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April 20, 1985
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Edward J. Clavin
Narrator

2640 Bayard
Address

Butte, mt. 59701
City, State, Zip

Jrissa Jordan
Interviewer

Butte Historical Society
PO Box 3913
Butte, MT 59701

12 Apr 1988
Accession date

Mary Murphy
Archivist

Ed Chouirnard, interviewed by Teresa Jordan, at the Butte-Silver Bow Archives, April 20, 1985. Former Oiler, shovel, and drill operator for Anaconda Co, and ARCO.

Born and raised in Butte. Father didn't work in mines, but father's three bros did. One worked underground, others worked part time, then got into other things--time keepers in office, etc. Father worked in service stations and garages. Last one was Ralph Olson's Exxon on South MT.

Growing up, Ed never thought he would work for Co. Started in May, 1962. 20 years old. First full-time job. Had worked at gas station w/ dad, steady in summer, parttime during school. Started in pay office w/ Co. office boy and typist. There 6 months--only real money there going out [pay office] so transferred as oiler on hoist. Year and a half on those. Big air engine, originally steam, fascinating, like at Steward, Original. First shift at High Ore--flat cable. Was swing mine, took guys' day off, got to see an awful lot of diff hoists. Never worked the Lexington. Worked the Anselmo one day. Engine rooms all different, engines a bit different. Mountain Con, never did go on surface, worked hoist at 4000 level. Only time Ed was underground. Would't like to work underground. Didn't like trip up and down. Engine room underground OK. Went to the bottom of the Con once--station tender picked Ed up first, went down to bottom, picked up guys, went up. Farther down you get, more stretch you get in the cable. You bounce more and more. Air, humidity...musky type smell. Spent year and half as oiler, was going more toward running hoist--made Ed nervous. Put him steady at the Steward. Was scared of that hoist. Figured he had better get off them. Called up Jim Cardin (sp?), head of general hiring, that sort of thing, explained it to him, he said, OK, we'll get you something else. He was real well liked. He suggested drill helper in the pit. So started out on that, they bounced me back and forth, shovels, drills--ended up w/ seniority on both of them. Finally settled on drills for long time.

Out of one 15 month period, was laid off, off and on, 7 months of that period. Around 1966 or so. But they finally learned they had to keep stripping no matter what--ratio, varied over years, but pretty much two trucks of waste to one truck of ore. They would catch up on the overburden, would lay off. But got caught w/ their pants down too many times.

Start out as drill helper (oiler) and learn how to run machines. Kind of apprenticeship. For many years, get to be an operator in about 2 years. sometimes, when running a lot more machines, putting people on, about a year. But a lot of people really didn't have enough experience. So many variables, esp w/ drilling. Takes a lot to know how to handle everything. Its a skill, kind of an art. Good place to learn here, because w/ all the old workings, ground isn't consistent. If work in Berk Pit, can work anywhere. Cement of old workings is something else to

drill. Something to do w/ type of teeth on bit. Worked shovels until late '60's, Ed thinks, can't really remember. On drills exclusively after that. Right around '70, made instructor of drills. Did that for 2 years. '69 to '71, something like that. Then filled in for various foreman. Worked their vacations. Truck and shovel, crushing and conveying, roads and dumps. Some, hadn't had anything to do w/ them before--(laughs).

Would fill in other jobs usually when there was slack time on my own. Basically, helped w/ indoctrination of new employees--safety program. Meet in conference room in trailer next to main bldg, each particular job have certain color hat. Certain jobs, issued other items. Given little talk about whole property, operation, safety. Then taken for tour, then help get them to area where sposed to be. When Ed started, they expected you to know where everything was--confusion. The program gave them a little better start. If Ed had any new drill oilers, would take them out himself, go through different sizes, etc, go through basic job. Then put them with experienced oiler for awhile. Would't put them with just anybody 'cause some not so great. Remember one guy, would tear up eqpt all the time. But he had something going with the office, they wouldn't do anything to him. Were a few, even bosses, that were in because of relatives in the past or something, would't be where they were w/o help. Was an awful lot of that for many years--before I was there, and when I was. But it died out eventually. Happening before ARCO came in. By ARCO, no more change in that than before.

