that you had talked about before was like, somebody would give you a hand underground, to lift a timber, dump an ore car, whatever. Was there that willingness to help each other in the pit?

**MURPHY**

Oh yeah.

[15:00]

**JORDAN**

Would you give somebody else a hand?

**MURPHY**

Yeah. Yeah. See, in the pit, I wound up being the same as a nipper at the pit. I got out of the miners union and went in the machinists union. And I was what they called a parts runner. I used to bring out, you know, they'd call for an alternator or whatever. I'd go down to the cart and run it out to them. It wound up being the same thing.

**JORDAN**

There's been a lot of talk about the work rules in the pit. Just the real strong jurisdictional lines. Was that different than underground? Or is that overstated?

**MURPHY**

Oh yeah. I thought so. They done things at the pit, you know, like waiting for a boilermaker to cut off a bolt, or you know, you couldn't do anything that was electrical. You know, down the mines, some of the miners, they knew it was wrong but they couldn't wait to get (of course there was nothing down there), but like, maybe hoist something that they weren't supposed to hoist because it was rope men's work. They'd probably do that. But you know, men are funny. They make all these unions rules about working alone and you know, all these safety rules. And I seen guys, when the boss would like them up you know, you'd go to your boss every day and he'd tell you what place to pull first for the motormen, or what had to be done first. For the miners that's coming, if there was opposite shifts, raise miners had the raise to themselves. There was nobody there but them. But the stope miners would have to go on, he'd tell them what they'd do, the boss would. He'd say, your partner's not here tonight, so I'm gonna put Sully there with you. They'd say, oh geeze, don't put anybody with me tonight because I can make that round or I can timber this, and so that would be one shift off of the contract see. And if the guy was off the next night, that'd be two shifts off the contract. And if he'd done as much without his partner, then he'd make a little bit more money. So you tell them you know, you're not supposed to work alone. So they would break their own rules a lot, I'd say. Or you'd want them to make a grievance and they'd say, you know— they had one contract come out towards the end, that a contract miner was guaranteed. One time he was only guaranteed day's pay, if he didn't make anything he'd get day's pay. But then they raised it to where, he would be guaranteed 20 dollars or something like that. Sometimes they wouldn't give them the 20 bucks. They'd say, you weren't on the contract. So you know, I was a grievance committee man. I'd say why don't you make a grievance. So I went in to see the foreman, and he'd say, well who is it? What's his contract number? And I'd say well he don't want to give me his contract number, so I quit doing that, you know, because the guy wouldn't want his name mentioned because he had a good working place maybe. Jobs weren't that tough, but he liked where he was. So I'd tell him then, you know, geeze if you're not going to follow the rules, then you'll have to pay the price and go day's pay. But I think they can see now that they done a lot of things, management was as much to blame on a lot of things too. See you can't blame it all just on labor, because management gouged and gouged and gouged until they ruined a lot of working places.

**JORDAN**

And what do you mean by that? Was it quick mining, or doing the development work?

**MURPHY**

Yeah, you know. I think sometimes trying to cut corners and make a rep for himself, he wouldn't check what his assistant foremens was doing. And they were doing things that shouldn't have been done. And waste was atrocious.

**JORDAN**

Can you give me an example of that?

[20:00]

**MURPHY**

Well, they used to put, in a drift, they would have the side of the drift is boarded up, I'll say, instead of bulk headed. And that's so that the rock don't slough out and go on the tracks all the time. Well, when they pull all the stuff back at nighttime after they drill, their buzzies and their jacklegs and the hoses and all the tools, they put them behind these boards. Some of them wouldn't bring them back far enough. And they'd get buried. And they wouldn't look for 'em. I'd say to 'em, well geeze it's gotta be here someplace. Well I don't have time to look. I need another buzzie. Uhh, timber, would be enough to fill this room. And they'd stop working in there, or around there. They'd poured miles and miles of cement at the Kelley. For slusher lanes. And found out that they were too close to the pit. So they pulled all that out of there.

**JORDAN**

Now what's a slusher lane?

**MURPHY**

Well, in the cave block system, they drove long tunnels like this. And then up above this, like it's a small tunnel. And they drove finger raises up like this. And they put the undercut, and that's when these miners would go up there. And they made good money. And they would bring, do all this blasting up there and then, it would start. And they caved blocked it. That would start caving. So everything would come out these little finger raises that they had driven in this little tunnel, and it's all cemented. It's all concrete. And they had, when they would stop running, all they'd do is put powder on the stick and blast it in these fingers, they kept coming up. They'd pull tons and tons of rock out. And guys sat over here on the slusher lane, and on this side, and right here, your train would be. And they'd put a cable in an I-bolt and drill a hole at the end of this slusher lane, where they'd have it all built in, and you'd put a hook and a wheel in there, a pulley, and they'd run the cable in there. And back here to a slusher. And a slusher is a bucket, and it's shaped like this. And it's open end, you know. And then they'd pull, the slusher goes back, and he drops it and pulls it this way. And as it's pullin', actually it pulls this dirt. And then he just pulls it right over and drops it right into the car. And then they bring up another car, and he just keeps doing this all day. And with good luck, these finger raises, these slusher lanes keep filled all the time. And then this guy in the slusher has gotta be

careful. If these first two were kinda hung up, and he's got rock back here, and he's pulling and he's pulling it this way and he doesn't stop and look at these two fingers, when he gets back here maybe these two fingers break loose, and then this muck just fills in and he's got his bucket back here. Then he has a hell of a time getting that out. But they built all of these and never even had, never even used 'em. So that's management. Then you know, nippers that would hide tools and forget where they hid 'em. I worked at the Belmont as a nipper and went up to the Badger, and got a call. For Christ sake, Murph, come back. You got axes and stuff hid down there. And, oh it just. Waste that'd really—so it was on both sides of the fence. Management was as much to blame and I got really mad one time. Copper nails—you could take copper wire from down the mine and sell it to the junkman. And I used to bring copper nails down the mine. And I'd bring a fifty pound box down and they'd be gone. Well, you know, hell they were throwing them in their bucket. So I went to the assistant foreman, he was the foreman then. And I just said to him, let me do this my way. Let me just take a small sack down. I know where they're using the nails. And I'll keep a couple of sacks and I'll just—and he said, you do your job and you let me worry about—so I said, well I could care less then, I guess. But then he wouldn't give you any axes because he didn't want to run his bill up.

