Howie: If you were a boy, born and raised in Anaconda you were assured a couple of gifts. Somebody would buy you a lunch bucket and a thermos and you could go down on the road, the hiring hall was down where the tipplet was, and hire out and within three or four you would go to work on the smelter.

Denise: And what were the entry-level jobs?

Howie: I went to work up there; in fact, I went to work up there in February of 1955. I graduated from high school in June of 1955. I only went to school a half a day. They had torn the high school down and along about January, I turned eighteen in October, and along about January Jackie Saltenburger, Ronny Hanson and I got a case of the smarts and went down and applied for jobs at the smelter. We told them that we could only work afternoon shift. They wanted to know why we could only work afternoon shift and we told them we were students. They took it for granted that we were School of Mine students. And we went to work. And we went to work in the loading station loading phosphate; they only loaded on afternoon shift. And the three of us went to work and the three people that were working there when we come thought they died and went to heaven. They were all in their late fifties, early sixties and they got these three young kids and we would tell them get out of our way old men or we'll bury ya. And they would just step aside and let us go. You had four cars you had to load, we would load them four cars in probably three and a half to four hours, and then we would just terrorize people.
Ah, graduated in June, on June 3rd. The following Monday I joined the carpenters union and went to work for Eck Construction.

Denise: So that would be Ted Eck's...?

Howie: Father.

Denise: Father, okay.

Howie: Actually, his grandfather, old Theodore Eck and he lived right over here on Fourth Street.

Denise: Okay.

Howie: And I worked there all summer, part into the winter. Ah, the winter of '55-'56 was a terrible winter, there was no work. So I went back to work on the smelter in the bull gang on the mill. And they would take you and you would work on the bull gang and they would farm you out. Well, they farmed me out to a straight afternoon shift job and I, that wasn't good for having a girlfriend and a job so, and days off in the middle of the week and she was in high school. So everyday at noon I would go up on the smelter, go to the carpenter shop and ruin Archie McPhail's lunch. Ask him "Are you hiring any carpenters today?" and "Are you going to hire an apprentice?" That took me exactly one week to get hired. And I worked then up until Good Friday 1962 when I was laid off.

Denise: Were there a lot of carpenters working at the smelter?

Howie: When I went to work, I was the even 100th carpenter. Between '56 and '62 there was 198 at one time.

Denise: What did you guys do there?

Howie: They did all their own construction, they didn't hire contractors like they did in the later years, we did it all. In '62 they started laying off and when they got down to me, I was the 45th carpenter that got laid off, that is what there was when I got laid off.

Denise: I guess I always thought that everyone who worked there was like a miner kind of mill type of person.

Howie: No, all kinds of crafts. If there was 100 carpenters, there had to be pretty close to that is ironworkers, probably that many pipe fitters, that many or more electricians. There was two day shifts. One started at 7:30 in the morning and got off at 3:00; at 7:00 and got off at 3:00. We started at 7:30 and got off at 4:00. We ate our lunch on our own time.

Denise: Wow. Were all the workers up there always union?

Howie: Oh yeah.

Denise: Since it started is was? Were you guys all under one union or you were the carpenters union and…?

Howie: The carpenters belonged to the carpenters and we were represented by what they called the Metal Trades. And when we negotiated contracts and stuff the Metal Trades did it.

Denise: So, did it do it for all the unions there?

Howie: Just the trades and then the smelter men, when I first went to work up there, it was the Steel Workers. And they had an election and the Steel Workers went out and Mine Mill came in.

Denise: And what was the difference between them?

Howie: They, they ran the smelter. And in the '50s, in the '50s there was, it fluctuated between 2400 and 2600 men working full-time on that smelter.

Denise: There doesn't seem like there is that big of an area up there.

Howie: But they were running three shifts.

Denise: Yeah, but MRI now, if you see that from the air it is huge and there is like 300 people there.

Howie: But, you got to remember that was before the computer.

Denise: Well, yeah.

Howie: And if you go over to the concentrator in Butte and look, one man can sit at the panel and punch buttons and run it. When I worked in the Mill, even with the trades, there was rod men and there was aggidare people and there was all these people plus there was a clean up crew that kept the mess down.

