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I also specifically grant Teresa Jordan, for valuable consideration, the right to use all or any part or paraphrase of any of my statements (with the exception of restrictions listed below) in connection with her proposed work of non-fiction provisionally titled Butte, America: Lessons From a Deindustrialized Town, as well as related articles. I understand that, unless restricted below, my name and photo may be used in the work and in related advertising and publicity.

Restrictions:

Jun 10, 1986
Date of Agreement

X John R. Kriskovich
Narrator

835 Missoula Ave.
Address

Butte, Mt. 59701
City, State, Zip

Teresa Jordan
Interviewer

Butte Historical Society
PO Box 3913
Butte, MT 59701

12 April 1988
Accession date

Mary Murphy
Archivist

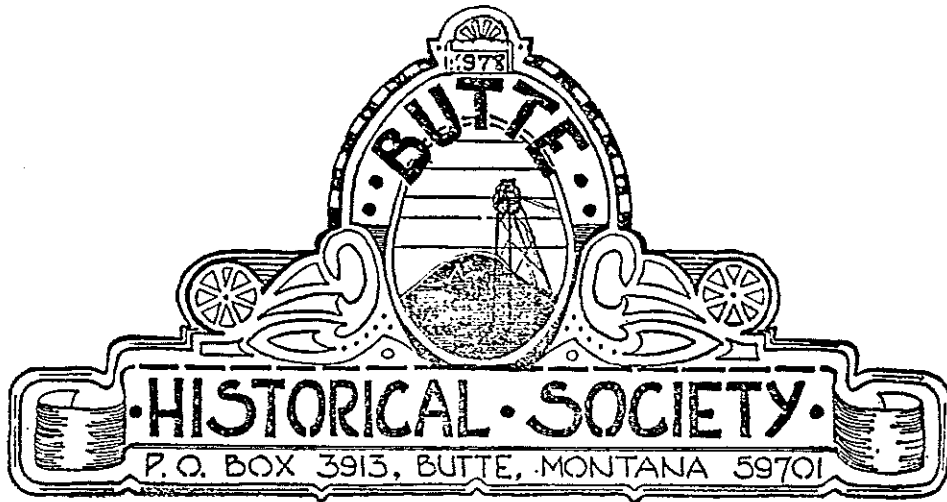
NOTES ON USING MATERIALS FROM

"IS THERE LIFE AFTER COPPER?" ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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

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

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



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John Kriskovich, owner, designer, builder, etc of Free Weight Systems, 525 Garden Ave, Butte, interviewed at his business by Teresa Jordan, January 10, 1986.

Born and raised in Butte. Grandparents were from Yugoslavia, both sides [of his father's family; his mother is German stock]. Father worked with Dun & Broadstreet (sp?), collection agency. He started there as a young man; retired from there.

John worked for ACM about 8 years, the last six as a pipefitter. In 1976, w/ close of Arbiter plant, took the test for the downtown pipefitters--learned to weld, fabricate, etc. He had been laid off with the closing, and had no desire to continue to work for ACM.

After passed test, worked for Downtown Plumbing, Samuel Wallace Construction in Missoula, MHD, helped build the concentrator for the Sunlight mine in Whitehall.

Began building weight systems. Worked for almost 2 years in his garage. The city would have been upset to know that, but his neighbors were really good. He just outgrew his garage. When the Co had lots up for sale, he bought three at his present site.

People say that hard work will get you into business, but really, it's money, money, and more money. His business is very competitive, he has to advertise nationally. In the national weight lifting magazines, ads can run upwards of \$4500 a month. Bob Earhart does J's advertising, and he suggested putting smaller ads, and putting bigger ones where getting good response. [Bob Earhart Design & Ad Co].

How got into it-- Has lifted for a long time. When he was working at MHD, bought some equipment from a company. Sold one of the pieces to a friend. In 2 weeks, the friend called him up, said it's squeaking. J started looking at it, took it apart--there were no bearings on the pulleys, just metal on metal. Eventually had to remodel everything he had bought from this company to make it usable. Figured he could do better. He was mad at the way he got burned. Figured, with his own, if it wasn't right, it wouldn't leave his shop. Every piece he makes, it gets better each time, there are improvements.

Moving to his own building was a chance, but you have to take a chance.

