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Restrictions:

3-7-86  
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12 April 1988  
Accession date

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## NOTES ON USING MATERIALS FROM

### "IS THERE LIFE AFTER COPPER?" ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Because of limited funds available for this project, audited transcriptions of the tapes were not possible. However, there are detailed notes for most of the interviews. The user should be aware of a few limitations on the use of these notes. Unless otherwise specified, the notes were taken at the time of the interview and were not later audited against the tape. They can give you a good idea of what was covered in the interview. However, if you find something specific that interests you, you should verify it with the tape. Because the notes were taken quickly during the interview, they may include inaccuracies. If you use information for attribution, you must go back to the original tape.

There are rough transcriptions for many of the interviews. Again, because of time and funds available, these transcriptions were not later audited against the tape. They are more accurate than the notes, but again, if you use information for attribution, check it against the original tape.

A few interviews have restrictions against use of the tape. The notes for these have generally been read and corrected by the subject of the interview and are accurate. Check the releases for further information.

Erin Lapham, Vista volunteer with Safe Space, President of the Montana Coalition against Domestic Violence, interviewed by Teresa Jordan at the Butte-Silver Bow Archives, March 7, 1986.

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

Erin was born with last name Kilgallen. Her parents divorced; her mother remarried; Erin became Lewis when about 2 1/2 years old. Born into an Irish family. She is pretty much 100% Irish.

Her natural father's name was Tom. He was not a miner, though his father was.

Lewis's didn't work in the mines. Erin's stepfather worked for the Newbro Drug Company, a drug wholesale company on Arizona Street, in a concrete building that looks like the national vault. That business went under in 1974 or '75. Her father was not ready to retire--he had the problems of people laid off later in life, problems of self esteem, problems of the older worker. He had gone to work when he was 15 years old, didn't finish high school. Had worked for Newbro's for years. He was about 53 when he was laid off, not ready to retire. He was unemployed a couple years, then went to work for Sherwin Williams. Worked there about four years, laid off. Now he is retired.

The drug co didn't close because of Butte financial sit'n but because of problems in the family that ran the firm. They also have a place in Idaho; some who worked there had the chance to move to Idaho, but that was hard for others, who had been here all their lives, who were rooted.

Erin's mother's name was Beryl. Her maiden name was Toy. She still works as a legal secretary for John Alexander. She started to work when Erin was about 13. She worked for the Cannon brokerage, then the Metals Bank (which is now First Bank); then as a legal secretary for a number of lawyers.

When Erin was young, more mothers stayed home. Those who worked were either professional, or something like a waitress--the two extremes.

Erin's stepfather, Bob, was Welsh.

Erin always felt a strong identification with the Irish--not so much through her family, but had a feeling, an identification with the Irish. She thinks that she wanted to have a sense of identification with her father's family. He moved away soon after the divorce. She didn't meet him again until she was 16.

How was that ethnic feeling shown?

St. Patricks Day, the general ethnic feeling here, the fairy tales about Ireland and leprechauns, the almost mystical belief

that Irish people have.

Erin went to McKinley and Emerson elementary schools; East Junior High, Butte High.

She went to the School of Mines--it changed its name to Montana Tech while she was there; then went to Western, and then Missoula. At the time she was majoring in education. Now she is going to go back in counselling with an emphasis on domestic violence. Will probably go to Missoula or Eastern.

She has two sons, Brett who is 16; and Eric who is 13.

Brett will have graduated by the time Erin goes back to school; Eric will have the option of going with her or staying with his father here in town.

Erin is working now under a Vista grant--it's statewide through the Montana Coalition against Domestic Violence. The program attaches workers to shelters across the state. There are three workers in Butte.

How did you get involved with this?

Erin answered an ad in the paper in about 1980, took training. She had been involved at the Y, and they had the first women's referral center and drop-in center. Grace Sicotte was there. Erin did work for her. She was central in starting Safe Space.  
\*Grace Sicotte; women's center.

Safe Space was the brainchild of the Butte Christian Community Center. The Center was formed in about '78 or '79, to fill gaps left by other social service agencies. They found out that the gaps were large. Decided to focus on battered women. Opened the shelter in 1980. Got a house through Urban Revitalization program--the house had been earmarked for demolition; the Christian Center wrote a grant.

Q: Was Safe Space a reaction to changing economic conditions in Butte, to the layoffs?

Erin wasn't involved right at the beginning. Grace Sicotte would be the one to talk to about that.

Q: Were you surprised, as you got involved in this work, at the amount of domestic violence, the need for the shelter?

Yes. Erin was surprised at how extensive abuse was. She had the beliefs growing up that fighting only occurred in certain circumstances, and that just isn't so.