Denise: Oh wow. When they did stuff up there, you were talking about phosphate; did they have a lot of chemicals up there?

Howie: Oh, terrible. The Anaconda Company was the first company in the world to ever float copper. Would bring copper to the surface in iron floats. The stuff that they floated it with I don't know the technical name for it but we called it "Dead Horse" because that is just about as good as it smelled. And it was horrible stuff and back then you could never ever get anyone to tell you what the harm was. They not only, I hate to use the word that they lied to us, but they did. It wasn't until the 1970's that we got passed through the Legislature the Right to Know. The Right to Know what we were working with. It was a terrible battle and they fought us tooth and nail. They would use the excuses that we can't tell what you are working with because it will give you trade secrets. We would say we don't care what your trade secrets are we want to know how do we protect ourselves from this. And down here on the flats, down there, there was a building just as you come in, that had been the acid plant. They gutted that out and they started to do some beryllium. A guy by the name of, god he lived up on Birch St, I can see his face. But anyway he was burying beryllium down on the slump ponds and busted a barrel of it and it came over the top of the Cat that he was running. Roy Thompson was his name. It took about six months and one day they noticed the Cat sitting up on top the slump ponds, I didn't, but they could see that it was running but it didn't move for two or three hours so they went up and he was dead. And he died not knowing what had happened. That was when we finally got, I was working as a carpenter then, a carpenters business agent, and we lobbied the legislature, and I went and spoke several times, and I told that story. They would stand there and say oh no, that isn't true. But the truth of the matter is that they killed Mr. Thompson.

Denise: Well, didn't they see, weren't people getting sick?

Howie: Oh, yeah. There was a guy; he ended up as a union official for the Mine Mill. He started out, his name was Tommy McGuire, born and raised here in Anaconda. And had a big mouth and would raise hell and his big mouth and raising hell finally got him elected as business agent for the Mine Mill union. He was so good at his job that the Mine Mill International came in and got him. And they moved him down to California and made an organizer out of him. He got down there, he got deathly ill. They got him

in the hospital and stuff and they're checking him over and finally there is a whole team of doctors and this one doctor said to him, where are you from? Well, Anaconda Montana. What did you do there? I worked for the Anaconda Company. Where did you work? I worked in the arsenic refinery. They got to checking and he had become addicted to arsenic. They had to put him on arsenic and give him arsenic tablets and such.
A lot of people it killed. Ben Harris, I can remember when we would go to Ben's house and Dick Harris, he just retired, Dick he was a social worker, he worked for the county. But we would go to his house and if we had dates his dad would stick a piece of cloth up his nose and pull it out the other side. He had no bones or nothing up in his nose. He had worked in the arsenic for a hundred years. If you worked in the arsenic, as a carpenter if we would go into the arsenic we got 75 cents more a day to go in the arsenic. They would tell you that arsenic wouldn't hurt you. In fact Marcus Daly and Clark used to maintain that the arsenic in the air gave the women in Anaconda rosy cheeks. Well, it probably did, it was eating their hide off.

Denise: You would honestly think that people would have had fingers falling off into whatever they were making up there and chunks of skin and stuff.

Howie: You know, what has went on, and if you have read the papers, what went on in Libby isn't strange to Anaconda. They did the same thing here. They would come and their doctors would com out. You know I am old enough to remember the Cigarette Act. Cigarettes wouldn't hurt you and that if you were an up and coming woman you smoked this brand, see? Today...more doctors smoked Camels than any other brand, I remember that ad. And so, they lied to us. They absolutely lied to us. They did the same thing with the company. It wasn't until you pushed them into a corner. If the Smelter would have kept on running, they had in fact, when the Smelter went down; they had just built all new change houses up there. And you were going to come to work in the morning you could go dressed just like you are now. You would put the clothes they issued on when you went to work. When you came home, came off shift, you would go into the change houses, you would take off them clothes, take a shower, in a separate room, go into the other change house put your clothes and go home. That is what was going to happen.