Had always wanted to go into business for himself. Made good money working construction, saved a lot. Wishes he would have put the building up while he was working construction, because he would have it paid for now. But, going into business for himself was just an idea at that time.

He didn't want to travel to get work.

Q: What experience with gov't programs to help small business?

Didn't want to get involved w/ govt programs--too much rigama-role.

Thinks that more small businesses could do well in Butte if they did not key into the economy of butte. If you have to key on Butte, you'll be in business about a month.

Climate here is excellent for the skilled workforce--the finest in the world. But most don't have the money or collateral to go into business for themselves.

And it takes a certain mindset to go into business for yourself. You have to undersatnd that for a long time, you are putting money into, but there is no weekly paycheck. And sometimes it seems to be going out faster than it's coming in.

It's hard, jumping out of that security blanket of wages, benefits, etc. You can't rely on anyone else, you can't say (like you sometimes can when you work for someone else) I'll have it 3 weeks from now.

Too many people go into business with a rosy outlook.

Q: What was your biggest obstacle?

People say that unions are the biggest obstacle, but J doesn't think so. He is a union man, built his building w/ union labor, didn't have any trouble. Thinks that the city is the biggest obstacle. J worked on his site plan, lined his bldg up with Macke Manufacturing [check], next door. Larry Walrod said that he would have to move the building back 3 feet, also that cars couldn't pull in straight, because that meant that they would have to back out onto Garden Ave. J is all for zoning, but thinks that the city took the California code book and just put a Butte-Silver Bow cover on it. People look at that, at the complications--it stops businesses from coming in here. There aren't 20 cars a day that drive down Garden Ave.

J had problems getting inspectors down here when he needed them. Thinks they should give those people a raise so they could buy personalities. He wouldn't build here again--just too much trouble. Also, the taxes and licenses are high and getting higher. He knows that the county is hurting for a tax base, but it's really hard on small business. He ran into trouble getting the electrical ok's, because had trouble getting inspector down here [and also trouble w/ installation?]

He spoke to people who put the McDonalds in, and they said that Butte was the hardest they had ever experienced for codes. That doesn't say much for a community trying to get business in.

Also had trouble with the plumbing. Floyd Stewart, he used to run a plumbing outfit here, thinks all work should go to his son

[or son in law]. J had to go uptown three times to get him down here, then he gave him a hassle. They are little things, but they really agitate you.

Started construction of the building around Sept 8, 1985. Moved in in mid December. [He is working there, but building is still not completely done--plumbing isn't hooked up yet, for instance.]

Started business in July, 1983. Right now, feels nothing but potential for growth. From what you read, the trend for physical fitness is not going to level off until 2000, and then people are still going to want to stay fit.

Important to have a good catalogue--when you sell mailorder, you have to tell it all--they can't touch it, ask questions. Bob Earhart designed his catalogue--it's really nice, first class. He is banking on that now.

Has a couple more improvements he's working on with basic system. He wants to hit the schools, private gyms, home market. Basic system runs \$2395. Bench is only detachable, and that is \$345. There will be 2 other options eventually. He doesn't deal with credit at all. It is hard to get money out of people--when they buy something on credit, they think they don't have to pay for it. 50% deposit at time of order, and the remaining amount due on shipment. Likes payment in cashier's check or money order.

At this time, he is a one man show. Working on a gym package deal in Montana--similar to the Muscleworks in Butte [next to Exerdance on E. Park]. Only that would have 50-60 pieces. Muscleworks has about 25 (check). If that deal goes through, it will put J over the heap, give him some investment money. Only person he works with right now is a friend who owns the New Life Fitness Club in Missoula. He will sell for J in the state of MT.

J has been approached by dealers from New York, California, Florida, other places, but to take care of dealers, you have to cut price 30%. That doesn't leave enough. J likes to deal with the machine directly--if it has a problem, he will fix it. Problem w/ salespeople is that they just sell the eqpt. They can't repair it.

Q: Problems with being in Butte?

Butte is isolated. Practically everything J needs that he doesn't manufacture himself--pulleys, weight stacks, etc--he has to order from far away. Approached the Anaconda Foundry to make them for him; they decided it wasn't feasible at this time.

J didn't get much advice/help from other people. "Just wanted to do it myself." By now, he pretty much has it down. Bob Earhart handles the advertising--he takes Bob a rough sketch and idea, Bob takes it from there. It would be nice to have a secretary, maybe someone to do ad layout. But not now; for now, J pretty much has it down.