[25:30]

**JORDAN**

Did you have nicknames underground?

**MURPHY**

Oh geeze, some of the nicknames. Yeah, you know there's, like I told you about Jip. Oh there's all kind of rags. They used to call guys dinner bucket pimps.

**JORDAN**

Dinner bucket pimps?

**MURPHY**

Yeah. They'd catch 'em down at the alley, or they'd see 'em with, in the bar, with maybe one of the girls and they'd call 'em, you dirty dinner bucket pimp, you know. And then there's peaches and you know and another thing is, at the chippy cage, you know. In the mines, people I never did find out why they call it a chippy cage, you know.

**JORDAN**

You know a hoist operator told me that they called it the chippy cage because it was always chasing the other one.

**MURPHY**

Is that right? That sounds like a good description. But when somebody asks somebody what are you doing they'd say, oh I'm station tending. I'm on the chippy, at the Anselmo or something. On the chippy. But oh jesus, some of the--I can't—

**JORDAN**

What were your nicknames?

**MURPHY**

Oh, I was called Spud, Harp a lot, and mostly Murph. Shorty an awful lot. Yeah.

**JORDAN**

Where did Spud come from?

**MURPHY**

They used to call my mother Spud. And she—

**JORDAN**

Was that because she was plump or?

**MURPHY**

Yeah, and because she was Irish.

**JORDAN**

Oh right, Irish potatoes.

**MURPHY**

Right, Irish potatoes, yeah. I worked with a Spud Murphy. And all these shafts were sunk mostly by Finlanders. And you always hear a lot of Finlanders sweat in the shaft and stuff like that, because that was really a tough, tough hard job. So we were working at the Anselmo, and they were sinking then, and they had the Finns were sinking the shaft there. And one day this Finn come up and he started to speak Finn, and my partner Spud started to talk to him. And I didn't say anything, so finally after he left, I said, what the!?! He was from the East Side, where all the Finns were, and I thought maybe he picked it up. I said how the hell, when did you learn how to speak Finn? He said, well my mother's a Finn. My dad is Spud. So, he was raised with his mother and she—

**JORDAN**

Hmm.

[29:00]

**MURPHY**

Yeah, and then there was a guy, the bull whacker, and that's all they ever called him too. The big guy, they called him Brother.

**JORDAN**

What was that?

**MURPHY**

Brother. Every day he'd say to ya's, how are you, brother? And preachers. I got some really good ones. Now I can't even think of them. Guys that were—a lot of the guys that I worked with, you know, that were men in their forties when I was in my twenties are long gone now, you know.

**JORDAN**

Do you know any ventilation men or water men who are still around, who dealt with—

**MURPHY**

You mean, I can't. I don't know of any of the ventilation men now. I'm sure that they'd be, [cut in tape] they'd go down one of these mines. I'm sure there's some of these men around that are in their fifties now, or late forties,. That worked as station tenders that'd know what to do. God, it must be awful down there now. What would they do about the heat, no ventilation, no coolers, no nothing now. So I think it's all just a lost cause. It's too bad that they didn't find a better technique, you know, instead of everything you hear now is so much high tech, the word they use. Too bad they didn't put some of it to use down the mines.

**JORDAN**

Yeah.

**MURPHY**

Because they wouldn't have had to pull all that rock out in ore cars and motors, and string miles and miles of copper wire for the underground motors at the Kelley and batteries for the other motors. There must have been, in some places, that they could have crushed it small enough to blow it or slush it or—I mean, hydraulic it out of the mines huh? I really didn't think they'd ever ever close. I thought there'd always be one.

**JORDAN**

Do you think Washington will get it open again, get the pit open again, the east pit?

**MURPHY**

I do. But I don't think it'll ever be like it was before. You know, I mean wages won't be what it was. Unions won't have as much to say as they did.

**JORDAN**

Do you think it'll be unionized? I guess the Golden Sunlight isn't even unionized.

**MURPHY**

I really don't think this one will be ever. Because I'll tell you. I was talking to a guy yesterday and one of the men that was a boss is back down there now. And he retired from ARCO in Wyoming. But now, for MRI, he's a new man. He's gonna go back to work, but of course he's only in his fifties. He's gonna start at \$10 an hour. And he was salary here, so. Will he be in a management position then?

**JORDAN**

No, No. Now, have they given jobs? Have they actually signed people on now?

