

Interview Of: Julie Crnich

Conducted By: Chris Roos

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**Chris Roos:** This is an interview of Julie Crnich, conducted by Chris Roos on October, 30<sup>th</sup>, 2006. Alright Julie, I'd like to thank you for being here today. I'd like to start out by asking what community did you grow up in, in Butte.

**Julie Crnich:** I grew up in the McQueen addition of Butte, MT which was located on the East side of the Berkley Pit at this time. Growing up where the hole is used to be a mountain and so I always said I lived between the West mountain and the East mountains. Interesting climate because of that at that time. We were in an area that grew fruit trees, we had plants that didn't show up in other areas because of that saving grace of that mountain there, changed considerably when they started mining, changed the weather patterns. As a little kid I could sit out there and we could see the storms hitting the flats and we'd be in sunshine so it was a different time. I was born in the old St. James hospital that is located on Idaho Street which was the St. James hospital at that time. I was baptized in the sacred heart church which was on East Park Street, which was one of the first things to be demolished when the mine started its forward push, and I did grow up in McQueen which was a community, in my area, I was in southern, the south end of McQueen and most of all the residents were Yugoslavian, Croatian, we had a number of Serbians who lived in the neighborhood and there were a number of Italians who had migrated out of Meaderville into homes up there in McQueen. So it was a broad range of people, it was a very close community. The fire hall was the community gathering place. The McQueen Athletic Club was our own bar which is now located, they moved it, located down on Continental, at this time. But back then it was strictly in McQueen, it was a, the miners would come out of the, off shift and go to the McQueen Club and its somewhat kept that flavor I think, even today. But it was a close community, tight community; we had our own church, as was common with a lot of communities in Butte at that time. We had the Holy Savior Church and the Holy Savior School. I went to the Harrison Elementary School, so the Catholic School was in the North end and the public school was in the south end. I guess for me growing up in that neighborhood, I am the only one of my family, out of at that time there was probably about twenty cousins. I am the only one out of that twenty that went to the public grade school; the rest of them went to the Catholic grade school. So as I said we were a close, close community. Different community on the south end as it was on the north end. North end was very prevalent of like the east side of butte, apartment buildings, close knit, very few yards, very few trees. By the time you got down to the southern end that was really settled mostly in the late '40's, two-three lots per house, lots of trees, umm., neighborhood of everybody working. Saw no divorces coming from our end of the neighborhood. Very few alcoholics, it was an interesting thing, we did have, we did have one who used to love to sing, and so we knew he'd been drinking because he used to sit out on his back porch and sing, but it wasn't prevalent. And that was a little bit different than the north end of McQueen, which was much older. And a little bit different type of, Blue collar workers compared to more of a professional side of workers in the south end, but it was a great place, great place to grow up in.

**C.R.** OK you mentioned that everybody worked in your part of McQueen, what did your parents do for a living.

**J.C.** My father was a sheet-metal worker, and he was very, he tells great stories. Loved the story of standing on the ladies grand piano to put in a furnace duct, which was always, I could see why people cringed at times, but he was very good. What stands out about my father is that he was um, and this goes back and its not really Butte history, but it's a history of the Catholic Church at that time, and possibly other churches, other faiths, he was left handed and because he was left handed when he was growing up, it was believed to be the sign of the devil, to be left handed. And he literally was beaten on his hands until he learned to write with his right hand. So it's fascinating to me was that he wrote right-handed and it really wasn't until he died that truly understood what it meant because all of his tools are left-handed tools, his bowling ball is a left-handed bowling ball. He was a gentle sole, he was Croatian, he was first generation, grandma made it here and he was born here in the United States, she was pregnant when she left Yugoslavia. He was born down in Jerome, Arizona. Which I never understood how in starting out in Jerome, they ended up here in Butte and in doing research, William A. Clark was in Jerome, Arizona and then William A. Clark here in Butte. And so they followed like-type mining operations. So my dad grew up in butte, my mother grew up in butte and so my mother was a house-wife. At one point, there was 16 years difference between my father and my mother in age. And in the 1950's, my dad came down with diabetes and I believe, my feeling is that they must have thought diabetes was a death-occurring type illness at that time. And so my father went to San Francisco to be treated for it and my mother, I was about five, my mother believed my father was going to die. And so when I was about five years old, she went to work. And that was a first; she was the only one at that time, of a female that had gone to work. And that was very rare, and that must have been probably around 1956, well must have been '57.