Q: Any advantages to setting up a business in Butte?

No. If J were in California, he would have more sales, because that is where the center of this business is. Here he is far away from any real market. Montana is a prime market for schools. But most of his sales are far away, and people look at the freight. J can't see any concrete advantage why a business would locate here.

One advantage, however, is the skilled workforce. Also, it costs less as far as labor. And the initial investment is less here. J's building is a 30 X 40 pumice block building. At a rough estimate, it cost him around \$30,000 for the land and building both.

Q: Why did you choose to start--or rather, keep--your business in Butte?

Like the town; born and raised here.

Tape A, Side B

J hasn't really lived much elsewhere. Was in Missoula about a month and a half. But he would consider a move from Butte if the circumstances dictated it.

Lives on Missoula Street--just below Walkerville. His neighbors are really good; they never complained when he worked in his garage. He wasn't out there at all times of the day and night, though. When 5:00 came around, he was usually out of the garage.

Q: Problems setting up schedule or system for yourself, using time?

Biggest problem is running around doing things--delivering things, picking them up. But that is getting better; now he has a lot of stock on hand, doesn't have to run out so often. Doesn't have a system as such. J says he is kind of a disorganized person.

Q: How much time do you have to spend on paperwork?

Not much. Does the books once a month--that takes two or three hours. And has everything billed the first of the month, so just pays them at one time.

Q: Get any breaks from the city or county or state for new business?

No--just basic depreciation and building payments. That helps quite a bit right now, but when the building is paid off, will have much less deduction.

Q: Things city/county could do to make small bus. easier?

J feels that when you go to the planning office, you should be able to meet with everyone you will be dealing with at once, present your site plan, discuss problems--and not just with planning director but with building, plumbing, electrical, etc all at same time. Right now, there is a broken chain of communication and everything gets fouled up. They hand you a card which has to be signed by everyone, but you don't know what those people are going to require. And, you should be able to say, I'm going to have the plumbing done on these certain days, and they would show up to do the inspection then. Because delays cost you money, having people standing around waiting for the inspector.

Q: Should the future for Butte stress high tech and information, or, small manufacturing?

Small manufacturing. J has talked to Don Peoples about small manufacturing. If you look through the book--like you can go to Pioneer Equipment and get a book of items manufactured back East, you can't get it anywhere else. If they would key on getting people into manufacturing certain items in these catalogues... And you just have to use your initiative, your own imagination. Just like with this weight training eqpt, no one said to me, John, go make weight training eqpt. You have to have the idea in your mind, people can't lead you by the hand. The small manufacturing is really going to be the way of things. Like with computers and high tech, that's all fine. But computers are just another learning tool. They are not the end.

For small manufacturing, have to get people together, see what products would be viable for manufacture in this community. That's where they are missing the boat. They want to manufacture, but they don't know what the hell they want to manufacture. J thinks there are a lot of things open here for small manufacturing.

Not raising a family here in Butte.

Q: How did you learn to make these machines?

Basically used skills from being a pipefitter. Also, if saw machine that hadn't built before, would scale it from a picture with an architect's scale. Have made machines for people that he has just seen pictures of. Doesn't have a set pattern. If he was lucky enough when he first started to see a machine people wanted, he could get some measurements that way. But usually it was just the old trial and error type.

Q: Do you have to have a real understanding of physiology or engineering mechanics?

You have to know basically how the body functions. You don't have to have any real great knowledge other than where the range of motions are, what muscles work what. You have to be innovative, though, esp in todays market, it is so competitive. You

have to keep a step ahead of yourself, you have to keep thinking of new ideas, ways you can improve things. because if you don't, the other guy is sure going to. Own experience as a weight lifter definitely helps. You know what is required, what you like. You try to make the eqpt fit everyone, which is impossible, but try to make it adjustable, flexible.

Main machine is Power System 250. Can put four out a month now; if had someone working w/ him, could put out 2 or 3 a week.

Trying to get away from custom work. The first piece, you are lucky to even break even, and you may not end up making another piece like that. That's why he is basing his business on one piece of equipment. Some companies make upwards of 50 or 60 pieces of eqpt; no way J is going to do that. He is trying to keep his line down to just a few pieces of eqpt that he knows he is going to sell really well.

Liability insurance?

