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## John Hughes

John Hughes, archivist at Butte-Silver Bow Archives, and research librarian at Butte Public Library, interviewed in his home by Teresa Jordan, February 7, 1985. John is grandson of Frank H. Cooney, Montana Governor 1933-1935.

Notes taken at time of interview; not audited against tape. Notes amended with corrections by John Hughes, October 10, 1986

Tape 1, Side 1

Mother, Merlie Cooney, born 1906 in Butte. John was born on N. Ewing Street -- the Old Governor's Mansion -- in Helena, 1935.

Had the "misfortune" not to be born in Butte. Very important — Butte people don't want outsiders fooling with their history. They won't open up to strangers.

Moved to Butte during WWII, when John was about six. He went to school in Helena. Lived one year in Governor's Mansion. grandfather died in office in 1936. Years later, John found an electric eye in the basement. It didn't work; even later John found out what it was for. He was born around the time of the Lindburgh kidnapping. The eye was installed on the balcony of the gov's mansion so if anyone came up that way to possibly kidnap him, they would be detected. [John adds that Governor Cooney was an American citizen though he came to Montana from Canada; Cooney's grandfather Patrick Cooney, John's great great grandfather, immigrated from Ireland to Montreal around 1837, just in time for a cholera epidemic and. John thinks, some sort of Canadian revolution. He moved to New York State, taking his family with him. He was naturalized and his son, John Ward Cooney, Governor Cooney's father, became an American citizen. The family went back to Canada during Civil War Governor Cooney was born in Canada, but of an American citizen. During his campaign, opponents made issue that he wasn't native; he was born in Canada, but he was an American. It was still remarkable to see an Irish Catholic as governor of Montana at that time.] [Frank H. Cooney, was

elected Lt. Gov under John Erickson; when Senator Thomas J. Walsh died. Erickson resigned as governor and then Cooney appointed him to take Walsh's seat. According to Malone and Roeder, Cooney was independent and aggressive, and asserted himself "as a real, not a caretaker, governor....Until he died of heart failure late in 1935, the scrappy little man continued to govern and to demonstrate his independence."]

Family was staunch Roman Catholic — Irish Catholic. Attended Immaculate Conception Church. In 1940's, very strong sense of neighborhood. It wasn't just that you would get beat up if you stepped into Finntown. You would get beat up if you were Immaculate Conception Parish and you stepped into St. Patrick's. That broke down when you went to high school —Boys' Central High school (run by the Christian Brothers). You didn't see girls in high school. You did in lower grades. Society wouldn't stand for that now, but that was just the way it was

General avoidance between Catholics and Protestants in those days. Wouldn't dream of attending a service at St. John's Episcopal. That broke down a little for weddings and funerals. [On reconsidering, John says he is not sure it did break down — he never remembers going to a another denomination's service — probably because all the family friends were Catholic.] John can't remember any family friends who were not Catholic

Cooney family was very large. Four uncles in Cooney brokerage. John's grandfather started the brokerage; he came to Butte in 1891, worked for one or more brokerages before he started his own. John's father was with a radio station in Butte and found a position in Twin Falls. He had learned radio in the Navy. Then they moved to Alaska. John finished high school in Twin Falls. Lived in Alaska before he went to college. He started at Western Washing ton College of Education in Bellingham. Now it is called Western Washington University. He started in education; however, education schools in the 50's were as bad as they are now. He found that he could skip class and still get A's. He transferred to the University of Washington in Seattle — originally in music. Played picollo and flute in amateur and semi—professional — Seattle symphony was semi—pro at that time.

Kept almost no contacts with Butte. Very happy to "get away from this place." Now he is not sure why -- all young people want to get

away. Tough place to get along in. Complicated rules, and you have to learn them for yourself. No one will tell you. An example, told to John by a German barber who had once worked in the mines. Irish miners would not work on St. Patrick's Day. The Company said they had to. So Irish miners say, OK, no one will work on St. Patrick's day. This German did not know that. St. Patricks day, like any other, he was at the bus stop with his lunch pail. A bunch of Irishmen came after him. He ran down an alley and escaped. That's the way he learned.

