

We, Madge Casteel and Mary Kathleen Oster
(Person Interviewed) (Interviewer)

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Signed: Madge Casteel
(Person Interviewed)

Mary Kathleen Oster
(Interviewer)

Friday, Nov. 27, 1998
(Date)

Butte, MT
(City & State)

Reflections on Life in Butte:

An interview of Madge Casteel

conducted by Mary Ostler

November 27, 1998

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Transcription of the Interview of

Annie Madge Potter Casteel

as recorded by Mary Ostler on

November 27, 1998 in

Madge's Home in Butte

Mary: Alright. What is your full name?

Madge: My full name is Annie Madge Potter Casteel.

Mary: And when were you born?

Madge: January 16th, 1912

Mary: Where were you born?

Madge: It was called Dempsey, Idaho at that time. It's Lava Hot Springs, Idaho.

Mary: And when did you and your family first arrive in Butte?

Madge: In March of 1929.

Mary: How old were you at the time?

Madge: Seventeen

Mary: Why did you come here?

Madge: My dad had come earlier because he was a crop, you know, a partnership, you know...what do you call them? Anyway, he shared crops and we got pretty short of money and times were very ... began to be very bad on the farm, and prices were low, and so he sold the farm out from under us so we came to Butte to work in the mines. He had been a miner in Nevada earlier than that.

Mary: And how did you feel about the move to Butte?

Madge: I was heartbroken cause I had, I was seventeen and I had to leave all my friends and all familiar places. I'd started school there, and I was a junior when I came here. I had just finished my junior year in Idaho.

Mary: So you would have been a senior coming into Butte?

Madge: I, the next, ... that following year, I went to Butte High and graduated from Butte High that following spring.

Mary: Yeah, that would be tough. When did you first come in contact with the Great Depression? Was that as soon as you moved to Butte or.....

Madge: The first I became was after I graduated and tried to find work. Butte was a . . . I knew

that times were hard, but they got harder than that, a lot harder after that. But, I found out then when I graduated from Butte High and tried to find work or any help for college, such things weren't heard of at that time. I had no help. No one had help. And it was such a union town, you had to have experience to get in the union, and yet, they wouldn't give you work unless you were a union person, strong union town at that time.

Mary: So, what did you do? Did you ever find a job?

Madge: I had a sort of a relative . . . It was my sister-in-law's aunt who was running the Milwaukee Beanery, which was not union, and she liked me and knew that I was a good worker, and so she put me in there as a cook\waitress, and I learned to be a cook and a good cook, short-order cook. And I became a fine waitress and later went to work for Mrs. Shea at the union after I got in. But, I worked there for a dollar a day and my food, so I knew that times were bad, if you work thirty dollars a month and your one meal a day.

Mary: And how did this affect your family? Did they also have . . . Like your parents?

Madge: My dad was working at the mine, and was one of the best miners in Butte, and he is . . . I know you can find it in records that he's one of the best. He always what they called "top the board" and that means more yardage out, piecework, you know. You got paid for what you did instead of a day's wages. So daddy was one of the last men to be laid off, it was laid off, it wasn't fired. The mines went down later, and daddy was one of the last men to work there in the mines, and finally he got on just two days a week, and then they finally closed down together; they were all out of work.

Mary: So that, at first when the depression first hit, you came to Butte, and then when he was working in the mines, he was one of the last ones to be laid off?

Madge: Yes!

Mary: Because he was a good worker.

Madge: You know, kids seventeen aren't as aware of the problems of the world as you are at my age now. Probably you don't notice that it's really hard times because your dad and mother still set the table with food on it and you, after all, if your belly is full, you're not as worried about things, as if you're the bread winner.

Mary: Right

Madge: But, I was happy all this time, and I think most people who have a home, and are loved and a family, you know are happy and they're not really aware of the troubles of the world until you get old enough, like I say, when I graduated and tried to get a job, then's

when I knew that times were bad.

