

Janet Cornish, interviewed by Teresa Jordan, November 20, 1985, in her home. (*Cornish home*.)

Notes typed from notes taken at time of interview. *Not audited against tape*

[Don Peoples, referred to in interview, is Butte-Silver Bow Chief Executive.]

Born May 14, ~~1985~~ 1951

Came to MT in 1973 to work at Glacier National Park as gift shop clerk. Had wanted to work in Nat'l park for long time. Had just graduated from University of Wisconsin w/ BA Polit Sci. Came in early July. Came back several years, for total of four summers.

1973-4, wintered in Tennessee--born in Chicago, but parents had just moved to Tennessee. Thought about what wanted to do, applied to grad schools, etc. Winter 1974-5, worked in chancellor's office at Vanderbilt U. Jan 1975, entered graduate program in environmental studies at Missoula. Finished June, 1977, MS. Did thesis on public transportation in Glacier. Last three summers there, worked the information desk at McDonald Lodge, and got interested in public transit as way to keep traffic down. Interested in either public planning and transportation, or public policy and environmental issues--eg, Environmental impact statements.

Met husband Jay in college--they were in same program. He worked in the Flathead Nat'l Forest so they shared Glacier as well as Missoula. They wanted to live in MT and decided that wherever one of them found a job first, they would move, as long as it was in MT. Most opportunities were in Helena and Butte. NCAT was coming on line. Nothing seemed to be happening for Janet, so Jay pursued interview with Montana Energy Research and Development Institute, which had major contracts for MHD research. He was interested in envir. effects of MHD.

Hired August 1977. Not sure at all that wanted to come to Butte. Janet somewhat depressed about prospect. Had driven thru once in 1975 and it reminded her of Pittsburg--shanties on the hill. She had a pastoral image of MT--the majesty of Glacier, the Flathead, areas around Missoula. Butte was something I had left behind. Depressed, but decided to give it two years.

Hadn't heard good things about it--had heard it was tough, that the pit was awesome, ugly hole. Knew it was a basically Catholic town--wasn't concerned with that, because had heard there was a small Jewish community--an old community rather than transient college community of Missoula.

They moved here, and every night, they would take walks. Got to know the neighborhoods, the streets, got interested in the history and heritage. Began to meet others who were into Butte.

I hated coming here, but within two weeks, I had fallen in love

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with it.

Many students from the environmental programs had come to Butte for MHD and NCAT, so they knew some people here on the technical staffs. And those connections led to others. Met Fred Quivik, Andy Shapiro.

Many in the upper and middle levels at MERDI and MHD were used to corporate life, or had been in the military. Were used to creating their own insular communities of colleagues. J. felt a little bit of an outsider with that group. Wanted to be involved in the larger community. But Janet and Jay had moved into an apartment house with Butte natives, and got to know them so those first few months were real positive, pleasant experience. Never felt like an outsider at that point--only later, when I began to get more involved w/ community's political affairs, was that an obstacle. Apt house at 321 1/2 Alabama St, by Anselmo Mine. Belonged to Alice and Leo Rodoni--Swiss immigrants. Rodoni's very kind. Pat Ingalls, who became a good friend, also lived there. Four-plex.

A number of women had husbands working MERDI, NCAT. We made the rounds of the unemployment agencies, etc. Not too many jobs other than NCAT, MERDI, MPC. Wouldn't have considered, at that time, working for MPC--thought, in those days, in terms of white hats and black hats, and MPC was, because of political beliefs, def. a black hat. At that time, we all thought of trying to find existing jobs. But I came to find out that I would have to create my own job. With my background--sort of a generalist. Came to realize that eventually, but at that time, got pretty frustrated. Bored, alienated from maistream. Jay and Janet got married fall, 1977, and all of a sudden, I was married to a person working when I wasn't. For the first time, my situation was dictated by another person. I enjoyed discovering Butte, but felt like I had lost myself here.