For teenagers, a very structured life through school and church. Boys learned through the Christian Brothers, girls through the nuns. Kids didn't have cars. But you learned that if you wanted to go someplace — that was fine, go. If you wanted to go to Columbia Gardens, then fine, go. If you didn't have a nickle or dime or quarter, you have two feet. And John still maintains that attitude. Likes to live where he can walk to work. Some times, when it is 43 below, he is the only one who turns up. People can't get their cars started, but his feet will start. Has turned up at the library — but one person can't run the library alone.

What was it like in "tough Butte" for a boy who liked music instead of football?

In grade school, everybody was tested. Go out in the schoolyard and fight. And afterwards, you were much more accepted. Even if you lost, you were much more accepted. If you didn't fight at all, it was a different story.

And today — Butte is a tough place, but only if you are looking for it. If you want a fight, you can find it. Otherwise, people will leave you alone

Lived in Governor's Mansion 'til '35: it was a great big house. there was room. He lived there until he was about 10 months old. Father worked for highway department.

Father was drafted into Navy: the family then lived in Boise. Then they moved to Butte. Lived in what is now Excelsior House, the bed and breakfast. Sarah Wyse who owns it now, learned about it at the archives. "I'd like to find out about that house." John said he thought he could tell her. And when John's brothers and sisters visited Butte,

Sarah invited all of them up to see the house. It was interesting what each remem bered. The youngest brother, James, was born in '46; he could only remember the furnace in the basement, with all its octopus arms. [by time of note amendments, Excelsion House, under new ownership, has become Excelsion Manon, and houses The Center for New Living, Inc.]

John married in college and then spent two years in the army, in the army band. The Army has a peculiar way of handling people. If they decide you will be a tank driver, fine, you are trained as a tank driver. But if you are in the Army band, you are probably already trained as a musician. Still, the Army insists that you relearn their way. After two years, decided that he didn't want to be a professional musician. Interested in Chinese, so decided to major in oriental languages. Got a bachelor's degree in Oriental languages in 1965. Wife is a nurse -- did electro- encephalography and lots of other testing. John's son Lloyd was born in 1959. He spent four years in the Navy; got out in September. Came up here. He tried to fit in, but he didn't have a context. He hadn't gone to school here, etc. He developed a strange set of friends. His aunt called from Seattle -- she could no longer take care of her father, age 96, alone. John thought it was a good idea for his son to leave; he wasn't doing anything here. Lloyd's grandfather died and he returned to Butte; now he is going to Vo Tech.

John received his PhC — doctor candidate degree. He finished everything but his dissertation for PhD. Then went to San Francisco. His mother called in '77 because her health had failed. '65 to '77 seems like a long time in graduate school, but John says, "It was a trap I put myself in." He decided it wasn't enough to just know Chinese because the Chinese had not always been the ones in control of China. He needed to know many other languages, including Mongolian, several other Asian languages, Russian German, French. With that much study he would have been better off if he had studied medicine; then he would be in pretty good shape right now. But he is not tempermentally suited for medicine. [John notes later that he felt like he was in graduate school a long time but has since learned that the average is 3 to 10 years.]

He was offered a contract with a university in Germany to teach one of these obscrue Oriental languages — Evenki — so the PhC degree is useful and recognized.

John has two brothers and two sisters. He is the eldest "I was free when my mother needed someone [to come to Butte for her failing health] so I could come."

John says, we had strong commitments to each other. Father was rather a failure. Very charming. But in the Navy during the war, he came out with a drinking problem. Mother and children had to pull together.

In 1981, it was clear that his mother wasn't getting any better. And John needed help. It was a 24 hour a day job. Called his brother up in Alaska. He came, and then when their mother died, the sisters came — one from Maine, one from Saudi Arabia. John says, "I should have been prepared, but I wasn't. We had joked about writing her obituary. But of course we hadn't done it.

## Tape 1, Side 2

John found through his work with the archives that death certificates are not accurate. They are about the least accurate of anything considered primary source material. They are very unreliable because people are upset at the time. Marriage certificates, on the other hand, tend to be very reliable. That's a happy time. [John adds later that marriage certificates also indicate a transfer of property, a contract between two families, and so more care is taken to make them accuarate.]