Denise: And that was going to remedy all the arsenic problems and all...

Howie: Now, now wait a minute. Not only that, men were packing arsenic home. In their clothes, in their, you know. And that is what they did in Libby, they packed that vermiculite home.

Denise: Were there any women that worked at the smelter?

Howie: Yeah. If you want to go interview one her name is Katie Dewing. She worked at the Park Café for one hundred and fifty years. One of your dad and I's favorite people in the whole... I just love Katie.

Denise: It used to be a treat to get to go and have hot chocolate with him in the morning.

Howie: Oh, yeah, because I just love Katie you know. And she was fun. And Katie worked on the smelter during the war.

Denise: And what did she do? What did women do at the Smelter?

Howie: Oh they couldn't, they wouldn't let them into any of the trades of course. Because they weren't smart enough to do that. But they did the, you know they worked in every department on the Smelter. They did whatever it took. There was a whole slew of them. And they wouldn't get away with it today. When the war was over and the soldiers started coming home the women were let go.

Denise: For no reason, just because the guys were back and needed jobs?

Howie: The guys were back and they were no longer and it wasn't lady work. At the same time when I went to school, and I went to the Prescott School down here in the Eleanor Apartments, and married women could not teach.

Denise: Really?

Howie: They lost their job. I had three first grade teachers. The first one, Ms. Keating, dropped dead in school.

Denise: Did you have anything to do with it?

Howie: No. No, it shocked me plum to death. She went out, bent over to get a drink, and boom fell over dead. I can remember how terrified I was, I was only in the first grade and we had to walk by her and they told us that Ms. Keating was sick. As young as I was I knew if they covered your head you were more than just sick. And so the next teacher was Ms. Malloy. Ms. Malloy got pregnant. Now you can't have pregnant woman teaching kids.

Denise: And she wasn't married?

Howie: Well, she got married. But all our mothers were home, probably pregnant, but you couldn't have a pregnant teachers so... For the rest of the school year we got Mrs.VanEllenstien. But she was just a sub. The minute school was out that year she didn't teach again. And the next year, I can't remember who the next first grade teacher was that we got but I was out of her class. We were the first and the last sixth grade class to come out of the Prescott School. There had never been one before then and there was never one after that because they closed the school down. And that was because they couldn't get teachers, there was a shortage. I had Ms. Olsen, and she is still alive. And I ran into her...

Denise: Oh my god.

Howie: God yes, I ran into her here oh, a year ago, and I said Ms. Olsen how are you? And she said who are you? And I said, you don't remember your favorite student from sixth grade at the Prescott School? That narrowed it down and she said I remember all of my students, I just can't see them. The minute I told her who I was she knew me and here she is almost blind.

Denise: Well, you are kind of unforgettable.

Howie: But you know, just to show you how times have changed. At that same time a married woman could not work in a grocery store or like Penney's or the bank or any of them places. They got married and…my mother lost her job when she married my dad.

Denise: So basically if you were a married woman at that time, plan on staying home.

Howie: There was a reason you were staying home, you couldn't get a job.

Denise: You couldn't really work anywhere?

Howie: They couldn't hire you.

Denise: How many people were in Anaconda at that time that there was a big enough population of males to work everywhere?

Howie: Oh, you know I don't remember how many, the best years that we had we probably had sixteen thousand in the county, and that is counting Anaconda and the surrounding area.

Denise: How many do you think there are now?

Howie: Ah, I would say there is maybe sixty five hundred in town and pretty close to nine thousand in the county.

Denise: And that is probably counting Georgetown?

Howie: Yeah, around the lake but you can only count part way around because part of it is in Granite County.

Denise: Now, you said the Right to Know came about it the '70s?

Howie: Um huh.

Denise: The unions were probably a big part of that, right?

Howie: A big part of it. We had to ah, the first time, it took us a couple of legislature, the first time we packed it, it did not go through. And it was the second time, and at the same time we were pushing a bill… You know they walked in here and they shut the

Smelter down and nobody in town knew. Including the supervision on the Smelter. You know, ah Stokke, did not know they were going to shut that Smelter down. He was as dumfounded as anybody. They can't do the now.