Mindy Quivik, Kathleen McBride, Carolyn Smithson really shared these feelings. Had similar sit'ns. We all had strong career orientation, and a strong commitment to making a positive impact on our world. Spent a lot of teary, lonely time. We felt isolated from the community, but isolated from ourselves as well. Checked out possibility of donated offie space for community service of some kind. Mindy probably wanted more to write--but she got swept up with us.

Carolyn became involved with ethnic affairs--the heritage quilt, and the ethnic dinner.

Kathleen and I--so involved with who we were, that that evolved into the idea of what Butte is, how Butte's past shapes its future. We never really got an office. But conversations at that time were important to make us realize that career opportunities would have to be self made--at least for people with kind of background and interests we had. Kathy and I started working on proposal for MT Committee for the Humanities,

for a conference. To do that proposal, we could get up in the morning and meet, go out and meet people, talk with them around Butte. But talking and developing files, all of a sudden, we were working from 8 to 5 and even though we weren't getting a salary, it made a million percent difference in making us realize that those kinds of opportunities were available to us and the support groups in the state were there--it became clear that we had a place. The other thing--I remember sitting down with Jerry Plunkett, founder of MERDI, and saying, in Butte, MT, the beauty of it is that if you wanted a film society, you had to create one, if you wanted better food you had to make a food coop, if you wanted to see a play, you had to be in one. That makes it hard, because it just takes so much energy, time. but it also makes a commitment that is much deeper. That was late 1977, early 1978 that we had finally recognized that we could make our own opportunities, be really involved in the community.

Janet had not been involved in community in Chicago (too young) but parents had. Father had been very involved in Chicago retail groups, and in their neighborhood with low income people, that meant social advocacy. Mother involved. So J had expectation to be involved. And had been very involved on campus. But this was her first involvement in her own community.

Conference--Butte Beckons. Organized around idea of past, present, future. Keynote speaker was Stan Kemmett--Sec'y of Senate. Sort of the Good old boy's good old boy. Didn't have a lot to say--but he was a drawing card. Next day had workshops and brainstorming sessions. About 200 people involved. Community had done some brainstorming at time of consolidation (middle 70's--check date) but people were anxious to do it again. Mayor Micone, Loren Mackenzie from MSU spoke. 20 people from MSU were volunteer facilitators for workshops on community's future and priorities. MSU extension service provided facilitators. They knew methodology for brainstorming and ranking priorities. End project was to set community goals.

Evolved from that--Butte chapter of MT Small Business Association--didn't last too long, but had good effect.

Tape 1, Side B

Lots of good Boilerplate. Also, Butte Historical Society came away taking a much more active stance, advocating preservation. Conference sponsored by BHS, MERDI and AAUW.

Personally, Janet got to work with MT small business association, became an unofficial lobbyist for preservation for the BHS. Learned a lot, met a lot of people. W/ Kathleen talked to 70-100 people working in gov't, MPC, etc. Met a lot--and they were so interested that we were doing this, interested in Butte. Also, they were a bit puzzled at who we were--we weren't Mrs. Cornish and Mrs. McBride, but doing this on our own.

But did us both a lot of good--increased our confidence, let us

meet people. Kathy ran in '79 for the legislature and won.

Lobbying, Butte Beckons, meeting people--made me feel more and more part of community.

Fred Quivik is one of finest preservation experts in the US--but occassionally he would talk about preservation in such depth that it was overwhelming. But remember time he wrote out step by step on newsprint on the walls--suddenly it became much clearer what preservation WAS, and what it meant to Butte.