John's mother was a librarian. She started out as a children's librarian in Missoula. She had graduated with a degree in English and they were just setting up the library program then. It was not called library science at that time; rather, Library Economy. Someone convinced her to stay around. And she did. Which was good, because then she could go out and get a job as a librarian. Before she retired, she was director of a library in Fairbanks — The Arctic Health Research Library. She had a very high government rating. [John adds later that his mother's profession allowed financial stability for the family because she could get a job wherever they were and his father was not always dependable.]

John's mother came back to Butte because she had four brothers here. She had to watch all four brothers die — except for the last one, he died a week before she did. We didn't tell her, but she knew when his

seven children showed up and they all came up to the hospital to see her. [She was in a coma, but John and the rest of the family feel that she sensed they were all there.]

What sort of a person was she? In Twin Falls, things were really pretty desperate. There was a quiz on the radio — they called her and asked her a question about music. She said, "Go find Spike." Oh, one thing I forgot to tell you. Virtually every male in Butte had a nickname. Mine was Spike. Next brother, Gerald Mark, his was Butch. Sister, Michael Ann, was Mike, and Patricia was Pat. James, my youngest brother, he never got a nickname, and he was always sort of hurt about that. Anyway, she said, to get Spike, and they found me, and I knew the answer. She gave it, and she won \$50. Which was good, because father had just cashed a check that had bounced. She was able to pay that off, and to buy food.

The most remarkable thing about her was that she was so unremarkable. We were poor — but we didn't think so.

I remember being resentful — her four brothers were extremely well to do. We were not. Yet, she was very well protected. Later, when they sold off their assets, they divided it up, and she got a nice little stock portfolio. She didn't understand it. She had little bits of money all over the place, in little savings accounts and things. When I came back, I took it over and started to figure out what she had. I remember transferring funds from one account to another; brought home a Cashiers check for \$10,000. When I showed it to her, she started crying. She said, "I have never seen \$10,000 in one place before."

Q:Did your mother consider Butte home?

I don't know she was born here, but raised in Missoula. But her family was here. One of her brothers was the dearest person in the world, sort of a substitute father to us. When he died in 1979, she was angry. She said, "I'm leaving I hate it here." She was blaming Butte for his death.

So many people — you leave, and then you come back. But you look into Butte behind its griminess and its ugliness — there is something there. No place on the West Coast I would rather be. The history here is so fascinating — Bozeman is not nearly as interesting. [Later,

after reading the notes, John says that he's realized how much he picks on Bozeman; doesn't know why. "Maybe it was something I heard as a kid."]

The most basic request can turn ito a fascinating story. Someone wanted to know something about the Centerville Mining Journal, edited by Penrose. I didn't know about that, but I did know about the Butte Mining Journal, also edited by Penrose. Looked into him. He was a Cornishman. Got elected as Silver Bow rep to the legis. Fought the eight-hour day. Made lots of enemies for that and other issues. He was murdered, on the corner of Montana and Galena on 7 June, 1891. The murder was never solved. But three Irishmen were arrested. The Molly McGuires were accused. The Sons of St. George, Cornishmen, put up a \$5000 reward. Eventually, that event ended up in the APA — American Protective Association — riots between the Irish and Cornish — 4 July, 1894. But so often, a simple question will take you off into incredible points of history

Q: Why are you still here in Butte?

Sort of the big fish in the little pond vs. the little fish in a big pond. Could get a job in Seattle or Chicago [on second thought, John says, perhaps Missoula or Eugene, OR]. I am terribly, terribly protective of Butte. Butte is suffering. I feel unwilling to pick up and leave. I can do some good here. I KNOW I can.

There is a way the game is played in Butte. If you don't recognize that, you're dead. For instance — the Director of the Library is not from here, he's from Illinois. He was chosen over a Butte native. John thinks that is because the board felt they could control him.

If Rotarian, Kiwanis, other groups, want me to talk to them, I will talk to them. And that counts. And if I see something hurting Butte, I will say, let's pull together.

Q: Some people have told me that Butte has a problem sometimes taking full advantage of people who have moved here from other places and who want to work with the community. They may be somewhat resented. How do you react to that?

Again, it's a matter of learning the rules. There are people who will simply not accept you if you are not from Butte or at least from

Montana. But if you are a person, say, like Fred Quivik, who comes in, who demonstrates his superior ability, who puts in endless hours of time working for the good of the community, I think this does begin to seep through. And then not everyone resents outsiders to begin with.

Q: If a person new to Butte asked you what they should know to get along here, what would you tell them?