Mary: Yeah. How did you feel about working . . . after, you know, it was tough, but

Madge: I liked to work all my life. I've always loved to work. I'd like to work, yet. I would do any, ... I mean, did good work and so good that I got tipped, even then. My tips were pretty good, considering the times, and I always like to work and then of course, after I got a little more education, government schools and things like that, I got so I was a very good typist. I went into office work and I was set, after I got a job or two from office work, but that came way later after times were getting better.

Mary: So, did you like Butte after awhile? Did you grow to like it?

Madge: I liked it better, and still do now than any place in the world; no place like Butte; no place in the world like Butte.

Mary: What do you think changed your mind or helped you to like Butte?

Madge: Everything. Everything that I've ever been important to me happened in Butte. That means deaths and births and marriages. Everything I found in Butte that made me happy. And I have a million friends. I know everybody and I have an awful lot of friends. Then my church developed to what it is today, and that took, that was important to me in my life, and I still do have a lot of friends everywhere in Butte. I think that's what I like about it then. To me, I like everything about it. I like. I think it's the safest place on the earth today; we're not having floods; we're not having the cyclones, riots, wars, anything else in Butte; Butte's safe. It's my home. I don't want to move ever, ever. Visit maybe. I'll visit. I want to visit everywhere in the world, but come right straight back to Butte. Then I have a sister here, and at my age, that means a lot. And I have a sister in Helena, who I love very much and that means a lot to have at my age, especially, you know. I have my nieces.

Mary: And is this where you met your husband?

Madge: Yes, my husband came from Colorado. He was a miner in Colorado, and everything shut down there. He was a coal miner. He and his brothers worked in the coal mines. But, he had a brother, here that told him he could get on in Butte if he'd come up, if he wanted to come up here and his brother was, oh, a shirt-tailed relative, I guess. He was married to my mother's sister's so and such, you know. Well, he was alone in Butte, and so was my mother and dad alone from that country in Idaho, and so George came to visit his brother, Lee, and he got him on at the mines and then he brought him up to visit mother and when he came up and I was there. I happened to be there, and happened to meet him at the same time, and I don't know . . . we didn't have a very long courtship. I guess we both wanted to get married when we way each other. I believe that he asked

June out first, my sister, but she didn't want to go with him because she already had another date. Anyway, he asked me, and I said yeah, I didn't have anything for that night, so we went. So three weeks later, we were married. We just knew each other for three weeks.

Mary: Wow, that's neat.

Madge: I wouldn't advise it? I'd never advise that.

Mary: And he continued to work in the mines?

Madge: He worked in the mines, let's see, I We didn't get along right at first. I guess we were a little old when we got married and accustomed to our ways. He wanted to go back to Colorado, and I didn't want to leave Butte. So, it ended in a divorce. I divorced him. He left, and I divorced him. And he went back to Colorado, and worked back there, and he was: Times were tough in Colorado, same as they were in Butte. But, he knew he could get a job back in Butte, but besides, he was lonesome to see me, and he called me and asked me if I'd consider going back to him, and I said yes, if he'd come, let me live in Butte. So he did. So, we were marr. . . . We were divorced a year and a half, but we got remarried by a justice of the peace then. And well, we lived together for the next fifty years before he died. Glad, glad that's all behind me. That divorce.

Mary: Oh, yeah. So you've always been around mining culture and

Madge: I've always been in and out of Butte all of my life. I left for about, my dad had to move out of Butte and get a . . he bought a little place out in Sanders County, the other side of Thompson Falls, and he and mother; he was sick and mother was young and not well; I mean, getting older and not well, so we finally moved out and bought a piece of land there and bought us a few cattle and, we got in to cattle business someway. Little by little, we just happened to get a lot of cattle and quite a bit of land. Little by little. We did everything we could to work. Both of us worked and paid for it; prices were quite cheap. We were out there about fifteen years, I guess. And then my mother died while we still lived there. And then, the next year, dad, my father, had a heart attack and we brought him to Butte, and he had to stay here for doctors and things. So one day, he called me and said he didn't want to be alone in here, and so George and I came in here. That was in 1966 when we came back here and we, he had to go to the hospital, and I got a job in an office, here; I got a job running Sunset Memorial Gardens Cemetery. And I worked thirteen years, really. And the only shifts I laid off was my annual leave, you know, vacation times. And I worked thirteen straight years here, after that. And George, as soon as he got well, why he went to work for the ACM as a guard and worked as an ACM guard here for quite awhile until he got too old. Then he retired and I still kept on working. He retired and went out to the ranch off and on. He'd go out to the ranch about three weeks because he loved his ranch out there. And I'd stay in here and work cause I like it better, it's easier money. It really was. I used to coax him, "Why