In time, there has been a lot more awareness in the community. The first actual women's shelter opened in 1975 in England, so this really is a new issue.

Erin figures that about 80% of the violence they have seen is related to layoffs. Saw some during the first stages of layoffs, then it tapered off. Now it is about level. All the benefits have run out; people are in a holding pattern. But you can definitely trace back physical violence in families to the layoffs. Yes, they see families who were never affected by the layoffs.

An example: One family that has gone through Safe Space--the husband worked for the Company, and he was very entrenched in working for the Company. For a lot of men, it wasn't only financial. Rather, it was their whole social structure. The adults they saw were people they worked with. They would go to work an hour earlier; their social life was in the lunch room. And when they were laid off, they didn't have a social structure. This particular family were transplants here. They didn't have other family here, and they didn't have a church. So they were really isolated. They never really recovered. There was lots of emotional and verbal abuse; they came to us in the first stages of physical abuse. It came from FRUSTRATION. To move away, you have to be up for it financially and emotionally. They had total confusion about whether they could re establish themselves in Butte or what they should do. He eventually took a job--he is under employed. He got esteem from working; but now he is in a job nobody else wants. He has to rebuild his self esteem at a much lower level. That family eventually busted up. A lot of it had to do with the Company, with being laid off. That was not the ONLY problem, but it was the one that became too much to handle. Erin has seen a lot of that.

Erin says, "I think a lot of families didn't realize how good the financial aspect of working for the Company was. ...When you have essentially a one industry town, there is so much involved. I remember as a child, even though my dad didn't work for the Company, everything centered around the Company. The parades all had a tone of the miner. The Columbia Gardens, everywhere you went, you were classified as coming from a mining community. People didn't realize, until they think back and start to talk about it, just how completely this community was centered around mining."

The Company has offered different retraining programs, but if you wait to get in one, you have lost everything. The man in the example took another job--so he was not on the roles for retraining. If Washington Corporation starts up again, he won't be on the roles to be hired; or he will really have to fight to get on them.

Q: Some people who were laid off landed pretty much on their feet; others were virtually destroyed. What are the factors that affect a person's experience with job loss?

Erin thinks that the people who lit on their feet could see beyond working for the company. They had a family support system, the ability and support to change careers. Some went

back to school. The ones in real trouble were the most isolated, those who thought they would always work for the company. Erin doesn't know that IQ or education had much to do with it. Some white collar workers who were laid off--the management--have had as much trouble as those who worked in the pit.

Another factor is the ability to accept role reversal. A lot of women went to work, or were the sole breadwinners. Those families that could accept that for awhile did better. The ages of the kids are a factor. When a man is thrown back in the house with little kids, especially if the mother has to go out to work, it can be hard. Erin considers herself a feminist, but in family structures, the truth is that women handle the day to day stresses of little kids better. They men don't have any experience with it. For blue collar workers who worked at the pit in 10 or 12 hours shifts, who were the major breadwinners, they had played a very small role in day to day child care before. Especially if they worked graveyard, they worked when everyone else slept; slept when everyone else was awake.

Tape 1, Side B

Erin thinks that the people who worked graveyard had perhaps more problems adjusting than those who worked mainstream shifts. Studies show that we do have psychological time clocks. And graveyard is alienating from the regular flow of events.

Q: Did the social structures set up at work continue after the layoffs?

Erin remembers a groups of men who would get together and walk everyday. A piece was done on them in the paper.

There was a lot of drinking. More even than before the layoffs. Bars were a place you saw people; they were social. She doesn't think men went in because they were depressed so much as for the social atmosphere, to see the guys. They didn't do a lot of calling on the telephone or visiting. Bars got to be more socially important. The same things happened during strikes.

Q: In the past, fraternal organizations like the Robert Emmet Literary Society could take up some of the slack. Did you see any of this?

Erin is not aware of any. Society changed and Butte got forced into changing. Family roles changed. When those groups were strong, the social scene was very male dominated. Women stayed home; men went to clubs. When that changed, it was a threat to those organizations.

Oddly, the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick is now very much a professional group, higher income. Very different than it was 20 years ago.

Q: Do you think it was harder for Butte to accept changing roles

and family structure than other places?

There have always been feminists in Butte, strong women who don't see themselves male dominated. There have always been strong women here because women had to keep things going. But as far as going public with it, being "feminists," that was not widely accepted; that was a very different thing.

Erin just had her 20th class reunion. Even those women from her class who went on to be professionals don't see themselves as feminists.

When major catastrophes happened, women held things together. They brought lunches to men on the hill, held things together. But they were invisible. The women were the backbone of Butte--and because of the support they provided, male dominance was possible, "allowed."

The self esteem of Butte and Anaconda women is low. Anything she does, she does because of something that has happened in the male dominated world. She doesn't set out to do it on her own.