If, for instance, a new director of the Arts Chateau came in, I have kept files with letters of resignation of previous directors, etc. Watts was director, then Colby Feldberg. He was here about six months. Then John Barsness. His letter of resignation should have shaken them up, taught them something. If you can learn anything from this, then fine. It doesn't mean you have to kowtow.

The Public Library is the same way. Difference between the library staff and professional librarian —defn. of Professional Librarian is a masters in Library Science from an American Library Association approved institution. That's all right as long as the starf is treated with respect. John is president of Librarians Union. Spent three months negotiating new contract. He knows the rules — can head off problems if library director treats him with respect. Fight about name of union — AFL CIO asked what we wanted to call it. Wanted Butte—Silver Bow Federation of Professional Librarians. In negotiations on the preamble to contract, bang — a big fight. Management says no, you can't call it that. Call it Federation of Library Workers. Even people not involved there knew the slight involved in that. We beat them on it. Don Peoples doesn't care as long as it doesn't cost money. Feeling that if we are being paid what we are we are entitled to some respect.

Tape 2, Side 1.

Spend a lot of time trying to protect Library Director and staff as well. Effective? Struggling, trying. Feel that we should give the man a chance.

John has conservative morality. Ronald Reagan is only 19th. Century. John is really 3rd Century b.c. Socrates, Confucius, Buddha. The way things should be.

I am a Confucionist. That's the reason I got into Chinese language. Not satisfied with translations of Confucius so learn Chinese. The way man

or woman gets along with fellow people. when people have learned to get along with each other, THEN we'll talk about God.

In China, Golden Age — Chou dynasty Long period of stability. But it ended and China fractured into number of feudal states. But still had knightly virtue; but some things came to be nasty. High moral standard no longer observed. So Confucius travelled around. He essentially an archivist. Travelled, looking for a job to put principles into effect. What we have of him are the notes his students took in class. We have the answers, but often not the questions. He wrote the golden rule. Only, "Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you." Lots of philosophical debate over which is morally superior, do not do unto; or do unto. Difference between doing and not doing. Desire to work towards becoming a superior man.

In Butte — you are tested more here. You see whole segments of society, of life, that you would never see in Seattle. Saying that here you see everyone at Eggers [grocery store]. Come back — little kid with a paper route getting beat up by big kids with a paper route. Idea is not that they will be sorry, but that I am going to be somebody. Went to a class reunion in 1983. Both Butte High and Butte Central. A good reunion for that reason, because so many were kicked out of Central and had to go to Butte. That way, you got to see people you graduated from grade school with as well as people you grad from HS with. Lots of questions, of course, on why John came back. One woman said she was not at all surprised that I was the archivist. "We knew in grade school that John Hughes knew everything. He still does." And with my morality, if I'm expected to know everything, I try very hard.

Haunting memories. People here who still remember blowing up of Miners Union Hall. John recalls the 1946 strike. Mobs were roaming the streets, smashing houses. Father put us in the car — don't really know why, but he did. We drove around, looking at destroyed houses...

Violence then, hopelessness now Hopelessness among the younger people, but also older people in their 70's. They can't pay their property taxes. I don't see any hope. Businesses closing...

John remembers Columbia Gardens closing. A newspaper headline read — The Day Butte Cried. Terrific resentment — they took away the one good thing we had here. And other gradual closings. Especially

Hennessy's, Safeway warehouse. The Cooney brokerage was started in the 1890's. But a food brokerage is not needed if there isn't a food warehouse. The cousins had to decide what they would do with the business. They had two choices. They could move to Billings, or they could close. One cousin said "I'd rather move to Siberia than Billings." Feeling that — why go on when you keep getting hit over the head. How Don Peoples can want to have his job... He is doing as good a job as he can.

If the good people give up, we're in trouble.

Q: How have troubles torn people apart?

So many remember Butte's hey day, and now they see gradual deterioriation. In the 70's, we had a series of fires.

At the archives, there are two major sorts of questions — those that have to do with family, and those that have to do with buildings. These old buildings mean things to people. All Alan Goddard, on his Party Line program [radio] has to do to get telephones ringing is to talk about a gas station being torn down... People resent not having a Beaver Block and other build ings any more [John says later that the loss he felt the most was the old Intermountain Building on Granite].

