cards

Jim Killoy, former machinist for the Anaconda Company, interviewed by Teresa Jordan at the Butte-Silver Bow Archives, April 10, 1986.

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

Jim was born and raised here. His father, his grandfather, and his greatgrandfather were all miners. His grandfather came to Butte from the Costock Lode in 1884. His great grandfather came with the gold rush to Comstock from Ireland. Jim's father died five years ago. Jim has a brother, Ed, still in Butte; a sister, Marie, in Helena.

Jim was discouraged from going in the mine. His father said, 'don't go in the mines.' Jim went to college for a year, but he tired of being broke. He was only going to work for the Company six months, get enough money to get a car, go back to school. But he never went back. He started with the Company in 1958.

He worked a short time as days pay. Then he apprenticed as a machinist underground. He apprenticed at the Berkely Pit. Apprenticeship took four years. He overhauled diesel engines, did electrical work, hydraulic work, rear ends, underground eqpt, etc--worked on everything that needed working on.

Q: Why did you choose being a machinist over being a miner?

The prestige, not having to break your back. Jim's father died of silicosis, as did his grandfather and greatgrandfather. Jim didn't think about that, though. He started in the mines 25 years ago; his father was healthy then. If he had seen his father as sick as he was the last three years of his life, he might have thought about it, but he didn't. When they were kids, everybody's dad had the Con.

He worked four years on the hill as days pay before he apprenticed. He apprenticed mostly at the Pit. He also worked at the Kelly, and at LHD, a small mine caving operation off the side of the pit, where the old St. lawrence, Anaconda mines were. They went in at the four or five hundred foot level.

Jim likes mining, says it gets in your blood. He doesn't really know why. Maybe it's the macho thing.

Q: What was it like underground? What sort of colors, for instance, would you see when your light hit the walls?

Dirty yellow--like the mine dumps. There were pretty colors in the veins--blue, grey, green, red.

Q: What was the temper underground, the attitude of the work place?

Jim doesn't really know. He just put in his eight hours.

Q: Was there a different sort of comaraderie underground than on surface?

Jim doesn't know; being a machinist is different than being a miner. Machinist was paid a wage, not like the contract miner, who wanted to top the board. Being the top man on the board, it was a macho thing. A man named Kovacich topped the board a lot. Jim thinks his first name was Joe.

Q: Was there danger working as a machinist?

Yes, there is always danger around big equipment. Just being in the pit was dangerous--danger of tires blowing, of a truck slipping and running you over. Just going down the mine was dangerous. The work wasn't so dangerous; it was the place.

Q: Did you have any close calls?

Yes, he had been working at the station on 400 at the Neversweat; they came out and about 10 minutes later, the whole station caved in. He missed it by ten minutes.

Q: In rodeo, for instance, sometimes a really good bull rider will suddenly become afraid--and that's the end of his bull riding. Does fear ever set in in mining?

Yes. Jim worked with a guy who had mined underground 15 years. He was in a wreck in a cage; he wouldn't go back underground.

Q: What was the attitude of other people toward someone who became afraid.

It was accepted; no problem.

Jim was born in 1940; started with the Company in 1958; was laid off in 1983; worked 25 years. He has retirement coming, but will have to wait until he's 65 to get it. The Company paid no severence benefits; and just last night, they told the unions again that they would pay none. The unions are talking about taking the Company to court. Jim doesn't know. The Company's position is that the shut down was temporary, a suspension.

Q: How was the Company to work for?

Pretty good most of the time. It didn't have much to do with the Company; it had to do with the boss you worked under. Policy was mostly up to the boss. A bad boss made your life miserable.

Q: Was it any different working for ARCO?

No, not where Jim worked.

Q: Pipefitters, for instance, found more of their work being contracted out. Was that the case with machine work?

No, not where Jim was. The Berekely Garage did about 99% of the work; they only cotracted out when they were swamped. They overhauled five engines every two weeks. Sometimes, especially at the end when they were pulling the trucks out of service, there might be 20 engines sitting there; then they might contract some out.

Q: Did you like the work?