Worked drill instructor 2 years, then after '71 strike, went back to drilling. Asked them to let me. A few things had been rubbing me wrong. And besides, make more money when went back drilling. Hadn't realized it would be that way though. Because of strike, diff in contract. Instructor job gradually went down hill because there was no new hiring. Wore itself out because of way things went. Had instructors for every type of eqpt. Three for trucks because so many.

Ed didn't think Co. would ever go down like it did. First few layoffs--most of the years that he worked down there, run 1500-1800 men, year-round. Around 75 on drills alone. When Ed got laid off, was number 5 from top of list. Kept one a shift, eliminated oiler. Ed was laid off slightly a year before they shut down. Thought he would be there until they shut down. Laid off in '82. Told on a Wednesday, last shift on Friday. Official on the Monday. Only two or three days notice. For about 3 years before that, rumours that were going to shut down. So mentally prepared self for it. But not expecting it when got it. Quite a few others got it at same time. End of shift, were all up in the dry, could hear a pin drop in that place. Never heard quiet like that, even in other layoffs. Maybe, too, most all these people had a lot of time, never thought they would get axed. Hit home harder with these people.

Tape 1, Side B

Ed started feeling bad when started seeing how other people were. Chins down to the ground, gloom. Tried talking to a few to cheer them up a little bit. It really wasn't the end of the world. Ed thinks that a lot of his attitude came from--had had a really hard time with divorce in '73, learned a lot from it. Took him a long time to get over that. Seemed like the end of the world. A lot of what he learned there, put it to work with being laid off. Lord works in strange ways--maybe he was preparing me for this through the other thing (divorce). Because I don't know how I would have been if I hadn't been through the divorce. Once I got out of that--I was numb, wasn't seeing anybody. Kind of like I woke up, everything so bright, they turned up the rheostat on the lights or something. And I was able to laugh again. I couldn't even laugh for a few years. Got to where my nerves weren't tied up all the time, heart a pounding...once I really knew that I was coming out of that divorce, made a vow to myself that I would never let anybody, even myself, get me that far down again--not even Anaconda/ARCO.

Worked for them 20 years, and was number 5 from the top--still think should have been there until shut down. Was quite a ways from retirement, even early retirement. Closest one was # years of service plus age, and it has to come up to something like 85.

That Monday, when official layoff day, made appt to sign up for unemployment. Sep, at old Boys' central. Followed through w/ plans had had for the summer, did some more, too. Trips and things had planned w/ youngest son. Made a good summer. Didn't know when would be able to do it again. Got vacation pay because pay was from year before, so they couldn't keep that. It was coming from time January 1 hit.

Since layoff, employability from background isn't really good. Would almost like to change employment, because drilling, hit and miss. One place for awhile, then another. Shut down, change locations. Like down in Gillette, about 6 or 8 places that hire, but they could shut down tomorrow. Don't believe in making that long a move if there isn't much security for the future. Could be stuck down there. Heard so many storeis about Wyoming, heard of a lot coming back, too.

Operating Engineers--on withdrawal now. Kept dues up for a year.

Retraining program year ago Feb-- applied, but not accepted. Got two answers as to why. Asked union--he said, only thing I can see is that you didn't have enough exp. on diff pieces of eqpt. But that's what whole thing was about! Then shortly after, got a letter from Dick Sullivan at Sep. Said, you qualified but just not accepted. No real answer. curious, what eliminated me? Asked bus agent at union for list of who accepted, see if any pattern. couldn't see any. But one fellow had exact same qualifications except for maybe a little time, he got it. And people who got trained, didn't get jobs like Peoples and others said they would--road jobs, etc. Like the road job on Helena highway, not a one got on it. One got on as mechanic, but that's

different. Most of those working on that job brought from Idaho, believe Soda Springs operations, of Washington Construction. When this is over, they will go back there, bump out the people who replaced them there. And in order to have a possibility to get on, have to go to Helena once a month to operating engineers 400, costs you \$21.50, Ed believes, just to sign book--and that list number 3! Not much chance they will ever get to that list. Plus got to pay that amount every month. And if do get to you, have to put \$1000 bill ont he table to get into a job. Mary Berg [at Project Challenge] very surprised when she found that out. All road construction really like that.