don't you go to town and I can earn more in a week of wages than you could in five years on this farm?" So, I called it a farm, and my folks were here and nobody else was out there so...so we came back in here to ... dad needed us, why we came back in here, and we've been here ever since. I worked up until 1980 and then I retired myself. There was no way I could go to college. No way. We didn't have money enough, and any kind of help, financial help, was unheard of at that time. Absolutely unheard of. So, there's nothing to do but go to work, and that's what I did. Just graduated from high school. But, I feel like I'm nearly college bred, you know. In that day, why I felt 'bout like I had a degree now, you know, as people do now when they have a degree. I felt quite well educated...only now do I see I wasn't. Computer was never heard of, word processor was never heard of ...keep mentioning em.

Mary: It changes all the time. That is for sure. What are some of your fond memories of growing up and around in Butte and even in Trout Creek?

Madge: Well, all of my fond memories center around my mother and father and my brothers and sisters and then they had children, and I dearly loved all of them, and then their children had children, and you guys, I dearly loved all of. I loved my family. They are my fondest and dearest memories. I've always had a great many friends. Always had friends. Many, many friends. And I enjoy them. I had a happy marriage after I got a few little experience. I was hear-headed, you know, independent and mostly my fault that I didn't have a perfect marriage from the start. But I guess, and my visits to all relatives. I've been many, many times to all parts of Utah, a few times to California, quite a few to Colorado where I had relatives. I guess those are my fondest memories. Dancing is my fondest memory of any sport in the world is dancing. I was one of Montana's best dancers, and I enjoyed it.

Mary: Where did you go dancing?

Madge: Well, in those days, we had big bands here. And it started in that mother was really watched, she was really particular when I went and who I went with, but then I always went to one weekly dance at the Winter Garden up on South Montana. And then Sundays we went, if my mother let us go on Sundays, we'd go to Columbia Gardens, up to Columbia Gardens.... and there's where we got our big, biggest bands and noted bands, too. Butte was in its hay day, right then, you know, up until the market broke, well even after the market broke Butte was a main mining town for everything. Right in it's hay day. And I did love dancing, ballroom dancing, up until, including jitterbug, and well, you name it, and I could do it. I was a good dancer. Really excellent dancer. And so was your grandmother. She was one of the best there is. As good as Hollywood performers. Good dancer. And that was my fondest memory of everything that I did.

I did love to fish. I and one brother that I have are the only two of us eight kids that loved to fish. I got to be a good fisherman. A real good fisherman for trout, and that's

the only thing I like to fish in Montana's streams, real cold, ice cold, fishing streams. Do love to do it. Can't do it now because I am too old. I can't get down to the creek. If I do, I can't get back up.

But, and then I've always had a pet dog. This last one I had sixteen years. Kenneth, my brother-in-law brought her over. I didn't want her. It was when George died, my husband died, and I was sitting alone one day, and he came in and said, "you need a dog." And I said, "I don't want a dog." He said, "Well, I brought you over one and what you do with her, I don't care." So, I had me a dog. Needless to say, she became such a part of my life that I'm lost with out her. She just died this last year. I've always had a dog and they're some of my fondest memories.

Things I did with my husband. Very personal, very dear. Trips we used to take. Troubles, as well as everything else, I... are dear to my heart. All of my sisters and my brothers. Sadnesses, just as real as the day they happened and all of my memories are too. I love every relative that I have so I have enjoyed all of my life. You know, that's all about you have to have to really enjoy..... be active in your church.. Have a large family and know every one of them and love them and they all know you and love you and then have a vast amount of friends in a community and like your community and that's about all there is to enjoy. With what trips you take, swimming. . .

Mary: Did you get to go to the Columbia Gardens a lot?