**MURPHY**

Now there's three people that told me yesterday. And they were all past supervisors. So, maybe they'll start out getting some of the things in shape as day's pay people and then maybe when they start hiring. But I was talking to some of the guys that were up there that got their applications, and you know, I guess it's only fair but, there's a lot of kids and guys up there that never worked here before. And I'm just wondering, you know, there's no union agreement that you have to take first one off, last one off, first one off, last one back. I think they'll just hire them as they want. But I can't understand, I don't see why they would take a new man that never had anything to—I don't imagine they would. Now he's got some mechanics that are still here, operators and shovel and truck drivers. I guess he's gonna hire who he wants, without these applications, maybe some of these applications might have been shovel operators in a coal mine some place. He might want them. And you know, some guys that were really really good truck drivers, but I say this because I know this guy, and he's worried sick now that he won't get back on because he dumped so much. And you know, he was a driver that, a lot of these drivers really didn't do right by the trucks you know. They could come in with a broken down truck and, but this guy never did that. When he went out, he went out and if his truck broke down, he got another truck and stayed out. But he's missed an awful lot of shifts. And in fact, when I was working, I asked his boss one day about him, you know, because I like him. He said, I wouldn't fire him for nothing because he's such a good driver. But if I could just get him to work more. I tried to get him to go to AA meetings, but he never would. So I don't know how they'll manage, but I don't think they'll have any problems. I don't think these guys are gonna turn down \$10 an hour.

**JORDAN**

Yeah, not when they've been working for 5 and 6.

**MURPHY**

Or 8 even.

**JORDAN**

Yeah. Sounds like they're gonna do a good benefit package, or at least some benefits, which is something when you haven't had them for a while.

**MURPHY**

This Jim that you talked to, he worked in Wyoming too. But he didn't have any hospitalization. It's a shame you know. I hate to see kids have to leave. You know? We raise our children and of course, my mother probably would have liked to see me get out of here. My two oldest daughters, they couldn't stay, even when things were pretty good for when my oldest daughter left. She couldn't find a job. She joined the Navy. And my second oldest, she couldn't find a job. She went to California. And she—that drove me crazy. So, she was working and paying rent and not getting anywhere. So she come home

and, my wife works at the military, at MEPS up there, where they induct the kids, so she went up one day to visit her mother, and they talked her into joining the Army.

**JORDAN**

Oh my gosh.

**MURPHY**

So she's in the Army. But I'm, you know it's just, guys that I know and see now that are probably late thirties or beginning into their forties now, two of them told me that they're at their rope's end now, where they're gonna have to sell, or try to get outta here. I'd like to see them stay you know, in Butte, because their fathers are from here and their kids like it here. It's not the greatest town in the world, but there's really something about it, but it doesn't offer kids nothing and it never did. But it might now, because you know, there's no competition for labor. One time you couldn't work any place but for the Anaconda company. Nothing else could ever come in here.

[37:30]

**JORDAN**

Did the Anaconda company try to keep other companies out?

**MURPHY**

Oh, they certainly did. They had a labor monopoly that they wouldn't let loose of. They would probably tell you that they welcomed, but they never—because if I a guy got in the mines, he'd stay in the mines. He couldn't say well, I'll quit and I'll go to the sawmill or I'll quit and go to the glassworks. He stayed. He stayed because he had his home, and he had his family to raise, he had kids in school. Not all the miners liked the mines, but some of them did. Some of them stayed here because they had everything here and didn't want to leave. Some of them didn't have—another thing, you know, probably myself you know, I didn't have—I worked when I wanted to work. And I never worked really steady until I got married the second time and had children. If I wanted to go to California, if I had the money, I took off and go and leave my room and I think that had a lot to do with it. You just didn't have to do—you know, you like to drink so you just drink.

**JORDAN**

And you could get a job. You knew you could always get a job when you needed it or wanted it.

**MURPHY**

Oh yeah, I could always—and yeah I could—I never ever thought I'd ever turn out to be an alcoholic because I saw so much of it in the neighborhood where I lived. But they weren't alcoholics, my neighbors weren't, but I saw some of it. And then I didn't think I could—I couldn't go to work without having a drink. Couldn't come off of work without having a shot. So then I got so that I didn't work.

**JORDAN**

Well there's so much of that in the Irish community. I'm Irish. There's just more with the Irish than anything else. There's so much of that in the Irish community you wonder if the Irish are prone to that. If there's something in the way we metabolize or something.

**MURPHY**

Yeah. I can tell you that first hand because I was—when I first went into AA I went in, they had a business labor and management thing on alcoholism. So I represented labor and I used to go to these meetings in Helena and in Great Falls, and I went with the safety engineer from the Anaconda company, which was the worst guy they could have sent, because he had—he got mad at me when I told him that management had as big of a problem as they were having. I said, I told him two of your head honchos at the Finlen are alcoholics. No sir. And I said you can't tell me any different. But he didn't like to hear that, see, so they never did much about it. But they could have done a lot about it, but then they would have had to uncover some of their alcoholics so then they didn't do that. So then, it just got to be that every time I'd sit down someplace this guy's name was Sullivan, or Shea, and they were all alcoholics. Well, I had two sisters that—one has been in AA for some time. And one, I don't know, she would never let me talk that way. She'd go—but I know she had a problem. So I guess it really runs in the family or in the Irish, a lot of it.

**JORDAN**

Yeah it really seems to. I guess the Finns have a hard time with it too.

**MURPHY**

Yeah but they're kind of different you know. I worked for these Finlanders at the St. Lawrence, and they're the nicest, cleanest people. Give you the shirt off of their back, want to feed you. And boy, they'd come to work soused. And, but I never seen any of them knocked down and dragged out like the Irishmen. It seemed like they always kept on working, where an Irishman would fall by the wayside you know. And, but I guess that was part of history. I guess another thing you'd like to worry about working in the mines is you come running off and everybody'd be at the saloon. You know, a fifth of whiskey, shot and a beer.

**JORDAN**

Just to see some of those pictures of Main Street and Granite, I mean all those bars lining the streets, and most of them are gone now.