**C.R.** And what was it she went to work as.

**J.C.** She, down here on Granite Street, and I'm trying to think where its at, there is a three story building that they've worked on and that used to be a pharmacy, and she worked there as a clerk in the pharmacy. As it turned out, my father did not die and my mother did, probably about two years after that. So it was interesting, he always said that he got his diabetes from being a sheet-metal worker. He did a lot of roofs and a lot of working in a lot of attics. And from all the heat, as a young man in his career, he drank a lot of coke, and back then it really had coke, and he would drink about two six-packs of coca-cola and he always felt that's what caused the diabetes but he lived, he lived until 1978. We were the second, third-to-last house to be moved out of McQueen with the expansion of the Berkley Pit. We received \$65,000 for our house and three lots, bought it back for \$1, the house was moved down on Hobson, its still there. At the time he moved the house, he, the trucks had started moving, rolling past, at this point most of McQueen was gone, there was his house, my aunt's house and one other house that were left out of all the houses and homes that were in that neighborhood and the trucks were rolling by from, going from the Berkley Pit over to the concentrator and would drive right by. So when he moved the house, he'd been given a, they allowed him to build a variance to move the house down on Albany which is down by the country club and they were going to allow him to move that house there and it was too quite for him. So he moved the house right across, which at that time was the Consolidated Freightway Yards so that every morning at around 4:00 the trucks started up. Which was really, I remember the first time coming back after I was married and my husband and I are sitting, laying there and all of a sudden these trucks start up and it was amazing. But

dad worked for, at the time, the Sullivan Roofing Company and I find that fascinating because last year I met the daughter of the family and as a young married woman, she remembers my father. So that was, so he worked many years for that, until they shut down and then he finished up, he was one of those that retired and then couldn't handle retirement and so at the age of 66, went to work again until he was 70 and went to work for Montana Sign Works.

**C.R.** OK, umm earlier you mentioned the elementary school you attended, did you attend any other schools in Butte, and if you did, where were they located at.

**J.C.** From the Harrison School, I went to East Junior High, which was very traumatic. I don't, now looking at my own children having gone through school and the cosmopolitan of all the different kids from different areas. We didn't we had started kindergarten with the same kids all the way through sixth grade, typical grade school, small grade school. And hit junior high and didn't have a class with anybody that I had been in grade school with. So East Junior High was a very traumatic time, to the point where there's been years where I would still have dreams, or nightmares, about walking up the staircase at East Junior High. And when I went back to teach there, I still had dreams of walking up the staircase at east junior high, it was a really strange thing. But I went through eighth grade there and then as it happened, as I mentioned, my mother had died, and she died when I was seven. And in the process, I literally picked up my box of rocks, my box of clothes, my box of toys and went over the fence and lived with this other family until I was 18 years old. And so at the end of eighth grade, my foster dad was the division engineer for the interstate highway, or the state of Montana highway system, and so we were moved to Glendive to finish I-94. So it was the Harrison for grade school, East Junior High for junior high and the Holy Savior Church for catechism lessons.

**C.R.** OK, you've mentioned a couple different childhood memories that stand out; do you have any others that stand out, and why?

**J.C.** There are certain memories that really stand out for me, I think that the escalator in Burr's. Burr's was a major department store on the corner of Dakota and Park Street and it had an escalator. And I remember as a kid, two things, going up and down that escalator 'cause it was a great ride and my first time that I had ever, I remember the first time that I ever dealt with a mannequin and believing that they were real people just standing really still and I remember touching them and the hand falling off and being as a little kid just being totally freaked out, so that's I think why Burr's stands in my mind.

Great memories of the, all the movie houses back then. The Fox was a movie show, we had the Montana with a beautiful spiral, like a spiral, like an antebellum staircase, and it wasn't a stairs, it was a ramp that went up, and that was on Montana Street, on Montana and Broadway, and then we had one called the Rialto that was on Park, a little off Park and Main. For us at that time, going to the show, they had a lot of, through the schools, they had matinee shows that were promoted through the grade schools, and you would buy like a punch ticket and you would get X amount of shows, X amount of shows for so much money, and so we, we went to shows a lot, we went to a lot of movies. Another memory is, with school, was the savings bond program in the grade schools, and we would come in every Wednesday with our quarters or how much money, \$1.00 whatever we did and you had a book that you put money towards a savings bond and then when you had so much money, you got a savings bond, and I don't know if that was city wide or if that was just something that the parent teacher association at that time did, but I remember that. I remember the buss system, and we still have the busses, but at that time for us to leave the

