

Oral History Project

Amy T. Metcalf

We, Lorraine Childs and Amy Metcalf  
(Person Interviewed) (Interviewer)

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(Date) City, State, Zip Butte

Butte MT - 59701  
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Outline and questions for the interview:

- I. Introduction
- II. Memories of childhood
- III. Memories of depression years
- IV. Memories after the depression
- V. Conclusion

What do you remember about growing up in Butte?

Tell me some of your fondest memories of your childhood.

What do you remember about the depression era? How did that time effect your family?

What are your fondest memories of that time in your life?

What do you remember about the years following the depression? What do you remember about Butte in that time period? Any people from the town that made an impression on you?

Any other things that you would like to talk about that we have not covered in our discussion?

## Outline of Interview:

- I. Memories of childhood
- II. Memories of depression years
- III. Memories following the depression
- IV. Memories of friends from childhood, also family
- V. Recreational activities of the time, including family outings
- VI. Town characters
- VII. Gratefulness for town spirit and national acknowledgment
- VIII. Talking about present day and hopes for the future

An interview conducted by Amy Metcalf of her grandma Lorraine Childs at her apartment on April 3 at 7 p.m. 2002. I'd like to introduce my grandma Lorraine. Hi Amy. Hi Grandma. I feel very privileged for you to have asked me to do this and I will let you know and I am happy to share this part. Everyone has a story to tell and I am going to tell this to the best of my memory and knowledge. I wasn't born in Butte I was six months old when I came here from Pentelton Oregon with my parents. I was the youngest of five in the family and a older half brother. My father came to butte in 1896 from Denver Colorado on a bicycle. And his occupation was a black smith and my mother came from St. Paul Minnesota. And they were married in the old saint Patrick's church. We lived on the six hundred block of west diamond street. My father's background in working with the black smith and he was older than my mom and I guess it was the industrial age and all the things that came and the trade of the blacksmith went to the side of the road. I was born in 1928 and I was a child through the depression. Oh, my dad's name was William Barth and my mother was Regina Casper Barth. And these five children we all attended the old Webster Garfield school, down on Alumium and Idaho. We got there by the way of ankle express and it was just great. That walk to school in the nice weather and the cold weather and during the depression years we didn't always have the shoes and goulashes and a lot of times we would fill the holes in the shoes with cardboard. Or else we would put on rubber soles that would flip and flop when you walked along. But it was happiness. And always had something good and nourishing on the table. And

the smells and odors as you came in the house with the breads and the cooking and baking and it was wonderful. We went this afternoon on our little tour around town so you would know and be familiar when I would mention these different areas that I would go. As a child I would take a little piece of bread and butter or nucco and nucco came in a sack, it was white like crisco, and it had a little tiny pellet of orange and you mixed it with your hands and that was nothing but a little ball of food coloring and it would color it so it would look like butter. And that was nucco. And that little piece of bread and butter and I would walk from Diamond street to the reservoir on north Excel. And it seemed like it was miles and I showed you the wall at Montana Tech and incidently that's the montana school of mines to me. And there's people and friends from all over the world that have gone to that school that have looked me up because your Uncle Bill graduate of montana school of mines and that's a top notch that's not a mickey mouse school it's a world known all over and butte can be very proud of it and I am. Anyhow, my little walks and wall climbing at tech my oldest brother worked on that project fro the WPA. Now what is the WPA? That was something that was like what the job corp is today. OK. They had that for the working man. (Phone rings) Tape shut off briefly. The pay wasn't good and it gave a man dignity and work. And as I told you we had our neighborhood skating rink where the hospital is and that was called the lover's roost. And we would gather all the Christmas trees after Christmas and gather them and stack them up and that was our bon fire to keep warm. And in the summer time all the kids would bring their

potato and we'd have a potato roast and another bon fire; throw those potatoes in and I would never think of eating a potato like that today but oh did that taste good. They tasted so good. We would play run sheep run, kick the can and it and ah, and we did our own fun and on every corner a lot of little grocery stores that you could go for your bread and milk and things. Neighbors helped neighbors. They helped each other. It was a good time to grow up in Butte. And the good times and the summer times and the trips to the Columbia gardens for children's day and take our little lunch and spend the day out there on Thursday. And there used to be a zoo in Butte we had bears and monkeys. I think that we... what else did we have? I can remember the zoo up in behind the roller coaster. Never had the money for the roller coaster ride or the airplanes, once in awhile a nickel for the merry go round. But we had fun up on the cowboy swings and slides and the rocks and one day out of the year we got to go up and pick a bouquet of pansies out of the pretty Columbia gardens. And I told you when they were putting the gas lines in and the ditch that was dug between Diamond and Silver street I was busy and jumped the ditch and ended up in it my mother couldn't get me out and the neighbor boy got me out. It was a deep ditch. And going uptown at night. Was fun, it was beautiful before a mall the stores that were uptown and the busyness it was busy when we came up out of the depression and into the late 30's and the street cars that ran over park street they ran from park to Englewood park from east butte to McQueen and then there was a dinky out there. It took the passengers on. But ah, I liked it I liked that street car and getting on it. I also