Hopefulness? John says he talks to a large number of groups. I present my talk from the vantage point of history. We've been down before. 1919 — Copper prices dropped, mines closed, coal miners in the western part of the state were on strike, you couldn't get coal. People were chopping down their neighbor's fences to stay warm. But Butte came back from that.

The solution lies in new things, new ideas. For instance, high tech. We have the college, firms, a lot of very quality people.

Butte didn't look to the future as long as the Company was here. Company looked at still with great fear—And still, feeling that it was not all that bad. They gave us jobs. Three generations of jobs. Butte doesn't have that crutch anymore. Whereas Billings and Bozeman are doing fine. So it's not Montana, it's something in Butte. Butte never thought the Company would go down. Still, some people are talking about when the Company comes back.

Q: Difference in perceptions of Anaconda compared to ARCO management?

John most familiar with Anaconda. Not here during ARCO takeover. Feeling with Anaconda that looked on with fear, but also not that bad. When John was growing up — Employees Club, Labor Day Picnic — he couldn't go because his father didn't work for the mines. "Now I can, I'm president of the Union." People in Butte don't understand ARCO, and ARCO just doesn't care about that. Butte Historical Society struggles with this. There is just no connection that ARCO feels with the past.

Butte was never just the mines. Many people were proud of having other jobs with the company, working as secretary, warehouseman.

You can get into an argument on which of the Copper Kings did more for Butte. Heinze sold out. There is sort of the idea here — good for Heinze. He came in, made it, sold out.

Q: What about idea that miners not want sons to work in the mines?

National Public Radio came in to do a program. Wanted to find three generations who had worked in the mines. That proved to be a problem. Usually, Grandpa said, if he didn't die in the mines, that no son of his would work there. Al Hooper mentioned one family, but they had had a terrific break; grandpa wasn't talking to father, wasn't talking to son. Finally, they found a family, but it was hard.

You see people here working on workfare. Some are extremely able, but they are not willing to leave. Why? Protective of family; protective of surroundings, of Butte. It's semi-tragic. Sometimes they are wasting their lives.

Tape 2, Side 2.

Here, I feel I can accomplish things. I can get recognition. I speak to the Marion White Arts and Crafts Club, other clubs. The column John wrote on Butte history — wrote around 30,000 words for the paper. People call up and say "Why did you stop? I've cut out every one." So you get recognition — you are doing a good job.

I said that the reason I quit doing the column was a delicate matter. That matter was that the Archives budget was lost in the computer. I worked for eight months without pay. If I thought that that was done deliberately, then I wouldn't have continued, I would have quit. One thing that was missing from the budget was the salary for the Archives director. I sat up there every day I was scheduled to work; I walked past the courthouse every day, I waved, so they would know that I'm there. And so, just the other day, I was invited to a party for the retirement of the carpenter at the courthouse. Other library workers were not invited. Again the rules, playing the game right.

I know how to play the game. When I'm asked, I say no, I wasn't born here, I was born in Helena. Well, at least that's Montana. And then I say, I was raised here, went to school here, graduated here. Those are points in my favor. Then they ask if I'm related to the Hughes up on North Excelsior. I say no, I'm not related to any Hughes in Butte that I know of, but I'm related to the Cooneys. And then they go down the list of people you share in common. When someone is from the outside, nasties...they don't have that official protection.

Sense of neighborhoods? Still here. But boundaries have broadened. The hill vs. the flat. Example is the fourth of July parade. There was a great big fuss. It had always been held uptown. It went down Montana Street, then turned onto Harrison to the Civic Center. Couple years ago, they decided that Montana St. was dangerous. Because of the steep hill, a float could get out of control and run into the crowd. The idea of moving the parade caused an uproar. But those who wanted to move the parade kept bringing it up. We'll just do it. So for last two years, the parade has been on the flat. My attitude is that, you put it down there, fine. But I'm not going to go down to see it

Aunt and cousin moved to the flat. And they are really better for it, but she is still embarassed about it.

Butte is a beautiful place at night. In matter what direction you arrive from, this is someplace different. Bozeman is an endless Harrison Avenue. Hard to find the interesting parts of Bozeman. But Butte, no matter if you come into town by Montana Street, or by Eggers...there's something interesting.