Q: Does this breed an atmosphere where domestic violence is more possible?

Yes, Erin thinks so. You see that in climates where the man leaves to get work. The wife takes over, takes care of home repairs, car, etc, manages things. When he comes back, there is often a power struggle. In some families, violence starts there.

Example--a couple Erin worked with had been married 16 or 17 years. With the layoffs, the man went to Wyoming to work for six months. There had never been a history of any fighting. When he came back and he took control again, there was verbal abuse, and then physical abuse. What was striking to Erin in dealing with the was their total shock that this had happened. He called on the phone, said, I can't believe I did this. They were lucky enough to be open to outside intervention. In a domestic violence situation, there HAS to be outside intervention or it will just feed on itself and worsen.

Q: I have heard that much domestic violence occurs where one or both partners grew up with domestic violence.

This situation broke all the rules. You LEARN to be violent, and to accept violence. So many women who are abused have a history of child abuse or family violence growing up. They think, this is the family structure. And our society sanctions violence.

Statistically, studies have shown that intervention will occur when you see two men or two women fighting, or if a woman is being aggressive toward a man. But intervention drops way off if a man is 'disciplining' a woman. We had laws on animal abuse before laws for woman and child abuse. With agriculture, the woman and kids are viewed as property.

That is changing, but you still see in in school, on TV, in commercials.

Q: Is the increased drinking you mentioned earlier related to domestic violence?

Yes. In something like 75% of physical violence, drinking on one or more partners part has been involved. That doesn't cause violence, but it allows it to go on. You often see people who don't know where they lost control--it just snowballed. They went to have one drink; it turned into two, then four. They leave the bar and realize maybe that they spent the grocery money; an argument happens, snowballs.

Q: We are so much more aware of domestic violence now. Do you think that actual amount of it increased with the layoffs, or are we just more aware of a problem that has been there all along.

Erin doesn't think it increased with the layoffs. We see more of it, but there is now an awareness that something can be done. There are families which had no violence before and experience it because of financial pressures--but that family, deep down, might have always been prone to it.

Q: Statistic tell us that the financial situation in Butte is improving. Do you see that?

Yes. The case load at Safe Space is down. Yet the police report as many disturbance cases. In the last legislature, laws were passed that made the home a safer place, that took the abuser out of the home for a period of time. So some women don't need the shelter like they did before.

Now, layoffs aren't that much of a factor. People who have stayed here have established their patterns.

But you still hear some people talk in bars that they are laid off--and a lot of what makes some people successful in dealing with the job loss where others aren't is related to that attitude. 'I'm still laid off...I heard they are going to start mining.' The ones who can't accept that that stage of their life is over are the ones who have the hardest time. And they get a shot in the arm about every six months that things are going to change. The latest is Washington Corps announcing plans to start up.

Erin thinks that mining will never be the focus that it was when she was growing up. She hopes it isn't. The biggest difference will be difference in the unions. They have lost their stronghold. Unions have come full circle. When they first came to Butte, it was a struggle; they got stronger and stronger. But now they have come full circle. Not strong like they used to be. So many struggles with ARCO were based in past history. Erin doesn't think that can be rebuilt again. American society won't



rely on unions again to the degree it did in the past.

Q: Do you think that is good, bad, or neutral?

Unions gave members a cohesive group, and they got benefits. But they became too much of a control factor. They started out to give the worker the ability to control his job to some extent, to have a say so in wages and conditions. But in the end, the unions wound up being a control factor themselves. They traded one boss for another boss. Erin doesn't think that will ever happen again.

Q: This might be a good time to talk about your involvement with WHY, the group of miners' wives who organized during the strike in 1977 and again in 1980.

Erin wasn't the instigator of the group, but she became the focal point because she was willing to attach her name to it. During strikes, it was a scary time because people were afraid of retribution if they did anything.

Tape 2, Side B

Erin wasn't afraid of it because she hadn't grown up in a Company family. Wives started meeting because they were unhappy with the way the talks were going. They were being held far out of Montana, and they were very slow. She had grown up with the attitude, right or wrong, that if you were willing to say something, you should be willing to attach your name to it. The first year, WHY was real effective. Both the unions and the company were willing to talk. Once they knew who they were talking to--that we weren't radicals, just concerned people. We were only organized for about 2 1/2 weeks when the strike was settled. Jim Roberts and a man from the Company called Erin from the negotiating table in Spokane to say the strike was ended.

But Erin's husband was asked several times why he "couldn't control his wife." Erin's grandmother was very frightened during that time that her house would be burned or the kids kidnapped--there had been that sort of violence in the past, but not anymore.

In 80's, WHY didn't work as well. They tried to reestablish it, but it was a little different, right off the bat.