Madge: Every Sunday night. Yes, we went to , even I got to go an awful lot in the day time taking my little brothers and sisters out on what is now old number 7, only it used to be a real street car, you know, electrified street car. And boy, we hold on that, and Thursday was Kid's Days Free, you know, and so we'd gather up all the kids and went down and see, there were five of us, and then Vola was the baby at that time, it began. And then I was about thirty five when my two youngest sisters were born. But, we'd gather up all the kids and go out to the Columbia Gardens for a picnic or something because it was Kid's Day free, The rides. Gee, it was wonderful. Nothing you can't, Butte was nothing without the Columbia Gardens. Everybody that was old enough to remember will tell you the same thing. Great huge dance hall and a roller coaster and a merry-go-round and beautiful grounds and , well gardens beautiful, go out there for picnics. And every kind of a ride for kids that there was. Something like a carnival only permanent, you know. And it was really nice. And then of course, like I say, every Sunday night I went to the dance hall there. After I met Bob, my fiancee, and I met him in 1930, the summer of 1930 and we went together for about five years. Steady. In those days and of course, I had someone to take me to the Gardens and that was just one of the things we did. And then have lunch after we come home , get home. Mother'd make me get home, dance was out at twelve, and mother only allowed me to stay out one hour and a half to have lunch and come home. And so yes, I was very familiar with the gardens and everything out there. Had really fun all the time out there. My, we were, I was a good dancer.

It's nice to have found memories, you know, like dancing. That's what I often think of .. my daughter's a pool player, you know, and she has been world champion, you know....and no wonder she likes her pool and enjoys it. And I think about my dancing, and oh boy, if I could still do it, I'd sure do it. Even at this old. No wonder. You like what you can do best, you know.

Mary: Oh, definitely.

Madge: I wasn't as good as June, though, not any better anyway. I was familiar with the Gardens and loved the Gardens, but I was familiar with all of Butte. And I still am, and know everybody.....doctors and attorneys and teachers and everybody I've known all along in Butte. And policemen and of course our church has a good smattering of everything like that.

Mary: What are some impacts that you feel that growing up in Butte and being around Butte, especially during your teen years has had on your life, throughout life?

Madge: Well, I think, the impact it has made on me. I have liked it and I think that Butte people are the friendliest people of any place I've visited in my life, and I've been around quite a bit and I think the friendly people are here and I grew up a regular Butte kid and I think that's a compliment if you say I'm a Butte kid. People know you're a friendly, outgoing, warm person, in my opinion. And I think I'd do anybody a favor that I could and think well of them, unless they prove me an enemy and then I hate them, and I sock them if I have to. And then, of course, this local, local church. I've always had my church here, you know. And I'm very active and always have been with a great testimony. And so, I have so many friends there that have impacted me, you know. If you go to church every Sunday of your life, why it gets to be a habit that you like or you wouldn't do it if you didn't like it, you wouldn't do it, after you get twenty one you wouldn't go inside of a church, if you didn't like it. But, that's become a way of life with me, and I think it is all good memories. It just becomesSo I would say the friendliness of Butte had an impact on me, and I grew up to be a friendly person and my church, I grew up to feel wanted and needed. It had a great impact on me. I don't know, just about anybody, anything, that's the only two things that has occupied was a job and my church, is about all I've done and then, going fishing. I think it has all been a good influence for me. What good things I've done has come from the things I've learned here because this is all I've known is Butte. I can hardly remember before I came here because I was only seventeen. So that's all about I remember. Of course, everything my dad and mom taught me.... don't we all remember my mom said this and dad said that and dad wouldn't steal, so you hadn't better steal if you wanted to live with him and all that stuff so.... So your family leaves an imprint upon you.

Mary: What impact did your father working in the mines have on you? What do you remember about him working in the mines at all?