Bad feeling toward Butte — Butte was the induction center. So everyone inducted into the service ends up in Butte. And that is not your favorite time. Also, the bus station. Don't know how Greyhound does it, but they always find the worst place to put a station. So, if passing through, seems like strange place. But Butte says, stay awhile, find out. People resentful of New York Times people, journalists — they have a regular program: go down and meet Mean Jean [Sorenson, infamous Butte bar owner; shot several people; died by time of note amendments], go to the M & M, dig up someone who will sing old Irish songs. Then leave, write up a story about Butte.

John remembers a review of an Easter show that wasn't so hot. Letters to the editor — idea that, if you can't say anything good about Butte, don't say anything at all.

Q: I have seen all these articles, letters to ed., etc. about, basically, "I love Butte." I'm not aware of that phenomenon in other communities nearly as much as here. Unusual?

It's true. People come to the Archives from Ireland, Montreal, South Africa — Just to visit the Butte Archives. You would probably find letters to ed. and such in cities with flare, cities like San Francisco and New Orelans. Butte is smaller so you can experience it deeply.

American Protective Association riots — Cornish vs. Irish, Protestant vs Catholic, Republican vs. Democrat — the riot, J thinks, "broke the blister." After that, an attempt to get along. Also, the fact that miners had partners helped. Because you had to work with your partner whether he was Irish or Danish or Cornish or whatever. You have to depend on each other. [In reading over these notes later, John says he is even more sure now, after more research, that the APA riots were a turning point for ethnic relations in Butte. Relations were better afterward; Butte doesn't have the ethnic difficulties that continue to plague other cities with early ethnic diversity, like Chicago. Here, you have a president of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick with a Serbian name — that sort of mixing happened here.]

## Q: Cornish or Irish first? Or miner first?

Feeling in Butte that everyone was a miner, but that's not true. The links — Irish, Catholic, Democrat, MINER; Cornish, Protestant, Republican, MINER.

Copper Camp talks about the "Bohunk" scare. That toned down in time. People learned that the immigrants might not speak good English, but they were good miners.

How people got here. The Cornish were the best-miners in the world, and that had been true for 5 thousand years.

The Welsh knew how to smelt — that that was a key to Butte. Butte had actually shipped copper to Wales to smelt; imported Welsh smelter experts over here. If Wales had not allowed that, Butte's story might have been different.

Irish — last copper mine in County Cork played out at the time the mines were developing here. A large percentage of Irish parishes turned up here. Had situation of Corkonians vs. Fardonians, other Irish. Corktown looked with disfavor on the rest of Dublin Gulch.

In archives, John is surrounded by pictures of mayors of Butte. First mayor was Jewish — Henry Jacobs. Others mayors were French, German, Irish, Cornish, Swiss. Some were noble; others were scoundrels.

Two Irish mayors end of 19C. Harrington and McCarthy. During Harrington's adm, McC was city treasurer. H. said, I want to see the books. McC said, I will show them when I want to. McC ended up punching Harrington in the nose. Then McC became mayor; Harrington had another office. Issue in election — you want a mayor who will punch a man in the nose? History is great fun. [John says he has since learned that Harrington was essential in formation of "Irish mafia," political machine in Butte.]

Copper Camp — limited. Done by first rate newspaper man, but all documentation omitted. Fascinating stories, facts, but when you try to track a story down, you can often do so only if you have unusual luck.

Lots of famous Butte stories circulate. John has sometimes tried to break balloons, such as the story that the Leonard Hotel was built to block the view of the Clark mansion. That is repeated often, but it's not true. Leonard built in 1906 and Clark wasn't even living here then. And Amalagamated wanted his interests, so they wouldn't have

done something that vindictive. Actually, it was built by two doctors who saw a chance at valuable real estate. [John says later that he tracked down the source of that story. Alan Goddard used to work as a tour guide for the Clark Mansion. He looked through the mansion windows at the Leonard every day and came up with that story as explanation. Now it circulates, and people don't want to hear it isn't true.]

Q: What about the idea that what people think is true is as important as what is actually true?

The truth in Butte is so fascinating that we don't need the fiction.

[John adds, in 1986, he is much more optimistic about Butte's future than he was when this interview was conducted a year and a half previously. Butte has rallied. But like he felt then, Butte had been down before, and always managed to pick herself up.]