neighborhood, that was the way that we got out uptown was on the city busses, and I always thought I was privileged because they would drop me right off at my house and I was the only one who ever got dropped off right at their house, and I'm not sure why that occurred. They either stopped, they used to stop at one end of the block or at the other end of the block and so if I, they would just stop right in front of my house, so I remember that. About Butte, we used to do skating, the skating rinks that used to be done by the fire departments, and every year they would find an empty lot, all over town they would find empty lots and do some dirt work and make berms then the fire departments would come down and put the water in them for ice rinks. And so a lot of things done around the ice rinks and come Christmas, we'd have all the Christmas trees that we'd gather up around the neighborhood and then have big bonfires while we were ice-skating, so that's a great memory too. So there was a lot of things that we did that we were able to, the S&L Ice Cream store that used to be up on Broadway, we'd sit there and it was sort of like a one-counter Matt's, if you can envision what Matt's is, there was just one counter at the S&L, but they had all the, they were a precursor to Baskin & Robbins, they had all the ice-cream, and what it was, that was on Broadway, and on the corner, on the other corner, right now where Silver House is, that used to be the Library. So once a week, we'd come up for, they had a reading hour, or a kids hour where you could get books and so it was always a treat, you'd go and get your books and then you'd go to the S&L Ice-Cream. And so it was always this everything you did. I think of things that really stick out in my mind, I'd say that, that was it. Growing up in Butte, I had a lot of opportunities, I look back and I took music lessons, I took knitting lessons, I took skating lessons, I took singing lessons, I took a lot of lessons back then, sports was not something that was pushed at all, but there was a lot of other lessons that were provided. A big thing was the Hennessy Building, which we still have the building but at that time it was a huge department store and so they had a lot of classes that they would hold their, in their knitting, in their sewing, so we were more apt to be doing those types of things than anything else. Neighborhood, most kids stayed in their neighborhoods to play, so neighborhood playgrounds, neighborhood activities and I guess as a neighborhood, one of the big things and which after, and then my own kids experienced where we live now was Santa Clause, and we used to be at the McQueen Athletic Club, Santa Clause would show up every year at Christmas time and all the kids from the neighborhood would file through and get their sack from Santa, and it was always the same gentleman. And you have to realize that growing up Catholic, I would assume anyplace but growing up in Butte, there was a distinction between the Catholics and the Non-Catholics, and I always thought it was funny is that the guy who played Santa wasn't a Catholic, he belonged to the Methodist Church, so as a little kid, I always thought that was strange but he played Santa for a long time until his death.

**C.R.** Well thank-you, one other thing you mentioned earlier was that you went to high school in Glendive and I'm assuming after that you left the area for awhile as well, what brought you back to Butte to live.

**J.C.** Well one of the things that happened is that when I was going to school, college was just an extension of high school, you didn't go to school for 12 years, you went to school for 16 years, it was just anticipated in my family. So at the point when I graduated, as I said I lived with this foster family from the time I was 7 until the time I was 18, when I turned 18, I moved back to Butte to live with my father and I started going to school at Tech. And so I, I had come to Tech and I thought, when I first started, I thought I was going to get a math degree. It was interesting; I was talking this morning with one of our female science teachers and as I explained, I said I hit here and having taken all the math in high school, I didn't take freshman

math, I went right into the next level of math here, and I was lost. I did not develop any study skills in high school and I was lost when I hit Tech here in that area and there wasn't any help, at the time, the professor at that time really didn't think women should be mathematicians. And there wasn't a lot of help at that point and I did not have the personality to stem my nose at him and say to heck with you I'm going to become one, I sort of retreated and I got involved in the history department at that time, we had a history degree. But, due to, and this is history of Tech, during the blue ribbon commission where they were considering turning Tech into a 2-year school, one of the things that they negotiated with is that they got rid of the history degree and the English degree. And so I left Tech at the end of my junior, about mid-point of my junior year and finished up at Missoula and got a history of political science degree. I then came back to Butte, did my student teaching here in Butte and taught a year of school here in Butte. But the problem was I was 22 years old teaching government classes, teaching 18 year olds that I was meeting out every Friday night in the bars. Which didn't prove to be advantageous to either of us so I chose not to follow that career path. Left Butte with the F.W. Woolworth company, was away from Butte for close to 15 years, I guess 12, 12 that last time and in the process had gotten married, had children, and what brought us back then, truly what brought us back was when they put the out-of-state hunting licenses on a lottery, and when there was no guarantee that we would get a hunting license, we moved back to Montana. It ended up coming back to Butte because at that time there was an opening in the Montana Bureau of Mines and so my husband took that position with the Bureau of Mines and that's what brought us back to this area. Coming back though, all my family had then passed on, I did not form any friendships during high school because I wasn't here, so it was like coming back to a, moving into a town that I did know because I did not have any of those extended relationships and so that was interesting, even though I knew the geographic and they physical layout of it, it was making friends all over again. Its proved to be a, I think it was a good choice for our children, definitely a good choice for our hunting, and its been a good choice all around. I'm very happy to be working for Tech now, I'm very pleased to be working for the departments I am now, I think I just have a much greater understanding of what this school does and I'm happy too. And I'm happy to be doing this for Mr. Harrington and the class.

**C.R.** Well thank you very much, do you have anything else you'd like to add or did we get it all.

**J.C.** I think this is great, I think oral histories are one of the finest ways to learn about a history of some things, so I thank you for giving me this opportunity.

**C.R.** Well thank you very much.