**MURPHY**

Yeah, I mean like Finntown. God. One right after the other. You know, when I was 24, you'd come off night shift and you could get a shot and a beer for a dime. So you'd have fifty cents, and you wouldn't even get, you didn't even get out of Finntown on an empty stomach and a shot and a beer. And then, you know, shot and a beer was a dime and they always kicked back. Hell, by the time you get down to Park Street, you were smashed!

**JORDAN**

And when you say kicked back, every couple of drinks the bar would buy one?

**MURPHY**

Yeah. And then you'd go in the boarding house on payday and gosh, you took your life in your hands. You'd stumble in, fall out against the table. [pause]

[43:30]

**JORDAN**

Butte must seem pretty quiet compared to what it would have been like in the forties. Things were really hopping with the war effort.

**MURPHY**

You know, before they had the 2 o'clock closing law and these saloons were open 24 hours a day. When they brought on this 2 o'clock closing law, they had a run on locks that didn't quit. These saloons were built with swinging doors without a lock. Bartenders, three shifts around. You know, and I took other jobs you know and that's why, when I retired, I only had 24 years because I quit so many times. But when gambling was going, it used to be a tourist attraction, but now. People loved to come and go to the M&M. Those places, all the other places, are all gone. You know, 1200 men at the Kelley alone. The dry didn't have enough baskets. They used to have to hang 'em on nails on the wall.

**JORDAN**

And there's nobody in town who hires 1200 people. I think Montana Power hires maybe, oh sorry, little kitten. I think Montana Power is something like 600 or something that they hire and that's the biggest in town. 1200 men at one mine.

**MURPHY**

I think the union had 5000 at one time, you know. Yeah, you cash your check and you meet all of your guys from work at—everybody had their certain bar that they'd meet you at. Then you'd go home, smashed, and go home and take two hours sleep and go out and get smashed again. [laughs] But the poor old timer, he was the one that paved the way, all of it. His wife would kiss 'em goodbye in the morning and hit him with his bucket and he'd come home that day and be smashed. Yeah, my aunt used to always say that my uncle—he'd come home and he had red eyes like I got. But he'd have a few drinks and one of his daughters would say to him, call him papa. Oh papa, you've been drinking. And my aunt used to say, that poor thing there, he's tired, and he had a few shots, and that's all he needs. They'd bring him his shoes, his slippers. Now, now you're married six months and they wanna try and go another way.

**JORDAN**

Yeah. [tape noise] It's so loving, I mean it's such a loving image, of your aunt. The poor [inaudible] he's tired.

**MURPHY**

Honest, I don't say this because he was my uncle, but he was the most loving guy. His kids they really did, they just idolized him. And he was stern and tough, and he was a station tender here in the mines. His one boy went in the mines and the other boy went into one of the gambling houses here and eventually wound up in Las Vegas as a pit boss down there. He used to always say he'd rather have his kids any place but in the mines, but didn't want them to leave Butte, so they had no choice. But they were really very—yeah she just would give 'em a big kiss when he'd go to work. Then if they had something special, she'd put it in his pot and one of the boys would take it up hot to him. There was a lot of them like that. But there was a lot of widows that, you know, that you don't hear much about anymore and they lost their husbands in the mine. Some of them were young kids my age that got killed and left young women that, well they're sixty now, but you know, that never married again.

**JORDAN**

Boy you wonder how those women, some with big families, 7 and 8 kids, and no real death benefit compared to, no social security or whatever.

**MURPHY**

No, I don't know how they did it, you know. I think mining at one time was kind of a strain on women because they really and truly—fatalities. I would like somebody myself to find the fatalities for, you know, 29 and 30. And then what the fatalities were in later years [church bells]. I bet you could see a big drop in fatalities. So, you know.

**JORDAN**

Did you have any close calls?

**MURPHY**

You know, thank god I never had a—I never had a lost time injury. And the time I smashed my fingers and had stitches, but I never missed shifts. But thank god I never—I prayed a lot. [laughs]

**JORDAN**

Yeah. Boy just the cages, I—you read some of these coroner reports and it seems the cages were really dangerous things.

**MURPHY**

Oh god yeah. You know I worked at the Belmont when those two guys went to the bottom. When they found 'em they both had their arms around each other. Boy they just rip up there you know. You take your life in your hands every time you went up and down on the cage because if one of those guides came off, you know, that the cage rides on going down, god. Yeah, I never knew this until the other day, some of the stories that an engineer was telling me about when he was at the Con. You know, that happened, that just, a luck—god willing—got the men to surface without killing 20-30 men. Guys coming to work drunk, putting in guides that didn't put 'em in right. Why I went to work so drunk that, shift boss would do me a favor and send me home. He wouldn't tell me to

go down the mine, sweat it out. I mean, but I really would. That's why I think a long time ago the women really did have it a lot tougher. They talk about stress and strain now, and tension, I just wonder if some of them poor women did really love their husbands and maybe their marriage wasn't the most solid thing in their world because their husband drank. I don't think you seen as much, you know, you seen probably a lot of broken homes, but you didn't see as much divorce, but a lot more broken homes on account of drink, but I didn't think you ever saw near as much divorces and stuff as you do now. But the women, they had to take care of the kids and I mean, men just done their work and that was it. Women done the wash, cooking, the baking, taking care of the kids, seeing their husbands off to work. If they were late coming home, wondering if they were drinking someplace, you know, they didn't know. Couldn't call the mine. They'd get killed if they did that. So, but it's just a sad thing to see. I guess it's the people in the mills feel the same way that we do.

[53:00]

**JORDAN**

Yeah nothing's more dangerous than mining though, just as far as—I can't remember. I just read these statistics and I have them written down. Underground mining is 7 times more dangerous than pit mining and pit mining is 7 times more dangerous than any other industry in terms of accidents. And those aren't the exact statistics but it was something like that.