Madge: Well, my father, was one of the best miners and topped the board, like I say. And he did the difficult jobs getting the place ready for some other younger people to come in and take over and then they'd transfer him to another spot to build up to get it to a good paying position. And they'd transfer him to another.... dad was the troubleshooter... George was one of the others who went in and took it over when it was already to go, and he made the big money it was already to... I was awful proud of my father and then when my own father bragged on my husband being a good worker, why that made me prouder than ever of George, he was always one of the best miners, like my dad, he was a lot younger than my dad, but he grew up to be as good a miner as my dad. Course, George was thirty years old when I married him, see, and he didn't know much about copper mines, but he sure was a good miner, coal miner, before he even came here; and of course, he had a lot to learn because anybody in coal mining would say, "It doesn't take any brains to be a coal miner, you got to know something to be a hard rock miner."

Mary: Really, there was that much difference?

Madge: Yeah, Well. They think there is, but I think it's all in their minds, too. A coal miner has their specialized parts to do, too. For instance, gas pockets and everything like that in a coal mine that you're not so apt to have in a hard rock mine. But you have to know how to put in stalls to make stopes or whatever, drifts or whatever you are making. You have to know how to place your timber and make them solid and make the ore flow and how to blast it and how to raise so many pounds and when it blows, to not blow timber up, rather blow the dirt in the chute and the ore in the chute instead of dirt, pardon me. It's real fascinating work. I've been down a couple of the mines is all, just the Spectator is all.

Mary: What did you think about it?

Madge: Scared. When I went down, I thought nothing went that fast, but George just laughed at me. He said they take all visitors down real slow as compared to a miner when ... you go on shift and you get in the cage, they drop it. And you just bounce on your... just like that. And George says many of the visitors have accidents going down because they just drop it and they just ...too scared you know....anyway, why I, it was a thrill, and then when I got down there, I was very claustrophobic so I didn't get much of a trip around it... I asked to be taken back up cause I found out then, it was the first time I ever knew that I was claustrophobic. But, I am to the extreme now, I even rather walk upstairs than to go in an elevator. But that is the first time that I knew I became claustrophobic. I sure did know what it meant to have claustrophobia. And so, I didn't get much of a trip in the mines, but I braved it again and thought well, if everybody else can do it, I can do it. And so, I went down in the mines again and same thing happened. I can't stand it. But, it was thrill of a life after being dropped that far and knowing that you are one hundred feet below the street. It was exciting. But, it turned out to be so claustrophobic that I didn't

enjoy it. I was anxious to get back on the street. Nothing like it. I haven't dropped from an airplane, but I bet its' something like it. To jump from an airplane... skydive... stuff like that...you get in that cage and they just drop it for a hundred feet, set it and drop it. Or whatever level, 2800, or whatever you are going at. So, it's over a mile deep, you see, Butte is. A little over a mile deep, so that's what 5, 280 feet, or something like that deep. And while I never went to the bottom, the visitors is only about 2800 level I think...usually they take them down about 2000 feet. 2800, I think is where we went when I went down.

Mary: So not the whole way down?

Madge: no. But, it's exciting. I don't want to do it, though. I want to stay on the street.

Mary: So you love Butte?

Madge: Yeps. I like Butte very well. I have my burial plots.....my husband's buried and I'm going to be buried beside him. And I feel good about it..... I don't want to be buried anywhere else. Be buried in Butte. And I like to live in Butte. If I were rich, I would want to have my home in Butte and then travel...what I want to do... and then come back Butte, to live here. And being poor, I just have to cut out the traveling and live in Butte. I don't know, there's disadvantages to living in Butte.... if you have a family, I don't think it's the greatest place in the world to raise a family. A lot of people have made it here, but most of our people have gone away to schools and settled somewhere other than Butte. Jobs have always been scarce unless you were a miner. Jobs have always been scarce and women are limited in skill, all kinds of skills.....if I had a family, I doubt if I'd like Butte to raise my family. Because it's '...there's no advantages here for young people to get jobs. We all want to improve Butte, but after the mines shut down, there was less than...more than ever you couldn't get a job here. And you absolutely had to go away if you wanted anything other than specialize in mining. To get a good education. So, if I had a family, I wouldn't feel as I do about Butte. But, seeings as only Madge Casteel is effected, I love it. And my daughter was raised out on the farm...out on the cattle ranch, you see. And while I still lived there, why she graduated from school in Missoula, and then she came to Butte, and then shortly left Butte and went to Denver to live. Just about all of our kids leave Butte. Used to be a popular city, but now, you know, it just ...the people who are here now, are not that very many....as compared to what it was. But, yes, I love it. I can't tell ya. There's no place I like as well as I do Butte. But, if I was going to raise a family here, I wouldn't want to. I would want to get them out where they got more advantages. That's why most of all kids get through high school and go away to college, either to Bozeman or to Missoula, if they don't have a particular need and want to go somewhere else. All of my relatives have gone to BYU, all of them. Every.....got their degrees there.