A real hazy area. The only thing he worries is about is somebody falling on a machine. There is no way a machine is ever going to break. Companies won't even talk to him about liability in that respect, for the eqpt, because we are so lawsuit happy. Virtually impossible to get insurance against theft for tools. Liability, you can get as far as if someone slips inside your building. But as far as getting covered for the eqpt you make, very tough. Hasn't found anybody yet who will cover him. They will cover you, but it will cost you a fortune. Most companies don't really carry any liability.

Q: Worry you?

Most definitely. Only way going to hurt yourself on this eqpt is lack of knowledge, using it improperly, or tripping and actually falling into it. Because the machines are not going to break. That's why he makes them so heavy. "You have to build your own liability into the machine, that's how I figure it."

The only thing you can do is incorporate your business. Then the only thing they can do is go after your business. He is not incorporated right now, his accountant advised him not to at this time. Will at a later date.

Q: Do you have advisors who help you with your business?

Only advisor is his wife. She is a teacher, 3rd grade, at Hillcrest. She was born and raised here in Butte. J is not the type to go looking for advice. "I guess I'm real funny that way--not that I'm not open for advice, but I'm not the type that goes looking for advice."

Slavic community--very strong when J was growing up, in the Boulevard, very ethnic oriented in that area--Mesapust (sp?0). But a lot ethnic has died in Butte, except for St. Patricks day.

That is kind of sad because a nation is really built on its traditions, and when you don't have traditions, you really don't have anything to fall back on.

Q: Why do you think that it has died out?

A lot of it is because of the Anaconda Company. They didn't look to destroy ethnic things, but when they destroyed the Columbia Gardens, and when they took out McQueen and Meaderville, a lot of those things kind of went with it. And the ethnic activities connected w/ those places were just gone.

ACM could have moved everything from the Gardens before they mined there--they didn't have community responsibility. The Gardens was always a place you could go. And now it's just gone. It will never be the same again.

Q: How do you feel about Washington Construction coming in?

Mixed feelings. J thinks it's positive. But like a lot of things that have happened in this town, we've maybe gone overboard, granting him industrial revenue bonds, and so many tax breaks. He should have had to prove himself a little bit before he gets all the help he's asking for. But J feels he is trying to do something for Butte, but that there is more money involved than just Washington's. Somebody is behind him, and down the pike we may find out who it is. But J doesn't think he has the resources to run an operation like this.

J was born April 1, 1951. Wife's name is Jacqueline. Married 11 years.

Q: Strengths for Butte in the future?

They are trying to diversify their economy. That's positive. And kind of think the way organized labor sees the way its going to conduct itself as far as wage demands and things, it's a climate that has been fostered by Ronald Reagan, J thinks, and we are getting the drift of it out here now. But everyone is going to have to tighten up their belt a little bit. Because you can't compete in a world market with the kind of wages we are getting right now. It's just impossible. The diversified economy is a good thing because for years and years and years we based everything on the Anaconda Co. J can't see the fast food restaurant coming in here as a real positive thing like everybody sees they are, don't think they provide for a great economic base. J thinks there has to be other things like the small manufacturing, that has to be pursued and not just given lip service. You really have to put some kind of committee together, investigate things, look into what things would be viable products and not just used within the state of MT--keyed for sales throughout the United States and even the world.

Q: A lot of people say that McDonalds coming into town signals the weakness of unions in Butte. How do you feel about that?

McDonalds serves a definite function. They don't pose any threat. It's mostly keyed to low paying jobs for kids. The building was built with union help. J doesn't think McD's is any threat; to some people with small minds, it might be a threat. But overall, thinks it is positive for the community, another business. At least they are providing jobs.

Q: Some people say that Butte's union reputation hurts it--agree?

J can go on for hours on that. He feels that a union craftsman can do it better, much faster, than a non union craftsman. He is prejudiced, but that's how he feels about it.

Q: Skilled workforce due to unions?

Yes. They have apprenticeship programs--pipefitters, for instance, has one of finest app program in country; part of your paycheck goes to appr. training. You have better craftsmen when you have apprenticeship and journeyman training. And the Company produced a lot of good craftsmen. People had the greatest opportunity of a lifetime to work in the machine shop on the hill, the boiler shop, the blacksmith shop.

[after tape turned off:]

"It's just a gut feeling, but I think '86 will be an excellent year."