**MURPHY**

And coal miners, they have it worse because they usually kill them by the dozens when they have explosions or fires. And a fire underground in these mines doesn't take the toll, unless you get where there's gas. And then they die, but you know they take these guys—that's why I feel bad when I go to Spokane I always stop down at Kellogg there where they got that statue of the memorial for the men that lost their lives at Sunshine. Geeze, those men go down a long way. But I guess these people you know, they feel, when they have a one-industry town, a steel mill, and all these men had the same camaraderie and it went from generation to generation, and then to see their mills closed and their towns—you know, it's the same thing here. You hate to see that. I think it was really halfway decent that they even left the headframes up, the gallus frames. I'm surprised they didn't tear all them down. They tore all the working shacks down.

**JORDAN**

How do you think Butte's doing now?

**MURPHY**

Oh, I think it's doing fair, but you know. What gets me is all these fast food places. They kill the locals. Yeah, you know, you take the guy from Artic Circle, his business. He can't compete with the McDonalds and John's pork chop has got no problems, and they pay good wages. They don't pay these broken wages. They're not all that high, even the union wages you know. But these other places that come, they don't—and now it's even

getting worse because these stores work these people half time so they can get out of insurance.

**JORDAN**

Yeah and like McDonalds doesn't buy salt in Butte. I mean they don't buy anything that they use here.

**MURPHY**

Yeah. But, you know something—but everything that's coming in, it's just nothing for people to really build their future on. I mean you take a young girl that's getting married. She works at McDonalds; she can't work at McDonalds all her life. They bring in that new mental hospital and that's a job for nurses and boy they're getting scarce. Hours that they have to put in and the stress that they're under. And like you know I'd like to see something come that had some meaning, like open pit. [pause] But I don't like to see kids have to leave their homes. Of course, they do it all over I guess. I wouldn't be here if my mother didn't leave Ireland, or my sisters wouldn't be in California if they liked it here, so. But I liked it, so I—there was just something about it that, my sisters, they live in California and now one is in Vegas. They could never understand why I stayed. When I split up with my first wife, they thought I should come to California. So I said no. I'll go back home. It was easier to get drunk here, I guess. But I even hate to—even Kelly, she's only 15 now but like I said, I won't be around too much longer for her anyhow. But she'll have to be looking for someplace else too. Because the boys don't have nothing here.

**JORDAN**

Well I've taken up your whole morning.

**MURPHY**

That's alright. I've probably told you stuff that's not going to be a bit of interest to you to find out about.

**JORDAN**

Oh it is!

**MURPHY**

But I have really, such deep feelings for some of these people you know, that—I just really hate to see their history lost, and like their kids I tell some of these kids, well you had to be pretty proud of your heritage. I mean, your dad, he wasn't a slob. He worked in the mines and you can't be as proud maybe as your friend over there that says your dad's an engineer or your dad's a doctor. But there wouldn't be doctors and engineers if it wasn't for miners either, so. I always remember. When I went to St. Mary's school. I was sitting in a desk like this and the window looked out and I could see into the mine yard. And I was like this one day, and I had an Irish nun. And I was just like this and I was looking down I could see that, and she cracked me in the knuckles with her ruler. Told me to sit up. I became really fond of her. Her name was Sister Orentia in fact I corresponded with her until just recently she died.

[END Tape 3, SIDE 2]

**MURPHY**

That's before they tore it down of course. So she grabbed my hand and she said Dennis, we all have to be something. Some of us had to be doctors. Some of us had to be priests. And you're put here, what you do is vitally important. She tried to make me feel good anyhow.

**JORDAN**

There's something so real about that sort of work, I mean you're making something, you know? One of these real early promotional pamphlets for Butte I ran across. It said how many hundreds of thousands of pounds of copper had been taken out of the earth at that point. It made the point that all the money that came out of Butte was money that was created. You know, it came out of the ground. It wasn't transferred like in real estate. It was real. It seems to me that you're really producing something on such a primary level. You're not living off anybody else. You're really producing something yourself, and there's a tremendous satisfaction to that.

**MURPHY**

I never thought about that. That's neat. Well, and you know there's—you hear a lot of things, you know, about these older men now that are gone that I think about. There's two guys, Gabe and Kaiser, they were brothers. One of them was as round as that refrigerator. And a man way going up isn't all that—I mean the man way is big, but where the ladders are, where they go through the landing, is narrow. And that poor guy worked in the stope and you could hear him huffing and puffing. He used to have to take his mine lamp off to get through the landing. And he'd struggle for 20 minutes to get his hind end down. And then he'd waddle. And he come out and he was such a loving guy. If he knew you liked povitica, he'd bring down povitica in his bucket for you. And then there was another guy there, Dago John, he took the sheets from the mine—they're quarter inch steel sheets, and walled his house with them you know because the boom was gonna come and the end of the world. He used to take a can of beer and a newspaper, and I saw him one day he put his bucket down and I saw the can of beer. And he rolled up the paper with a piece of wood, and he was gonna kill me. He didn't know I was after it, but I just wanted to tease him. But he used to like to tell me about his inventions. Great big man that was more powerful than he himself actually knew. I mean he could do things that—and there was guys that used to like to show you how husky they were, standing up timber and stuff like that, like to show you how they could walk away with these timbers. And I'd pick one up and I'd drag it, and they'd say to me, some of them would say, here Shorty, let me get that. I used to always say if *you* can pack it, *I* can drag it. They wouldn't bother me too much about it.

**JORDAN**

You were saying, when you went to California, you never made the friends there like you did here. I hear that lots of different ways from different people, just that there was a quality of friendship here, that people move away and never find other places—you know, people come back to Butte.