It was interesting to be learning all those things. And you had to keep up with it; diesel engines changed every couple months. It was good work.

Q: Did you see the total shutdown coming?

"I saw it go from when they shut all the mines down and they started cutting down on the pit; they closed the big pit and they went into the little pit, and I kept thinking, oh, when's it going to end, but I never ever thought that I'd hear them, that day they called us over and said, 'hey, this is it.' I didn't believe it. I thought that that new pit was our savior. You know when a place runs for a hundred and some years and your father and your grandfather both retire from there and you already got 25 years and you think you're going to retire too..."

Q: Can you remember how you felt when they made that announcement?

"Yeah, sick. I couldn't believe it. That's hard to do. I think if I was 20 years old when it happened, I wouldn't have taken it so bad. But when you get up where I'm at, you hate to leave town, and boy, there's no work around here."

Ann, Jim's wife, was not working outside the home at that time. They have three daughters, Laurie, who is 23 now; Jeannie, who is 21; and Susie, who is 18. They were at home at that time.

Jim got no trade readjustment act money He did get unemployment, $160 a week; and company SUB (supp. unemployment) of $50/wk. He had been making $520 a week.

Two days after he was laid off, he went to Idaho and worked construction in Ketchum until Fall. He came back, collected unemployment for the winter. The next summer, he worked for the same company in Wyoming, around Cody and Clark, where 'jackrabbits wear canteens wrapped around their necks.' He worked there six or seven months. He tried to get home every weekend; it was about 340 miles each way. He was injured; a back hoe hit him. He has a permanent disability now; his back.

Q: Did you experience depression with your lay off?

No, because he had the offer of a job a month before he was laid off. He had a friend from Billings who worked for the company in Idaho; Jim had been told that as soon as he was laid off, he could come to work. The Anaconda Company told them right after Christmas that they were going to be laid off, but they didn't know when. (The final layoff came in June).

Q: You had spent time at home before, during strikes. Was this similar?

No, strikes are different. They will end; tomorrow or the next day, you will be back to work. But this was different. You have no faith you will be back to work. On construction, Jim ran Cat, and did mechanical work. It was a non-union outfit. The wages didn't compare with what he made here; he made the same as he did in Butte, but he was working 50 to 80 hours a week, and there were no benefits. Benefits here ran something like a third more than your pay.

Q: Did you think the shutdown was temporary, that you would go back to work on the Hill?

Yes.

Tape 1, Side B

At first the Company said that the suspension was just until the price of Copper got better; he thought they would start up again.

Commuting was the worst thing Jim ever had to do. If he had it to do again, he would move, but the problem with construction is that you end up moving all the time.

Q: Did you consider changing careers?

Yes; he took the test in boiler engineering and passed it; he thought of other things. But there's no work around here.

Q: What was your family's response to the lay off?

They didn't hurt too badly. Jim never missed a pay check and besides, his kids worked. It was hardest on Ann and on him. It was probably hardest on Ann, because she had to listen to Jim.

Jim can't work now with his disability; it's frustrating. He never thought he would be retired at the age of 46.

Q: What would you like to have seen the Company do?

They could have offered more people work. They have work all over the country; yet, they only offered work to a few salaried workers.

Jim wishes they had been fair, had said that it was a <u>shutdown</u> instead of a suspension. More would have left before they were

too broke to move. You have money when you are first laid off; a year or two later, you are broke. But they kept stringing people along.

Q: What was your family's attitude toward the idea of moving from Butte?

Jim's wife hates Butte; she would have moved. The daughters said they wouldn't have gone anyway. It would be hard for Jim to move. He is so involved with Butte history; it would be hard for him to live elsewhere?

Q: Why are you so interested in Butte history?

Jim doesn't know. He used to walk up Anaconda Road to meet his dad at the Mountain View mine; his father used to tell him the names of all the mines. He just always liked it. Then when they started with the pit, he wanted to take pictures of things before they tore it all up.

Q: Was your family affected by the relocation that took place to allow the pit? What was your attitude toward those things being torn down?