A few of those trained did get some work from Butte-Silver Bow. But out of all the bally-hoo about it, not much came of it. Somebody who knew all who went through, best he could figure was that one got a steady job. Out of something like 35.

Haven't had employment since laid off. Benefits have run out-- July 9 of '83, unemployment gone. Supplemental unemployment from company, which never started until late, ran out the middle of last June. (84) In way, glad that delayed, so not run out so soon. Started around July, '83. Something like \$90 a week, the last six months. Didn't matter about seniority, Ed thinks. Three different programs. Depended on when you were laid off, what you got. One bunch got a flat \$1000. Others got \$1000 plus full supplemental. And another group. Older guys, sort of ironic, fund depleted by time they were laid off.

Have had to learn more and more what can do without, what can cut. Times I've thought I've cut as much as I can, but I find some other ways to cut. Have been surprised how much can cut. Was living at dad's when laid off, and is now.

Ed feels he was more fortunate that many--living at Dad's helped an awful lot. dad gets pension, social security.

Sep is to help you get employed, also Project Challenge. If you find job, they will pay up to 50% of your wage up to 6 months, something like that. Employer gets some tax benefits from it. Through Project Challenge, they have given a number of good leads, and they take input from people who have been in, leads they hear of. We check in once a week, voluntarily, not mandatory.

Sense of purpose...you begin to wonder about it. what is it now? So much that I can't do I used to be able to do. Not just for my own benefit, recreation. But I can't help others like I used to.

Tape 2, side 1

I can get through the summer all right. I'll sell the jeep, that will make some difference. I'll still have a car. The car, two weeks ago or less, that's the first time it ran since the middle of last October. '78 Buick LaSabre. Usually don't use it in the

winter anyway.

Q: What do you see in your future?

Right now I don't see nothing. I haven't for awhile. I've sat down and thought about this at times. Going back to a purpose--don't see nothing. Maybe there is something there being as the big guy upstairs is still keeping me around, there must be something.

Q: How much time a week involved w/ looking for a job.

Really varies. Depends on what I find, that's worth the effort to do the running around.

Q: Some people say, if can't find job here, then leave...

But where do you go? And a lot of them can't go and haven't been able to for a long time. Can't afford it. One guy I know, orig from W. Va, his dad come to work for the mines, then when he old enough, he did. He is working now and has been almost since he was laid off, he was laid off in the time before me, he's working for less now than he's ever worked before. Last Feb or so he made trip back to W. Va, and he said most people there working for less than they've ever worked for, too. Lot of mines have opened up again, but through smaller companies, working for a lot less. And a lot not w/ mines, working for min. wage. But happy, working regular.

Ed not drawing unemployment, but may still be being counted as unemployed because on active list on job service. Job counselor, Marie McBride .

Arby's, McDonalds, Wendy's, those are really jobs more for teenagers. Not for a family man or family woman. Like my daughter, she worked at McDonald's in Anchorage. Kind of gets into union or not to union type of thing. Forget how long she was there, but she was assistant manager, working all sorts of overtime and stuff. About a week after they told her what a great job she was doing, she asked for a raise, they told her to hit the road. Your unions will give you protection for that.

Unions are good, unions are bad.

Q: what might have prevented shutdown?

Copper imports--Reagan wouldn't put any restrictions on them, they flooded the market. One by one, different operations started folding--as you know, most recetly, Kennecott in Utah. Knew it was coming sooner or later. Steel industry got hurt by imports, also. "Take care of the other countries, never mind ours." Now they just took the quota limits off the Japanese cars.

Unions overdid a few things w/ company. More and more expected

of company to do. Wages--we were always on tail end, as it was. Got in contracts for catch up. But we got within reasonable amount to catch up w/ Kennecott, they were always way higher than we were. Boiler makers and mechanics, things that were ridiculous as to who could do what. Mechanics tied up for hours, waiting for boiler maker to cut a bolt or something like that. Some of this was stupid. But they were starting to work out of it. Flexibility. Productivity.