[4:50]

**MURPHY**

Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean I see guys now my age that are back, that are retired. You know, going. But my sisters would never never come back. When my mother first went down to San Francisco, she went out to the—they took her out to the ocean. That was they first thing she wanted to see. And poor old mom cried. Because she got to see—where she was born in the old country was by the ocean. And that was just like going home for her. I mean she got to see the ocean and she loved the sound of the waves, and she went from a woman that was 4'10" and weighed over 200 lbs. She fell one day and I had to run back to the neighborhood and get two men to help me get her up, because she couldn't get around. And she went down to San Francisco with my sister, got a job, went down to 145 lbs. She had no teeth here. She had a job in a building that had dentists and dental labs. One day she was cleaning up the office in the dental lab, and the guy said Mrs. Murphy, what's wrong with your teeth? Why don't you wear em? And she said I don't have any. And he couldn't believe it, couldn't believe it that she'd lived that many years without teeth. He said, if you don't say anything, you come in here. And he made her her teeth. And she just got all dolled up, had two homes. One with my sister in Oakland, and one with my sister in San Francisco. She'd pick up her purse and go to Oakland. When my brother-in-law in San Francisco, ma, when the hell you coming home? She'd grab her purse and she had a wardrobe in both places. Thank god they took very good care of her. I didn't. They did. She wouldn't come back here. I used to say, now won't you? In fact I asked my sister Fran if she'd like to come back and she said you're crazy. You know, and another thing, all these Irish people ought—you ever go to the cemetery and see these plots that they bought? You could raise a couple of sheep on some of them. And there's not going to be anybody buried in them. I mean when they done some of this, I wonder if they thought, now here's a place for me, my husband, my five children. So they put their husband, and then my mother, we brought her home for—because we thought it would be—but my sister's wont be, and my sisters—two sisters have one child each. One was at birth, one was two years old. They're there. That'll be about it. I mean, those girls wont ever come back. I so I never could understand why in the hell they - I guess it was the big thing in them days.

**JORDAN**

You'd buy a place to have a place for your family. [inaudible]

**MURPHY**

Yeah, sure. I used to love to tease my mother. I used to say, you know, I could get Patty Harrington's cow from the barn house ma, and I'll bring him out, and we won't have to worry about the grass. Yeah. There's another thing, you know, you never hear about these boarding houses. The things that went on in boarding houses. There was romance! My mother in law met her husband in the boarding house, my wife's mother met her father there. And she was a good looking Swede and he was a handsome Harp.

**JORDAN**

Seems like a lot of the Irish girls who didn't come over with their family would come over and work in a boarding house, and then they'd meet somebody and—

**MURPHY**

Yeah, I can—oh there's a lot of friends of my mother's that came over young, you know, younger than my mother that come over, young girls, and that's where they met their husbands, at the boarding houses. I can't even tell you how much my mother made at the boarding house. But she worked in the laundry a long time before my older sisters got a job, so she'd made a pretty good thing of it.

**JORDAN**

It's interesting, the apartment where I live is set up so that—the way the doors are set up, actually three different people could live there. It's a two bedroom apartment, but one apartment has a door right into the hall, I mean one bedroom, so that could be rented out as a single room. Then out of the other bedroom, there's a door to the kitchen, so that could be rented as a single room and they had access to the kitchen without going through the living room and dining room. So you actually could have had two single men and a family.

**MURPHY**

They probably did in there, at one time when the Anselmo was going full blast.

**JORDAN**

Yeah I'm sure it was designed that way.

**MURPHY**

Yeah, see when they brought them soldiers, or miners or I don't know who, but they had room for a lot of them. But a lot of them married butte girls and took them back to Pennsylvania. So, well there's four of them here that I know of, that came as soldier miners, so they probably lived in a place like that.

**JORDAN**

Now were you working underground when the West Virginians were arriving?

**MURPHY**

Mmm hmm.

[11:00]

**JORDAN**

Now was that in the 60s or so?

**MURPHY**

Yeah, Curby Crowley went down and got them in Alabama. I always remember the time—they weren't all—some of the Virginians are still here. But a lot of them went

home too. They didn't like it. You know they loved the hills back there, they really do. I knew one really good, and he was as proud of being a hillbilly Virginian, as he used to say, as we were being from Butte. But they brought this one guy from Alabama. And they recruited him of course. And he was down in the grizzlies and he was—great big boulders—and they take sticks of powder and they split them. Paste 'em on the rock, and just put one or two sticks and then they put a blasting cap on and cut a fuse that long, and then they slide the fuse and then they step out, or if you're using electric blasting caps, you can step out of the pocket and get behind the wall and [click], you'd test your battery with them. So the safety engineer was down there this day, and this guy from Alabama had sticks of powder in his—the bibs of his overalls. Well, that was nothin'. I mean, you know, if I had to do it once in a while, I used to take three or four sticks and I'd put 'em in a bib, or underneath my bib. And I'd keep the blasting caps here you know. But anyhow, the safety engineer said to him, what's that you got? He was gonna – and the guy had a real southern draw. What does it look like? It's powder. He said “get up out of there and get that powder out of here before I run your fanny down the hill!” He said, I'll tell ya I'm not coming out. I'm gonna blast, and I'm not coming down and getting back up for a stick of powder every time I need it. It's safe here. I've been doing it for ages and it's not hurting anybody, particularly *you*. And another thing, he said, you can't fire me. I got a contract. [laughter] And the safety engineer said, contract? Contract? So I said to the safety engineer. Yeah, Curby Crowley went and got 'em. He said oh Jesus and he walked away. He couldn't fire 'em.

**JORDAN**

Now who went to get him?