Shortly after, fed team of architects, planners and historians came to Butte--Heritage Conservation Recreation Service. The Historic American Engineering Record--the HAER (pron hair) Team came to Butte 1979. Fred talked local govt into providing funds to have team come to Butte. Invited Alan Comp to come, was at that time working for HAER in Washington. He spoke to Council meeting. Alan said we would have to hire someone who would be a good community liaison person and work w/ HAER team while in Butte to make sure their stay here profitable. Mindy turned around and said, "Janet, that's your job!" Thought about it, sent Alan my resume. Met with him some time later, got job. In March, and then more in May, began working w/ team. Got them housing, got old City hall ready for their occupation, worked with them on the inventory. (Inventory of Central Business District & surrounding neighborhoods to inventory bldgs and make suggestions for new uses--called the rehabilitation action project. Usually HAER is industrial blds, but since Butte offered comb of indus. and commercial, felt appropriate for them to become involved. Focus was revitalization of CBD) Sometime during that summer, local govt decided they wanted to continue after the team left w/ revitalization & re-use of CBD. Decided to use MT urban Renewal law as basis for doing that--law allowed communities to write urban renewal plans & use self-financing mechanisms. They made it clear they looking for someone to head this. I was sent to conference in Billings on preservation law w/ idea that I would be hired by the city. But my job ended in October and I hadn't heard from the city. I thought I was unemployed. Left job Tuesday. Wednesday night, Peoples called--why aren't you at work? I told him, I didn't know I had a job. I was to meet with the newly appt Urban Renewal Board the next day. Wasn't asked to be director at that point, but was to collect data, review reports, write urban renewal plan. Wrote it. Lots of discussion about who would they hire to head up agency; finally Don said he didn't want to pursue that; he would like me to. Spring 1980--got job as director. called the Rehabilitation and Rennovation Agency--that the official name. But Revitalization was a word that was being used around country, Janet called it that. (Urban Revitalization Agency)--it stuck, even though officially are R&RA.

Started w/ \$10,000 revenue sharing funds or entitlement funds (not sure which)--that was salary for first year. That was salary for first year. No money second year, so J wrote proposal to Old West Regional Commission--set up by Economic Development

Common

Adm to work w/ local economic development issues. One in Appalachia, one out here. Pretty much defunct now. Got grant for \$20K--paid salary, some travel, some consultants.

Mt Urban Renewal law allows self financing mechanism called Tax Increment Financing. Cities can estab areas that have had much deterioration, and whatever new development occurs in that area will finance additional improvements. Zero year--starting point--1980. In 1981, measure growth and the associated taxes. The first year, had about \$100,000 increase in taxes from previous year. 1985-6 (fiscal) had \$519,000 budget. That much of an increase. About 60 square block area of uptown. Most of increase from Montana Power--large investment in computers and equipment and renovation. But will lose some of that in about two years because MPC building new computer center on flats. Bldg it there because computers so sensitive they think they want new bldg that is very controlled, rather than putting so much renovation money into old bldg--they mostly lease uptown anyway. Also, their "nerve center" is on the flats (from which they coordinate MPC statewide). And, the move will impact Butte positively on the whole, even though it won't help uptown specifically.

Janet was disappointed to learn that MPC was bldg on the flats--wish she had known beforehand.

What's interesting about the job is being able to do things.

Problems w/ being outsider? Occassionally hear, how did someone from outside get this job. But has always had the support of the board, the county commissioners, Don Peoples. Even when done something in error or not politically astute.

Peoples excited about Revitalization

Mistakes-- political: When parade being moved to flats. Uptown Business Asso circulate petition. Asked JC to present the petition (and she had helped organize it). Presented it to Beverly Brothers at her place of business, with much fanfare--paper there. That occassioned much conflict--hoopdelah in papers, nasty letters. Full page ad in paper against Janet's action. (Get) But Don called me into his office, asked what happened. He had been asked to put a letter of reprimand in my file--but he told me he understood. Didn't put letter in file.

Hurt? Janet does like good controversy, drama--but wouldn't care to repeat. She was angry about losing the parade to the flats. Gatherings bring life to uptown, and it's historical. Losing parade was symptomatic of attitude.

But Janet was also embarassed. I don't want to hurt people. Didn't want to use position to hurt people. Afraid that made Butte Celebrations people feel unappreciated, and embarassed Mrs. Brothers, and feel badly about that.