Jim's family wasn't moved for the Pit. He never thought too much about the pit. He used to listen to people he worked with who didn't want to move. Others, though, did.

Q: Was the settlement the Company gave people fair?

People Jim knew were happy with the settlement.

Q: You have been working with Al Hooper for 16 years collecting Butte History. Can you talk about what all you've done?

They have collected photographs, they have every book written about Butte, they have mining maps--anything that pertains to mining. They each have their own collection, and they work with the mining museum.

Jim tries to write down everything he learns. He has photographs of 227 mines; he is still missing close to 200. A lot of those were just prospect holes; they never pulled out enough ore to pay for what they spent. But there were about 150 fairly good sized mines in Butte.

Q: Do you remember the Butte Forward movement when the Company discussed moving the Uptown and mining there? What did you think of it?

He thought it was a good idea. Butte needs jobs, and he never could see buildings putting people out of work. And he loves the old buildings, but people need to work.

Q: Do you think, in the end, it would have made any difference?

Jim doesn't think it would have made a difference, because he doesn't think ARCO bought Butte to mine it. The oil companies were rolling in money and they needed some place to hide it. Once they had enough hid, they didn't need Anaconda anymore. He doesn't think that union concessions or better management were the issues; Anaconda just wanted out.

Q: The reasons cited for the shutdown are usually price of copper, price of labor, and international competition. What do you think?

Competition hurt, "but the price of labor didn't hurt it. "Everybody says it did, but if you go and look at any of these other mines in the United States, they paid more money than Butte did. I don't know. I don't really think it had much to do with it. If you look back a year, two years before they shut the thing down, the price of copper was at 52 cents but they didn't shut it down. We lost the barge up at the big pond up there, it sunk, and they had to shut the concentrator down and it froze, and they didn't shut it down. It was all at the same time. Why didn't they shut it down? The big pumping barge that was up on the lake up there that recirculated the water to the concentrator, and it sunk, it sunk into 40 feet of water. It's a building about the size of this thing we're in."

Jim thinks it wsn't all management's fault, either. They had some good management. ARCO just didn't want to run it. In Wyoming, ARCO mines coal near Gilette, and pays $5/hr more than here--and that's the same company.

Q: Are you angry about that?

"Yeah, I am. I think if the Anaconda Company had owned it, we'd never been down right now, unless they went belly up because they were broke. But I don't think they'd ever shut it down because the price of copper was what it was. Look at Phelps Dodge, they keep running even with scab labor. They had all the trouble, they had to have guards guard them and everything going to work, and they didn't shut down.

Q: Was there anything more that the union could have done?

They might have offered more concessions, but they gave them productivity, flexibility, everything they asked for. ARCO never went to Helena, asked for a tax break like Dennis Washington did. They didn't try all the options. They wanted to shut down.

Q: Some people have expressed frustration with the International, with the Big Table bargaining. Did you share that?

Every mining company has different problems; Jim thinks they should not be thrown into one hat and all negotiated together.

Q: What was the turning point when things started to go bad here?

The price of copper was down, and there were other problems. But there were labor problems when Anaconda was running it. Jim thinks that the worker probably gained more through the big table than through one-company negotiations.

Q: Some young miners I have talked with thought that the 1980 strike was unnecessary, that conditions were pretty good. What did you think?

Jim thinks that every strike is unnecessary. "I always figure, lets work and negotiate, that's my theory." [Jim made a remark he wanted erased; I turned down the mikes to erase the remark; didn't get the mikes turned back up when we began taping again so there is no tape for remainder of interview]

In 25 years, Jim lost three years and 2 months of work to strikes, and that is not counting the wildcat strikes. He says that you didn't save for your kids ewducation or a vacation; you saved for a strike.

Q: I've heard the saying that you don't strike to benefit yourself; you strike for the next guy to come along.

Jim says yes; another saying is that every job they had at work was 100 years old.

Q: Some peple say that Butte's labor reputation hurts the town. Do you agree?

No. The labor reputation doesn't affect anyone now; 1/2 the town is non-union.