**MURPHY**

Guy by the name of Curby Crowley. He's still in town, in fact he's a graduate of the school of mines. He was a mine foreman and stuff and he went around recruiting. He was on the radio the other day for the alumni—Montana Tech alumni meeting for 50 years or whatever it was, he graduated. And he retired – he was always in management, though I mean, he was a graduate. He probably worked as a miner, and then he probably went to shift bossin' and stuff. But he was always in management. But then a lot of them guys come up and didn't stay, didn't like the mines, this type mining, and went back, you know.

[14:30]

**JORDAN**

I understand there was some prejudice against them when they first came too.

**MURPHY**

Oh I think there was, yeah. That's what I don't understand you know, you hear stories about the good people in Butte, you know. They are friendly, but still in all, even today now, I don't think even though we're looking for progress I mean, to get new, as they saying is now, high technology stuff, but a lot of them still don't want the town to grow. They don't want a bunch of different people you know. They want the people to stay the

way they are. You know, they hear a lot, so many things happening in bigger towns and stuff. They don't want that. And I think then that they even kind of resented people being brought in here. I don't know, they didn't like the solider miners, and they were gonna bring in the colored troops to work in the mines and they raised—there was gonna be a shutdown. They woulda walked out of the mines. They really woulda done that. But we had two of our own home grown colored here, and they treated them like terrible. So you see, I mean as nice as our town is and as nice as we try to say there's no prejudice and there's no difference between you know, half of the Irish goes and marries the Bowhunks, and half the Bowhunks go and marry the Lebanese. Or they marry an Irish man—I mean it's all mixed up. There's no kid in Butte that's 15 years old that hasn't got a mixture of all the nationalities in Butte. But they never tell you how bad they treated our colored people.

### **JORDAN**

Now were the blacks that were from Butte originally, they were treated bad too?

[16:30]

### **MURPHY**

Oh, they spoke to 'em but they couldn't come, you know. Clinton Glenn was a swamper. And he was a happy-go-lucky guy. He swamped, that's the cleanup now. He done the Butte water company, washed their windows and scrubbed their floors. Then he had bars in town where he was the swamper. And he tended bar at the Sobrecity was the colored club. He was married two or three times, never to a black woman. And my wife asked him one day where his wife was and he said, Ohhh, well now she just ran away with the trumpet player. We used to get a bunch of colored bands coming through here. He says, yeah, she just ran away with the trumpet player. But he worked for pork chop john's also, making pork chops. So he got sick, and he was in the hospital. I found out he was in the hospital and I went to the hospital to see him, and he cried—'cause I was the only one that came to see 'em. I mean, I'm the only white. So he come out of the hospital and after that, he got pretty well and I used to go to his house to visit. And we had a young friend of ours, a white girl, and she liked Clinton, I mean, good company, I mean a good guy, and his wife, she was white. And he had a bunch of colored porters that used to come in on the railroad you know. And they used to stay at his house once in a while. So he told her one day, don't come over here no more. These men are no good for you, and I can't watch you all the time. He was just that kind of a guy. He had a boy that was born from a white woman, and he had to leave town. The girl, she was an outcast. [High brown?] was a great athlete at his school here. He worked up at the Anselmo, but they didn't treat him with open arms. In fact they went to a little league baseball game one time years ago and he was an umpire. Then they would call him black bastard, nigger, because he'd call the—so I really and truly can't say that they treated the colored people here too good. And they few colored people that are here now you know, they still stay by themselves. I don't know. And they don't talk to you because, I don't talk them I guess. That's the only thing I could never understand is why we pride ourselves on being a friendly town. Now my wife works – they have colored people come in, so we had them down for supper. And you'd be surprised—did I see a black guy going in your house? You know. They

had a young lieutenant girl up there. And if it wasn't for my wife and this woman that works with her, she'd had a hell of a time getting started, but she joined a church and that one there on Platinum. And they treated her pretty good. But she got, you know, so she—but at first she just cried and cried when she first came here.

[21:20]

**JORDAN**

I think it would be tough, there are a couple of black students up at Tech and it must be really hard for them.

**MURPHY**

But I wonder if the students treat them a little better than the people downtown.

**JORDAN**

I guess, I think so. I think things have changed a lot and maybe people are more used to it.

**MURPHY**

Uh huh. But even down the garage one time, they brought a couple of colored guys from the smelter there, you know, kids that were born and raised here. They'd say boy did you see—did it get dark in here all of a sudden. I said to one of them one day, why don't you go up and ask him? I mean, you know, man to man. He'd tear your head off maybe, so. But they couldn't stay there. I mean they were accepted, but not—I'd like to see them be accepted as buddy buddy. The guy that was up there, he was only there for a short while, but he was just the neatest guy. So we had a little going away party for him, you know, and he thought that was really nice, but he was telling us that, you know, he'd feel sorry for these people. In fact they had one commander up there, he got one colored young boy and he was the only one here. So he asked his commanding officer, you know, he said he didn't think it was right that he should be here because he's, you know, alone. And there was no other colored people, no other colored people in Butte. And they took him out, but after that, the other guys they had to tough it out. Then we had another kid here that was a sergeant, and he didn't back down from nobody. They ganged up on him and beat him up. And then, he got a transfer out of here because it became kind of a problem because he was gonna get revenge you know. So they tell ya, it's my town and I like it, but I often wondered you know, what would have happened if they did send in them colored troops. [pause] But with all its faults I think it's pretty good.

[24:00]

**JORDAN**

Still there's a lot more of that community spirit here than you see in other towns like Missoula.

**MURPHY**

Yeah, it really is.

**JORDAN**

In Missoula for instance, or Bozeman.