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Other experience--1984. Commissioner Don Ulrich had asked agency to replace garbage cans. Voted to do it. J instructed to pick cans. Design board met--got bids. One for \$9,000. J ordered them, left for family vacation. Got call while in Chicago. Garbage cans had come in, but for amount over \$10,000, There was an error in charge on the part of manufacturer. The paper on it went out over \$10,000. That violated the open bidding law, which says if anything over \$10,000, has to go out on open bid. A jailable offense. Papers got ahold of it, and it became quite an issue. Again Don Peoples suppt J, dealt with company, told them, it's your error. But it would not have been out of line for him to seriously reprimand me. Had been problem along that line years before, during time of consolidation. County Commissioners let contract go out over 10K--split it into two parts so could go to favorite son. Bad situation--some people were jailed or at least fined. In J's case, had done no wrong. But if had not had support of Council and People's, it would have been chance for them to cause her problems.

Run in with landscape architect--Dave Longey (sp?)--over parking lot. He suggested project, but J put it out on bid. He sent hate letters to newspapers, TV. TV threw them away; newspaper showed it to Peoples and J, and then threw them away.

Each time was an opportunity for Council to make hay--but they supported J.

Tape 2, Side A

Promoting Uptown can be devisive--support one part of the community over other parts.

Peoples runs good interference.

The conflict between flats and uptown:

Much of flats developed same time as hill--rich architecture, culture. Divison, J thinks, comes with the 50's. Develop of Berk. pit, feeling that Uptown would die. Needed to improve mine, and the community would benefit. Along with that, a lot of business and property owners on the hill thought it was not in their best interest to make improvements--didn't know future. Lots of nostalgia in Butte, but not, at that time interested in redevelopment--that idea in disfavor (urban renewal meant tearing down old bldgs?). Everything pointed to relocation on flats. And by 70's, move known as Butte Forward. Utlimately, it was turned down. There was a core of people who didn't feel that it would provide an adequate business district. But during all this time feeling that things were changing. People who didn't like these changes--eg Butte Forward--seen as obstructionists--against God and Mother and apple pie and Butte.

For a long time after Butte Forward-- J would hear conversations all over the state indicating perception that the mines would take the uptown.

Also, lots of people had economic interests on Flats--still do.

But for last 30 years, everything about the uptown is so strong, so dramatic--good press. Save/destroy uptown is so controversial. When those questions weren't part of the scene, there wasn't such a feeling of division.

But now attention given to uptown seems unfair to some. At meetings, for instance, sometimes emotional--"I live in Butte too even though I don't live on Granite Street [uptown]."

The flats can't help feeling a bit disenfranchised.

About journalists come in, go to M&M and Helsinki, leave and write article: Park Plaza, Country Club area, you could be anywhere. Just reading article in Sunset Magazine that people want to see old fashioned, small town West. Leavenworth (?) Washington most popular with readers. There they have created a setting (built old time bldgs? Not quite sure). But here we don't have to re-create. We HAVE it. When people travel, they look for something different. And Uptown and the heritage it repr. is different.

But, to live here is to see much more than M&M. Quaintness is important. But on other hand, don't like the image of the toothless old man in the M&N representing our future...<sup>t</sup>hat Butte is a town of toothless, dying old men. There is VITALITY here. Just last weekend, went to McDonald's opening and then the Xmas fair at the Civic Center--couldn't find parking. Butte is alive and well.

Q: awhile back, referred to yourself as "outsider" even though you've been here over 8 years, you have a home and are raising a family.

That's true. Said it with a certain degree of cynicism. I feel like a Butte resident. But 70-80 year family orientation for many people here, strong network of insiders. Strong obligation to provide those people with jobs first. And meet newcomers with suspiciousness. SEEMS more prevalent here because we are so involved. But being an outsider, not included in some Butte-Silver Bow Personnel meetings--and those who are not included are, for the most part, those not born here. But we are growing out of that. Sometimes we mix up old-boy network with parochialism--that's not quite the word--but with favoring one's own. but in spite of the fact that I'm not from here, I'm not Catholic, I didn't go to Butte Central--I'm able to achieve things here.

Telling friend recently, that over time, I've become less narrow. More conservative, she asked? No--I was radically conservative before. Less narrow now.