Company had some dump projects that cost 50, 100, 200 thousand dollars over the year, weren't feasible. They 'd get a new turn in management, try all sorts of new things. Redoing things that should never have had to be redone. A lot of the overburden material has been moved three, four times. Rehandling the same products. Wasn't enough in their long range planning. They were messing up there.

Q: Angry at the company?

Not really angry. Don't know what I do feel. Guess this is how it is--let it be. Don't let it eat you up.

Felt for quite some time that the fed govt and big corps are in cahoots to wreck the unions nationwide.

McDuffs, Champion Auto--the people who work there do not choose to be in a union--that's their choice. Somebody brought up to me recently--you know what the unions did for you while you were working; what have they done for you while you've not been working. Nothing. What good are they then? As long as you are working so you can pay your dues every months, they are right there. But to help you be working, they aren't doing anything.

Unions gave some concessions to ARCO in last two contracts. Kennecott went through same process--co said, we gotta have this, we gotta have that, you give it to them, and then you're still out the door, it didn't make any diff.

Don't think Anac ARCO will run it again. Think it will be someone else. Canadian firm was looking at it. Someone else is supposed to come to look.

Ed doesn't know if will work for mines again. It's possible, but would rather not. Like to get out of mining all together--cause not much mining going on any more.

Looking for jobs--help from project challenge, job service. Just try to hear of something. In February, just for something for possible help, went to explosives and blasting training seminar, intensified class work. Hope something might come of it. Got a certificate for it. Over and above what MSHA (Mining Safety and Health Adm) & that sort of thing calls for. Also, thought might meet someone, get a job. Representatives from all over hte state there. Golden Sunlight Mine, Champion International, etc. A little more exposure for a possible job. Very interesting.

Went through week-long training session w/ Project Challenge, shows way to look for work, resumes, letters of introduction, that sort of thing.

Q: take a min wage job?

Depend on what it is. If way more work than minimum wage should be, no. Aren't going to take min. wage for same thing somebody is getting \$12.50 for. Have a little pride. Something they are pushing in the state legis that burns Ed--pushing the veterans preference so much. Ed just as good as they are, they've served, he understands that. But why push anybody else out who isn't a vet? One guy says, he knows vets who put in applications, don't even get interviews. I haven't had an interview in 3 years! What's the difference there? What makes him better that he gets to get an interview? Just because he's a veteran, he has to have an interview? Not right. They are pushing for ALL work, not just for Govt work as it has been for so many years.

Q: In a year, from what you said, your savings will be depleted if nothing comes up. What then?

We'll figure that out when the time comes. Don't sit and fret and worry yourself sick about what will happen in 12 months, 5 years--have learned not to worry too much about things you don't have any control over. Learned that from the divorce situation.

Tape 2, Side B

Usually, things will work themselves out, one way or another. Worst part of it is the time element. How long it might take to work it out.

Christmas before last, told everybody in the family, that's it for Christmas and birthdays until I can find a job. So from a year ago Christmas, nobody's got nothing. Thing that bothers me the most--grand kids. My kids, they understand. Neither of boys is married. Have 2 grandkids.

Q: Any benefits from being laid off?

Don't think so. One thing I have learned--don't think its an advantage--I found out that my talents, I don't have as much chance of finding something as somebody else. I'm not a very multi-talented person. Not too many things I can do and do well, satisfactorily. I've pretty much accepted that, but sometimes it starts bugging me. When there was maybe a job I could have had; some people can do just almost anything.

Chouinard is French Canadian name. Family came from Eastern part of Canada, Quebec. Migrated E. US--New Hampshire. Don't know why family came to Butte--Ed's dad's mother and father, and Dad's brothers and sisters, think a total of seven, came here. Don't

know why. Maybe because there was supposed to have been work in mines. Don't know if grandfather worked in mines.

Ed grew up in Floral Park area, where he lives now.