**MURPHY**

You know, that's what bothers me when I go to Missoula or someplace. We go over there shopping and maybe we'll go over Friday and want to spend the weekend or something. And they'll say Butte? You know, like it's really something that's been spit on or something. That you couldn't—they're as smoky and dusty over there as any place, but I—people will say “these ore dumps, you know how can you st--?” I was—my house in Corktown was at the bottom of the little mine ore dump. And when it would rain, the gray mud would run into your yard. Couldn't grow a tree. Couldn't grow grass. You could grow grass, I shouldn't – but people didn't have time for it I guess. But now, if I was a rich man and younger, I'd build my house where my old house was. Geeze you could see over the flat.

**JORDAN**

Yeah, there's some wonderful views.

**MURPHY**

Yeah.

**JORDAN**

Well, I should let you go. This has been so helpful.

**MURPHY**

Oh, I just always, I just ramble off sometimes, when you probably wanna find out about contract mining, and I just tell you these stories.

**JORDAN**

Oh, the stories are the things I just love to hear, because those are the things you just can't—you can't get at the mining museum. You can see the pictures but you don't get the real story, the real people who worked in there. I value that most of all.

**MURPHY**

Well that's why I say, when a guy's like, you know Gabe and Kaiser, and this John. I get a lump in my throat when I think of John.

**JORDAN**

“Too bad you're Irish.”

**MURPHY**

“Too bad you're Irish.” Only he used to say, “too bad you're Irish, bastard!” Yeah, he'd just—I couldn't drink wine to save my soul. I could drink whiskey. I couldn't drink wine. My ears used to get beet red and I'd get real flushed. I'd go down to his house, and he'd pour me a big water glass full. I'd say John I can't do it. I'll eat but I can't drink that

wine. That's why you're so skinny. That's why you can see through your ribs. You gotta have this wine. So I'd take a couple of sips and then I'd-- his wife would say—He was neat. God damn it. And then I used to like to listen, when I worked at the St Lawrence, and it was the old horse barn. And there was five or six guys that worked there when they had the horses. And they'd tell ya stories about them horses that, you know, just would make you wonder. And they treated the horses ten times better than they did the miners you know. They used to bring the horses up out of the mine and put 'em up out here to pasture. And the skinner could stay down the mine till they died of silicosis.

**JORDAN**

Boy those pictures of putting a horse down the mine.

**MURPHY**

Yeah, isn't that something?

**JORDAN**

It really is.

**MURPHY**

See, there was another breed of men, that rope gang, and you know they were mostly all Norwegians and Swedes, like John Olson—his dad was a rope man. They were the ones that lowered all that stuff, and you know, Jim Killoy probably showed you pictures where they moved a whole gallus frame without dismantling it.

**JORDAN**

Oh gosh, no I haven't seen that.

**MURPHY**

I couldn't believe it. He showed it to me and it's—yeah these are all guys that never get out of grade school, you know. But with wenches and different rope pulleys and stuff, they done more of those things – whoever thought of how to put the horse down the mine in a sling? You know, they went crazy when they brought 'em up, you know.

**JORDAN**

They hadn't seen the light.

**MURPHY**

Yeah they'd take 'em down to the barn and then they'd keep em blindfolded and keep the barn pitch black for a while, you know, and eventually they'd bring it out. But some of these skimmers, as they call em, you know, would bring an apple for their horse. Some of them brought chewing tobacco. You know, when, if something happened that the skinner couldn't come to work, and they'd get another guy, this horse wouldn't work for him sometimes. He'd go to go in – like the stall would be here and he'd go to walk between the stall, and this is what the story I was told. He'd go up to—if he didn't tie 'em into the stall, they'd back out of the stall and they'd walk around the level because they had lights in them you know. And they'd tip the tops off of buckets and eat the stuff out of the

buckets, so you used to have to tie 'em in the stalls. But anyhow the skinner'd go in and he'd get to untie 'em, and if it was a mule or whatever, he'd lean against the wall and he'd pin the guy to the side of the stall. And then when he'd leave off, the guy, if he'd go to go forward, he'd lean back again. But if you back up, started to back out of the stall, why, he'd let 'em go back. But he wouldn't let 'em – so, they had their own ways. There was some of them. [inaudible] Some of them tell me that they'd pull a six car train. They might go back in the drift and they'd find into their [tape cuts out]—they did, broke their necks sometimes taking them out. But this guy told me that they, you know, some of them skimmers, the horse would do something fantastic and boy, they couldn't wait to get home to tell their family what the horse—I don't know, I guess they all had names. When he'd go down the mine, he'd throw [inaudible] he'd give his horse a [inaudible]. So I guess they became pretty close.

**JORDAN**

You can really get into a relationship with a work animal. You just, you learn each other and get things done together.

**MURPHY**

Yeah, sure. Yeah I guess at the end of the shift the horse knew when it was quittin' time, and they'd follow 'em right into the stall.

**JORDAN**

They probably had union contracts too.

**MURPHY**

Yeah.

**JORDAN**

They sure—I used to love the stories of the old ice horses, you know, that would know every house on their route.

**MURPHY**

Yeah. You know it's just the same way people—like when I go to bed at night I always stayed up later than my wife and my daughter. And I'll say to the dog, you have to go out before I got to bed, she's lazy. She run right to the door. But I guess it was the same with the—like the oxen for the milkman. If there was four in a row and then two that weren't customers, he knew—he'd stop at those four and pass the two that weren't.

**JORDAN**

Well, thank you so much for this.

**MURPHY**

Oh like I said I'm really sorry that I—

**JORDAN**

No you didn't.

**MURPHY**

Probably.

**JORDAN**

I—it was just exactly what I wan—

[TAPE 4 ENDS]

[INTERVIEW ENDS]