Yes, here for 7-8 years. But in local govt, many have worked for

*Crush*

30, 40 years. And their parents worked in govt. But birth of Daniel--bearing a child here in Butte--has been a sort of right of passage. Feel that that caused level of acceptance hadn't had before. Family experience they can relate to. Not just a footloose female, but building a family here in Butte.

Recently, spoke to a ladies group and was asked the same question. Tired of that question! And answered, "I CHOSE to come here; most of you are here by accident. Butte is perhaps a little more special to me, like an adopted child.

Q: What do you think oldtimers are afraid newcomers don't "Understand?"

I feel toward "come lately's" sometimes--Yes, we know that. Like if someone just arrives and says, "have you ever tried getting everyone together to talk out our problems?" I respond--yes, we tried that; it doesn't work. That's gut level response, and then I realize that new energy, enthusiasm is good, should be encouraged. I understand how oldtimers feel. You work very hard, get tired. And when newcomer comes in and says this, almost like a rebuke. If you have tried for a long long time and someone almost accuses you of not running your community right...if someone new comes in, says, Butte's great, but this is what we suggest. Feeling that that takes a lot of audacity. Again, has to do with size of community. In Chicago, come in with new ideas, not even noticed. Maybe get a job and put them into action. But here, there's a tradeoff. You can make more of an impact but you're under scrutiny. And it's easy for outsider to be seen as "criticizing" way things have been done.

Also--jobs have ALWAYS been an issue in Butte. Yugoslavs, Blacks. Idea that, I'm on top, don't threaten me. Also, loss of jobs here for decades. And new people represent expansion of labor force.

Political method in Butte: Observed pretty straight forward political system. How used to be is all hear-say. When jobs open, sometimes there is a favorite party to get the job, and the process gone through but favored person gets it. But that not unique. That happens everywhere. But as far as decision making process--if you are interested in getting something through, good idea to meet with Commissioners beforehand. Occasionally someone will have an axe to grind. But most I've observed is "running the government." Straightforward. With strict enforcement of state bidding law, and People's open method of running govt, govt handled in open. Kinds of things that deserve more scrutiny in other situations--sweet heart deals--pretty confident that not going on.

Tape 2, Side B

Can't recall anything I am aware of by any public official of unethical behavior.



Before consolidation, heard a story--then, County Commissioners could get free lunches at the hospitals. And that really wasn't right. But deals that were cut, stories like that you hear--I don't have any personal experience with it, haven't personally seen anything like that.

Also, w/ Federal programs, which are life-blood of local govt, the federal auditors are so rigorous--such scrutiny that can't do anything underboard.

Low Income in Butte:

Pretty disenfranchised from system. Don't know what the answer is. Govt responsive in terms of programs--rehabilitation projects, housing assistance. Some of commissioners could do better job of representing low income. But job of local govt not really focussed to social action--more streets, sewers, etc.

Butte Community Union could be VERY effective. But method of late--confrontive can be effective at times. But BCU being VERY confrontive right now--and sometimes govt feels like it's being put in a corner.

Example--\$25,000 grant to BCU to do neighborhood plan, Central Butte. Asked to be clear on specific projects that would improve area. Also matching grant. We just reviewed proposal--nothing real specific. Bob McCarthy (head of BCU) said, "this is neighborhood's plan, not your plan." Lots of data, but no concrete plans. J Understands the importance of the process, but feels a little used. Funds were used to employ BCU people, but not to propose projects that local govt can act on. Bob thinks the value is the whole neighborhood going through the process. And I do understand that. But didn't end up taking opportunity to actually see improvements. Example of where could have had better input in local govt.

But demanding nature has made govt hesitant to trust BCU--and that distances them further.

J Realizes that planning can be very frustrating to citizens by its nature.

Problem here with confrontational politics in a community this size--creates enemies.

Ex--some discussion of burden on low income of assessment for garbage removal. Proposal to take a number of blocks off the assessment, let them haul their own garbage. Didn't take in reality that some people not want/able to haul own. And also--part of the fee supports the landfill dump itself. If hauled own, wouldn't be paying anything for support of dump. Possibly an example of BCU not having all facts before deciding to push forward. Didn't consider that it might not be a good issue to take on. On other hand -- terrible sites in Center Butte--very dangerous. Jimmy Johnson (public works?) go down to look at

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them--met with a battery of TV and newspapers. May have been an effective tactic there, because it embarrassed local government into doing something.