McDonalds coming in signalled the end of strong union era. Jim thinks McDonald's is good; anything that comes in is good. He wishes that 100 businesses would come in, with 25 employees each. Then if two or three had a hard time of it, it wouldn't bankrupt the whole town.

Q: What do you think we'll see with Washington Corprorations owning the mine?

Jim can't imagine Washington buying the mine without having a smelting contract in hand. He isn't covinced of Washington's sincerely.

Q: Will they need a new concentrator?

No, they could have it running in a month; the Berekely Garage could be running in a couple days.

Jim thinks the mine will be non-union if Washington comes in.

He doesn't know why Washington bought the property. He will have a problem with water. Jim has pictures that show that from the Civic Center on down much of the flats was a swamp by a lake at one time. Water won't have to get to the top of the pit for it to rise outside the walls of the pit, get into the water table. Water weight makes terrific pressure; it will press out of there. Jim's basement right now is just two feet above the water table. Washington is stuck with these problems. Jim wonders, if problems occur, who will take responsibility for them.

Q: What do you see in the future for Butte?

If the mine opens, it is not going to be a big operation. Jim doesn't know what will happen in terms of other industry. Butte should have been a big place; it had all the major railroads; it had two interstates, two major airlines--yet, it never grew. He says we have the Anaconda Company to thank for that; they wouldn't sell land, water rights. That's the story, anyway. They didn't want other companies coming in; if other industry was here that paid good wages, Anaconda wouldn't have been able to get people to work the dangerous jobs underground.

Q: How do you think Butte is doing right now?

It's holding its own pretty good. A lot of people are out of work; half the guys Jim worked with are still here and out of work.

Q: Do you think that the retraining programs that have been offered have been useful?

No. Why send a mechanic to mechanic shool? What gain is there in that. They had a mechanics retraining here; the guy who taught was someone the students had worked with. If you are going to retrain people, retrain them in work that is needed.

Jim took a hydraulic course; but no one gets hired with just an 8 week course. You have to be a mechanic first to get hired. The instrumentation program that is going on now is fine. But if that course was all you had, you wouldn't be hired over someone who had been an electrician 20 years and then took the course.

Q: What do you see in your future?

Jim doesn't know; maybe go to school, become a historian. He likes that and there aren't too many jobs that people like.

Q: Did you like your job with the Company?

Mostly, but he got bored. The work wasn't boring, but working in the same building, with the same people, at the same thing all the time was. Maybe if management shifted people around more it would be better.

Q: Did your father like being a contract miner?

He hated it. He didn't want anybody to know he was. Jim doesn't know why he felt that way.

Contract mining turned most people on. Moving rock, making good wages--a lot of it had to do with the macho thing.

Jim is proud to be from Butte--"You bet." It's maybe a little too cold here sometimes. But Butte is different. He doesn't think they should clean up Butte. People don't come to see new buildings; they come to see a dump. Up around Buffalo Street they are planting grass. Jim doesn't like it. The historic preservation is nice becuase they are restoring the buildings to the way they used to be. Weins Men's Store on Park looks like the building did at the turn of the Century; Jim has a picture.

Buffalo Street is pretty now, and it shouldn't be. Mining towns aren't pretty. Jim has a friend who said once, if you were blindfolded and dropped by parachute into most cities, you wouldn't know where you were; they all look the same. But if you landed in Butte, you'd know where you were.

Jim thinks that the Mine Yard Plan is a good idea. He would like to see the train run from Anaconda to Butte and back. All sorts of stage plays and stuff could be held at the Washoe.

He thinks that the plan would tie up the Orphan Girl, the Anselmo, and the Original head frames and that would be good because head frames are going to be torn down in time. The headframe for the Anselmo came from the Black Rock; it was moved in '36; shut down in '59. Jim never worked at the Anselmo, but he grew up on Copper Street, "in the Anselmo yard." When he was about 12, he and his buddies stole lumber from the yard to build a cabin down on Jackson Street. The Company let them do it, watched them take the stuff out. They waited until the boys had finished the cabin, then drove a heister down, picked up the whole cabin, waved, drove off. Lots of houses are built with company lumber; plumbed, wired, etc with Company supplies.