told you when they took the street cars out they took and set the street cars up in different neighborhoods in town and the one that we got sat on the south west corner of silver and Clark street and it had a big pot belly stove to keep us warm in the winter and that's were I went for my girl scout meetings. And I was telling my older brother about it and he said "no" we didn't have street car as a meeting hall and I said we did. Well I had to chase down a friend of mine to verify and back that up and I was right, my memory was right. And there used to be at the nine mile there used to be full of china men and they had produce farms out at the nine mile and we called him Johnny Chinaman and he had an old truck and the cover a black tar canvas cover and roll it up and the scale on the back of that truck would be waving as he would come down the alley. But the produce that they would have was wonderful and it would be door to door delivery and the Ice man we didn't have refrigerators, we didn't have automatic washers, the boiler would go on for the coal and the wood stove and no one could afford to heat the whole house, in those years and if we had a fire at Christmas or if company came. Fire in the front room. But we'd get together with the popcorn popper and have popcorn and play monopoly and cards and when it seemed like my home was the gathering home for everybody and my parents welcomed that they knew where I was were the kids where when the kids gathered there. The Ice man would come and that was a treat when he would 25, 50 or 75 lb block of ice to put in the ice box. But I never did it but my older brother used to and John Tresonio and my brother Clarence would go Ice box raiding. People would have them on their

back porch and they would go and do that I ice box raiding, I would never go do a thing like that but they did. Now what was that? What? What was that, ice box raiding, stealing the ice? They'd good and help themselves to people's ice box is what ice box raiding is. (Laughing)

We didn't have too many cars but my folks had Essex that would run once a year, my brother in law he would work on it and get it running. It was beautiful talk about plush beautiful on the inside but it wasn't a running car and we got to ride in it once a year around the fourth of July we got a ride to the nine mile and that was a treat. Talk about a plush automobile that would be worth a fortune today. I used to sit in the garage and play that I was driving that car, we had a garage for that car. Everybody didn't have cars. My little neighborhood school at the Webster Garfield school I have lifetime friendships from there. My very good friend Opal and I for years and years and years. And good kids and kids didn't get into trouble and it was a different time we had different kinds of pressures and we'd work out of that depression and money was very scares. If we had the nickel to go the Saturday afternoon matinee at the Park theater which we usually had that, you would line up at the park theater and it would be down in the middle of east park street and I didn't point that out to you the bank sits on the corner but it would have been right in the middle of east park street there. And that line would come clear down past the Rolato theater and down because you got in for a nickel. The Park theater Rolato theater, the American theater, the Broadway theater on Broadway and the Fox. We had these five theaters uptown and downtown on Harrison Ave, do you know where that might be?

Down across from the H and R block, the great harvest there was a theater there and one in Walkerville. And when we would read the funnies there was little orphan Annie, Maggie and Jigs, Cats and Jammer, AllyOop, Buck Rogers, and reading Buck Rogers and thinking that there was flying rockets and flying to the moon oh, that was, 65 years ago that was fake-a-roo. That was something. Someone had some way out imagination. This is the beginning of what's coming but we were just coming out, into the automobile stage when I was a kid there was cars yes, but nothing like today. And oh Marcus Daly was in the middle of Main in front of the federal building and they finally moved that statue to the school of mines, I'm not sure the year it was moved but there was a lot of cars that came down main street that ended up in the middle of Marcus Daly. The gallus frames on new years eve all the mines in Butte the whistles would blow. At Christmas time when I drive to see the lights today and those old times that get up and light that gallus frame for us I say god bless them, god bless the dedication for the old timers to crawl that thing and throw those lights on for everyone to enjoy and there's people in the world that don't know what a gallus frame is and I look at it as structure of it and Butte when it was wide open town and everything was going round the clock. The streets were safe to walk on, the people were friendly and you'd talk to someone for five minutes and you'd have a life time friend. The hospitality in Butte America and I think it's gonna come back to were it was. I'm hoping because there's no place in this whole world like Butte. And were I am today and I thank God that I am able to do and be up there as a volunteer at the

Lady of the Rockies I have a, meet people from all over the world and they come in and they talk they are very impressed with Butte Montana The architect of the buildings they said that even Jenny from CA the art teacher in LA said go to Butte Montana and draw the building there the architect work is beautiful. There are so many happy memories that went with that childhood I used to peddling newspapers with my brothers. I had a friend from school who had a liberty magazine route and I used to walk one end of town to the other on that route. After school, great great memories. Tape pauses for a moment. We had our town characters we had Nickel Annie. We had ah, Mary Pointdexter she used to have her bags she'd come into the shamican café and she thought that make-up was really something, believe me she used an abundance of it. We had ah, lots of little characters in Butte and you can see them. But to go uptown in the evening and window shop in the department stores or over in the town that was a great experience that was before the malls. And people would go up and take a stroll and see people stand and visit. And the fourth of July parades we had were just gorgeous all the businesses had decorated floats. Butte is Butte America. And a lot of happy memories here. What else can I say I hope that I gave you something of an insight of what it was to and it's a great place to raise kids and have a family. I don't know what else we could talk about Amy do you? Well I think that you pretty much covered your childhood grandma. I just wish you could talk a little bit better. I do too. OK Thank you. OK (the tape ends)