Q: Can you give examples of how it was effective in '77?

During a strike, the issues are funny--there are two different stories, two different sides. The copper workers didn't know what was holding up the negotiations; they didn't know if it was something that they were, in fact, willing to negotiate on. They weren't a part of the negotiations. We wanted more openness, more say so. In '77, WHY got that clarification. That was the impact. Our meetings weren't strictly women--few women came alone. WHY got good feedback from the men on what they were willing to give up. For instance, in the definition of jobs, job

classification. Men were willing to cross jurisdictional lines in certain situations. It had been past practice that teamsters were the only ones who could drive a truck. So, when they needed to move arc lights from one shovel to another, it had to be done in a pickup. Only the bosses had pickups. But to move the lights, a teamster would have to ride with a boss to move the lights. The Co thought that was ridiculous, and the men thought it was ridiculous, too. WHY gave hints to union leaders on what the men would give on. We weren't experts on wages and benefits, but we could communicate what the men were thinking; we could show that there were people out there, not just a nameless group--people who were scared, looking at months and months of a strike dragging on. In this town, you were always either preparing for or recovering from a strike.

Erin's ex-husband's name is Ray. They split in May of '82. He was laid off in '81. The layoff was a big factor in their splitting, but not the only one.

He was without a job for about a year. Then he went to work at the Park Royale. He is underemployed there. It hit him hard; it still has an effect. It's hard to think back on what could have been, compared to what it is now.

Q: How could the affects of shutdown been minimized?

Erin doesn't know. She feels that they didn't know the whole story when ARCO bought Anaconda. She thinks there was nothing we could have done to prevent the shutdown except years ago.

One of the lessons of it is what you can do to prepare a company for layoffs--in terms of social support, etc. The community, workers, govt--all reacted rather than acted. We were just caught. The whole world economic structure changed. When women started working in the pit, they were the first to go with seniority. It should have been that way. Seniority works. But the whole women's movement suffered from the downward economic spiral.

Q: Are there any benefits to the shutdown?

It made the community look at other things. The picture of Butte is changing, and that's good. Whether it will ever break from that mining town picture completely, Erin doesn't know. But many new people and businesses have come to town. And the community is stronger as a result.

Butte still suffers from the spinoff of the shutdown. The tax structure is hurt. It may take another five or ten years before we rebound. Erin hopes that when Washington Corporation comes in, it comes in not as THE employer. The medical community has grown and flourished.

The Company had a large payroll--which made community service easier to fund. But you get stalemated; you get to rely on it.

Families that either stayed together or split found new directions, strength. If Ray hadn't been laid off, Erin would never have developed a career of her own. It's too bad that they couldn't do it as a married woman.

Other families came out this side of things a lot stronger.

Q: How has it affected your kids?

The boys have suffered from financial problems, from having parents who had to struggle. So many families became part of Anaconda--fathers worked there and the sons did. Brett and Eric won't do that--they have no inclination to work for ACM or Washington. They've seen the frustrations of short money.

Brett has gone to three grade schools. Two were shutdown. Madison school shut down directly because of tax shortfalls. It was a neighborhood, family school; having to leave it had a big effect. It wouldn't have been closed if the Company didn't shut down. Brett is a junior in high school, wants to follow a military career--he is joining this spring on the delayed entry program. Eric still wants to be a hockey player, fireman, astronaut--typical 7th grader.

Q: Do you think Brett is interested in the military because of the security there?

Erin says, "It's secure, You won't get laid off, you can go as far as you want to go with the initiative you have. Also, the control. The fact that the military person--for awhile he talked about becoming part of the special forces, I saw that as a definite tie in that he had lost control of his life through the divorce, through the layoff--life happened to him and he had no control of it. And by God, one way he was going to control his life once he graduated...I think that is probably one of the things that has enticed him into the military."

Erin adds, "I become very unnerved. The boys say, "Mother's freaking out again," when I see the Vietnam era glorified because that whole macho structure seems to be fighting to be in control of our lives again. And coming from a macho oriented town, I have some real problems with that. I spend a lot of time at war with myself over the fact that I am raising two sons in a male-dominated world. They are both hockey players which is about the extreme as far as the macho male violent sport."

For awhile, it was accepted to be a feminist--but the more that happened, the more the male dominated world had to react. For awhile, even TV shows were taking a stab at role reversal; then all of a sudden we are back to Rambo, Miami Vice. She sees it in the boys--they like the macho-control, the violence.

Erin can remember, her senior year in high school, when her first high school class mate was killed in Viet Nam. It hurt terribly, was terribly sad. She is terribly uncomfortable with the

revision of Viet Nam. It wasn't like that.

But the new generation has lost control. So many families have broken up. Divorce has sky rocketed. It will be interesting to see the results.