Denise: Yeah

Howie: We got that passed and it took a couple of times to pass. If they are going to shut a place like the Smelter down you have to give a six-month warning.

Denise: Yeah, Les was working at MRI when it closed down so we went through all of that. The Warn Act, right?

Howie: Yeah, and they just came and did it. And you know, I packet petitions for people to sign that. And I was unbelievable the people that wouldn't sign that petition. In fact, one was a fireman and he was a cousin of mine, and refused sign it. He said no, I can't do that you know I said it would a have made a whole lot of difference had he been working on the Smelter and lost his job. And that is what came about you know when they went to close Galen.

Denise: Did the Smelter shut down periodically from strikes and such?

Howie: Did the Smelter? Oh, yeah, yeah.

Denise: Very often?

Howie: Oh, every three to six years. Depending on what was going on. But we never had a strike that the Company didn't want.

Denise: Really?

Howie: It was better for us to go on strike than not. To give you an example, back in the '70s, the early '70s and they were doing all that remodeling on the Smelter, and of course I was the business agent. All of the sudden it came to the point where they couldn't produce. We had the copper wheels tore out of there and we were all pretty... So they were into negotiations and they just made negotiations so miserable that the workers chose to go on strike. So, by going on strike, they didn't have to pay unemployment. I workers had said no we are just going to keep negotiating, if they would have laid people off then they would have had to. What they did was they went on strike. If you happened to be a trade for the Company, the carpenters, the electricians, the ironworkers, you never missed a shift.

Denise: So if one union went on strike, you all didn't have to strike?

Howie: No, they'd give us permits. So you would go up there and you would get a six-day permit and you would go and work for six days. At the end of six days they would call you out for the next six days. And they were hading out these permits. And they

were up there working and doing all these things to get the place ready to open up. I will never forget, we were at a meeting one night, a union meeting one night, and somebody said when is the strike going to be over? And this little carpenter was sitting there and he said in four weeks. Well, how do you know, his name was Lloyd Martz, we called him Unc. He said we will be done with the copper wheel in four weeks. He said you can't build a fire place with the fire in it. And four weeks later the strike was over, the copper wheel was in operation, new one was put in operation and the strike was all over and everybody went back to work and there was copper.

Denise: I had always thought that it was something like that and there was different unions involved, if one union went on strike, the other unions honored it?

Howie: That is the way it should have been. And that is the way it was at one time. And we would all go on strike. The carpenters, everybody went on strike at the same time. They wormed it around someplace and I never was for it. But we could get this repair work and stuff done.

Denise: Because it was better for the company.

Howie: Um huh.

Denise: The Anaconda Company controlled a lot, even with the, throughout Montana like with the legislature and stuff?

Howie: Oh they did, you know, they would, they made sure that they hand picked people for the legislature and things like this and they packed the bill that the company wanted.

Denise: Do you think that the Right to Know Act passed in the 70's and the smelters shut down for good in like '79 or '80.

Howie : In '80.

Denise: I vaguely remember enough that they had the march, and I remember being in it with my dad and his mechanic, Dave Blaz. There was actually a picture in the newspaper of my dad, my brother, and Dave and I was on my dad's shoulders.

Howie: When they did that I refused to march. Because that was nothing, that was done by the big newspapers, orchestrated that so that they could get these guys and they could take pictures and put them on the TV back East. And they came through town and they showed pictures of business' that were closing and they took pictures of building that had been vacant for years. This is what happened the plants are going down these stores are closing. And they took pictures, I will never forget, they took pictures of Colonel Sanders' Chicken.

Denise: When it was down, the Kentucky Fried Chicken at the east end of town?

Howie: Kentucky Fried Chicken. That business closed six weeks before they ever announced the plant closure. They showed this and I will never forget, the day after the plant closure the swarmed the Park Café and have you got anything to say? You know, wanted everybody to say something. I had a reporter ask me what happened and I we were a one horse town and our horse died.