Don't want to sound overly critical of BCU. From perspective of local gov't, they don't seem as effective as they might be. But if I were not working with local government, I would be interested in working with BCU.

Frustrations from living in Butte? Biggest is same thing that makes it so interesting. Smallness. Can't get away from work. Groups of friends interested in same things--Butte heritage, history, future. Focused toward redevelopment or observing Butte--so we tend to become narrow. But to go to Chicago--see people grappling with the same issues.

Personally frustrating--12 years ago I got in an airplane and came to Montana by myself, changed my life, had a wonderful time. Now I'm not so footloose. Jay very challenged here--I'm not as challenged. Ultimately, you can find it here. Hard. You can create your own--but not a banquet out there to whet your appetite. Sometimes you don't even know the opportunities exist, don't have the input to think of new ideas.

Don't necessarily believe the quality of life better in a city. But opportunities for growth better. E.g., voice lessons--wanted to take in Missoula, but told that I had more experience than anyone who teaches.

Job has become a little frustrating--exciting to be on cutting edge--but the sameness has begun to overtake the newness. And don't know what else I would do.

March--most depressing part of year. Miss an honest to God spring.

BUT--never lived anywhere where felt such close family of friends. Can't imagine having better friends. Hard to imagine having such a nice community anywhere else. Try to weigh that when I'm down.

After just moved here--remember going back to Missoula and being struck by how homogenous Missoula was--wasn't even sure I liked it here yet! But I noticed that. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else in Montana.

Jewish community here is stronger than it's numbers and not transitory like on a college campus. In beginning it was quite large. Both reformed and orthodox. Jewish miners and primarily mercantile. Moved around with mining camp. So settled as Butte did. Built two synagogues. Subsidence around Emma hurt bldg -- so orthodox and reformed joined about 20 years ago. Result sort of a mish mash of traditions. About 35 families, mostly long-time families. With Tech, MERDI, etc, new families--about 5. New life. Also, growth of medical community.

They occupy reform temple, built in 1903. Beautiful intact bldg. Much Eastern European influence. Now congregation looking toward reaffiliation with reformed.

After mid 1960's: more and more difficult to afford full time Rabbi.

Tape 3, Side A

Have Rabbi in for high holidays, bar mitzvas (sp) etc. There are a couple kosher families--don't know what they do. Pretty secular jews here. Real observant jews would have a hard time.

Recently, man convicted of rape--moved out of state but now back in MT for reconsideration of his case. Claimed to be Jewish and though not raised orthodox, said he had decided he wanted to follow Jewish dietary laws. Ministry became involved. John Isaakson called--said, please lay aside your attitude about his heinous crime, and the question of whether he is even Jewish or not. We are just trying to help him meet his spiritual needs. J suggested they go through campus ministry to contact Jewish families in Missoula (where he was being held). Also said, by the way, that kosher was not hard if didn't mind eating vegetarian--lots of products on the market that only use vegetable shortning, use paper plates, no meat or utensils that had prepared meat. Nice to be in a community where would be consulted on that question.

Never run into any anti-semitism here.

Role of Jewish community very positive.

Apalled at Our Lady of the Rockies--oppose it on every level. Religion is personal. Claiming that particular observance is shared is audacious. Object not the money spent, but to the idea that it represents us all. Bothers me too that the landscape I love so much is being defaced. People argue that towers are disruption of landscape and they are--but they necessary for communications. This far more impacting--  
And finally, think it will make Butte a laughing stock. In other towns-- when drive through, find pink crosses on the hill or that sort of thing amusing. People doing it may be doing so as act of faith, but when commercialize it, lose it.

J says jokingly, if going to do it, why not have religious hall of fame up there--Buddha, Allah, Moses, etc. Reminds me of Disney characters.