Mary: Any last thoughts or stories you'd like to share?

Madge: I don't know, dear... there is so many funny thing happened.... and I can die laughing when I get around a bunch of relatives...we'd just..... there just isn't a minute to spare. Each one of us is filled with funny things that happened and happened and happened. But, when you ask me that outright, which one, which one.....I don't know....it would probably sound stupid if I related something. But, I don't know...no, not many stories. I don't know.you think of your dating life and how you choose the man you did choose and the trials and things that have happened and also the pleasurable things that have happened....same way with the wonderful times you've had with your family. And like I say, when a couple of us get together that knew the family and went through these experiences, we can talk for hours and hours and laugh and laugh and laugh.....but, when you try to think of one certain thing, without having thought of something before hand why it's hard to think of anything special. We've always been very happy. I can remember different thingsplaying with my little brothers and sisters. For instance, my sister, June, couldn't speak well, neither could my little sister Loy, when she was a baby and I enjoyed them as much when they were little kids as I would my own children. For instance Vada would say, "How do you spell piddow?" I'd say, "You mean a pickle?" And she would say, "No. I got three words. How do you spell piddow and piddow and piddow?" Come to find out, these piddow and piddow and piddow means pillow, peaches, and pickles. So there is all kinds of funny things like that, you know. And then one night, another short little quick story that you think of when you think of all of the roaring and laughing your heads off about something. We didn't have any fences when we first went out to the ranch and we bought a cow for dad, a milk cow so he could have milk, and mother and dad and the little kids could have milk. Her name was old Peaches. Well, here she got out of the barn and no fences in that country and you could go for miles and miles and a cow could run you to death. So all of us rushed out...Someone said,"Peaches is out" We rushed out, we all circled around the barn and get her back in the corral and hazing her back in and she took it in to have to run and boy she just started to run and break through our guard and dad saw that she was going to get away so he picked up a big clod of dirt and sticks there....big hard clod and threw it at her to hit her to turn her and mother was running at the same time to hit her, so he just hit mother in the head. Cold-cocked her. You know, there's things like that when you get together that you talk about. Of course, there was nothing seriously wrong... he just kind of knocked her down...she just stumbled, too, you know. Lot of depression stories you could tell. You could tell sad stories all your life. You had to get a slip from the doctor....everyone was on welfare. Everybody when the mines closed down completely. You get so much coal a month. They had to stand in line for beans....I do mean doctor's children and lawyer's children and everybody else. And I know I went up personally one time. Mother sent me up because I had a sore throat , a very, very infected throat. And I asked this man in charge for a slip to go up to the welfare to go take to my doctor. And he said, "We don't just give anybody in here a slip to go to a doctor that comes in after one." So I said OK, and I started to cry, but I went on up to see Doctor Potter and when he saw me, he said, "Didn't you get your slip?" And I said, "No, he wouldn't give me one." And I told him exactly what ...I quoted this man exactly, "We don't just give

anyone a slip to the doctor who wants one.” So he says, “ Well, he will after this.” So he got on the phone and told the new owners “No one denied that came in there with a sore throat. He wanted them to have a slip or he would see that they got fired.” And I said....he just petted me and said, “You come here. You don’t need any money or anything else.” And of course, he was the greatest man in the world, the greatest doctor in the world to me because he had to lance my throat. And there’s lots of stories you could tell like that, but they’d fill a book.

Mary: That’s alright.

Madge: In fact, you know, I have thought, I should write a book. But, then I think it takes a college student.

Mary: Love to hear stories.