Denise: That is true. That was basically the major thing that was ever here. The city was built around it.

Howie: Due to that all them jobs, I always refer to them for lack of a better thing, I call them grass root jobs. For every grass root job that we have, the spin off of that is probably two or three jobs. Because that takes care of the barber and that takes care of the bar owner and it takes care of the beauticians and it takes care of the waitress' at the Park Café and all of them and they were just secondary jobs. And everybody, the barbers were all union, all of the girls that work at the Park Café and all of them were all union. It wasn't uncommon to have in some house four or five workers, maybe four or five unions, everybody belonged.

Denise: Do you think at one point there was maybe too many unions? For too may different things? Or did they all co-exist pretty well together?

Howie: I think what we do as unions, we have a tendency that when we have nobody else to fight with, we fight with each other. I think that if we, and it may come, workers of the world. Workers of the world believe in one union. If you worked you belong to workers of the world and if you fooled with one worker you fooled with them all. I am not entirely sure that I believe in that theory but I think that all of the building trades, the plumbers, the electricians, the laborers, the carpenters, anybody that has anything to do with building should be in one union. I feel that you should take all young kids in when they come in to join this union, they all join as laborers and you teach them to work. Six, seven months down the line you look at them and say hey, do you want to stay a laborer or do you want to become a carpenter or an iron worker? Of course, whether that ever happens, you've got tot remember that all these internationals protect their dung in the wall so these big wheelers and dealers. The President of the carpenters union makes $400,000.00 a year plus expenses. I don't have much problem with that but the ones that I have problems with is the head of the hotel employees/restaurant employees probably makes that much money. And he makes it of the backs of minimum wage workers and you know I have problems with that. I have problems with taking advantage of people that are least apt to defend themselves. I have a problem with that.
Over the years I have been outspoken a lot. I took our international on because they fired one of my carpenters out of the Job Corps and they fired him because he was sick and they didn't give him an out. They just come up there one day and they fired him. They fired him because he was an alcoholic but they didn't give him an out. So, he happened to be a personal friend so that made me a little madder and I had talked to them oh, maybe about three weeks before that about him. I said you know, he is not a dumb man, you come down to Anaconda and we'll go up to his house and sit down and we'll lay it

out on the line we'll say this is what you are going to do and if he don't do a thing you can fire him but you got to give him an out and they didn't. In fact, it all happened the day of the plant closure and just wasn't right. He come into the office afterward and Friday and said that he had been fired and everything. I said well I got to think about this. So on Monday, I called him and I said what are you doing? He said I am staying home feeling sorry for myself. I said oh, okay. Stay home, don't go drink, stay home. So that afternoon I went up, I got some help when I went up, and I sat down and I said well Dick why did they fire you? And he said well, they told me I didn't know what I was doing. I said you worked there for almost twenty years and you didn't know what you were doing? I said lets can it, why did they fire you? Well, I drink too much. I said did you ever think about quitting? Every goddamn morning. I said well do you want your job back? You can get your job back but there are somethings you are going to have to do. What do I have to do? You've got to go to treatment, you can't just go tot AA you've got to go to treatment. Oh, I can't go until next week my wife is back in New York. I said I can pick your wife up, you can go today. So he went into Butte, went into treatment and I picked his wife up off the plane. He went through 28 days and they still wouldn't hire him back. So one thing led to another and I wrote a letter. Still didn't get no answer. One day I picked up the carpenter magazine and was thumbing through it and our general treasurer had a drinking problem and it outlined what we had done for him. I said well if that is good enough for our general treasurer it is good enough for Dick. So I filed charges through the state. I could have filed for unfair labor practice and I could have went to the NORB but I chose to go through the state because they didn't make a lot of waves. We had a hearing, we won. By this time he was off six months. So they ended up they had to pay him six months back wages, they had to make him whole again as far as vacation time and sick leave and the whole thing they had to make him whole. The little rat that came in, two of them, came down to my office that evening and the one said, and he is just a little guy, he said well I want you to know, you have can as far in this organization as you will ever go. I was standing in the door way and I said I want you to know, you are the dumbest man I ever met in my life. What do you mean? I said well first of all I am twice your size, you are in my office and I stand in the only hole, you've got to come over the top of me to get out. That is what makes me think you are dumb. Well, he was right, that is as far as I went. When Bob Corcoran retired and they wanted to know who should be the new executive secretary he said Howard, he is the one that has been training, he is the one. They went right over the top of me. So he was right, I had gone as far as I would and that is because I had field suit against them. I was talking to his wife, Dick's wife, here not too long ago, Dick has passed away since, and she said are you ever sorry? I said no, no I am not. Because I was right, I was right with what I have done. They were the ones hat were wrong. And as it was it worked out all right anyway. It worked out. Is everything the way it is suppose to be? No, no it isn't.

Denise: In anything there is always going to be corruption. Usually more at the top level than the bottom.

Howie: But arguing is good for workers. Because without them, I look back at the things that were gotten. There is an old boy in Butte, he has since passed away, his name was Mike O'Rourke. I knew his son rather well and his son is seventy-five years old now, but

old Mike used to tell me stories. They got through negotiations, on the Smelter we called them change houses, in the mines they were called dries. Fought like hell, they fought to get these change houses and dries and they got them through negotiations. But they couldn't force it. They had to go through the legislature ad get them through the legislature to force them to build them. And Mr. O'Rourke and a guy from Anaconda by the name of Frankovich, now I didn't know him but he was a carpenter and I worked with his son who has long since been dead, they went to Helena twice to the legislature to get that bill passed. That they put dries in the mines and change houses at the Smelter.

Denise: Don't you think without the unions that they would still have all the arsenic and all the chemicals? Everybody would still be dying form the beryllium and nobody would know why.

Howie: Well, it was the union, the union in Libby that brought down all of the smell and everything on them and it started after the plant closure when all these people were getting sick with asbestos. Nobody knew what was wrong. Even the hospital lied to these people. They didn't want it to come out what was really going on because hey, you and I have got to come and move in there. The real estate people were against these workers. I just love this gal, Gracie oh what the heck was her name? I worked with her husband; her husband was a union rep for the laborers. I told her husband one day we had the wrong one as the business agent, we should have had your wife. He never worked, her husband never ever worked at WR Grayson and yet he has asbestosis. Her dad died with asbestosis. And one of the things, I was just amazed when I found this out, my sister has a little friend, she is a missionary in their church, born and raised in Libby, WR Grayson came to the Libby school and fed the kids with a spoon, fed them vermiculite, to prove to them that it wouldn't hurt them. Can y imagine? That would be like feeding you a little bit of arsenic. Milo Manning said to me one day there is no arsenic west of Main St. And I said who are you trying to kid? Go tear a roof off. When I tore my dads roof off, it just flew. I can't get in it. If I get in it all the sudden I break out in hives and I think it is because I have been in it too much. Has it hurt me? Hell if I didn't live in the arsenic I would live to be one hundred and ten. Some people it really does a number on, some people it doesn't. But that beryllium, it did a number on anyone that had anything to do with.

Denise: Was that here for very long?

Howie: That beryllium plant was here for probably ten years.

Denise: So in the grand scheme of the smelter is wasn't?

Howie: They buried it all down through the valley. When we were building the concentrator in Butte in the '60s and the slurry building that we built here, they were burying it in the valley then all the time.

Denise: What do you think the reason is that the Smelter stayed closed once they got the copper mine going again? Why not smelt it locally instead of shipping it out?

Howie: It stayed closed because we had an eighty-year-old smelter that had nothing but cosmetic things done to it for one hundred years. It became advantageous to ship the concentrates to Japan and other places. That plant foreclosure hit on one day, and we were on strike when it hit. I tell this story myself. We were in negotiations with the company and the whole works and I go to the post office to pick up my mail and I run into people saying, is this all the better you can do? What the hell you doing in negotiations. Maybe we should get someone else to go over and do our negotiating. The next day when that hit, the next day I went to the post office and someone said well, you finally did it. You got too much. The Smelter is going to close. So it all depends on how you want to look at it.