

Mary Berg, director of Project Challenge, interviewed in her office by Teresa Jordan, 5/15/85

Born and raised in Butte, up on N. Main St. Backyard was Mountain Con mine.. Went to St. Raymonds, Butte Central, graduated '73, attended MSU a year, quit, worked at Wilhelm Flower since 13 years old, mother works there. Then went back to Eastern MT College, grad '77 in elem education and early childhood degree. Subst. in Butte school 2 years, started to work AFL CIO Sept '79. AFL CIO, at beginning, worked w/ dropouts, tried to get them to go back to school. Federal grant for program, dealt w/ kids 17-21. Called Vocational Exploration Demonstration Project. Pilot program, funded through Nat'l Dept of Labor, Natl Alliance of Business. 10 week program for kids, basically what we go through now in a week. One week, at a business, exploring what it was, what criteria to be hired--stressed cleanliness, being on time. Four weeks like that. Other weeks in class room going over what expected to do when hired, how look down on non-graduate, eligibility criteria. In May of 1980, moved to Helena, became director of VEDP. Ran that from 1980 to 1982. Then took over as dir. of Project Challenge in 1982. Married, 1982, in Butte, to Butte boy. Moved back here in Sept '82.

AFL CIO--don't know structure, but involved in programs to help people. Feel that help because there is so much unemployment, and felt that so many kids needed help because folks unemployed. They have several grants now--Technical Assistance and Training Program, TAT, do research--layoff survival workshops, what help is available in the community, open to public, family, friends. Also, research on why there was a layoff. Now work on project re. unemployment rates in state not as accurate as it should be. Study on what impact of layoffs is.

See where laid off people going, if have had any work, left area, etc. Candy Brown is human resources development institute representative in Montana, developing program. Lisa Kleven, on staff. But hope to start in June. Money from state Dept of Labor. Another is OSHA project--conference on June 1st in Helena--reference library of chemicals that cause certain diseases, health problems, etc. Put on conferences--thinks it is an 8-state project. Do workshops in each state. Also, Human Resources Development Institute, w/ Natl AFL CIO, representative stationed in Helena--anything to do with unemployment and training quest--writes grants, sits on Private Industry Council (PIC) boards, technical assistance, anything that goes with employment and training--Candy Brown. Travels a lot--8 states. Project Challenge is thru AFL CIO. Project that just finished--Rocky Mountain Work Project, taken from Project Challenge in MT, worked w/ Rocky Mt states--had a person in each state that does same work as Mary. But something like an 85% placement rate.

Never thought would do this kind of work; hoped to get on w/

school district, but no way. No one old enough to retire. But have learned a lot--lot to learn when deal w/ govt officials--things to say, ways to negotiate. Candy was a good teacher, Jim Murry was another.

Family--mother's family old Butte. Mary's grandfather worked at Mt Con, grandmother didn't work. Mary's mother lives in family home now. Dad from Syndey, moved here when 19. Worked for Govt. Mary has two brothers, neither worked for Anaconda. Oldest worked for Stauffer chemical during summers, went to school. Other brother, Mary thinks, did same thing. Mary never worked for Anaconda. In family, always stress on education. Mother grew up in mining family, wanted us to get educ, not have to do that hard work. Common in mining families, think that those families knew company wouldn't be there forever. Older ones--M's parents are older--and they knew that everyone needs an education, saw that coming. Most people saw it coming, but they didn't want to believe it.

Thinks people think mining is over in Butte. Last Wednesday (thinks), article that Company was looking to sell--of course no follow up story, but they are looking. Company is sending out letters to people who rent their property (under their houses) in order to buy it. Mary thinks it is finally hitting most people that the Company is not coming back. Has taken something like three years for it to really sink in. When flooded the pit, that opened a few eyes, too.

Butte used to be a blue collar city. Now you see everyone working for the Power, or in a business of their own. Think it is sinking in that things have changed. And people saying over and over, the Company is not going to come back.

Don't think that company selling will bring in new people to mine. Just received a nat'l report that said mining is pretty much out. Smaller business expanding will grow; mining is not going to be the sole industry in MT anymore. Build MT--from governor's office. Don't know if that is proper name of it.

Think the change from labor, mining town to something new--older ones don't like it. It's hard to take when 50 and above. Esp if have never worked anywhere else--if have worked 25 years for the company, hard to change. And not old enough to retire. Have to find what they consider menial jobs--janitor work, retail stores, and wages cut in half or more. Making \$13, now down to \$5. Hard to take. Younger ones more likely to go to school, be trained, move. Older ones have houses, paid for--don't want to pick up their roots and leave. They only have 5 or 6 years to retire. Tough on the older ones, but younger ones seem to handle it better.

In the old days, you went up to the company, you said I'm a laborer, I can do anything, and you were hired, they'd find a spot for you. They never had to interview, never had to fill out

an application, never knew what a resume was. And it's tough to realize that you need that piece of paper, and you need to know how to read and write. Some of the older folks who have worked for the company have maybe a seventh grade education. Most of younger ones have graduated. But between 40 and 50, there's a lot that don't.

Since 82, it's getting easier to help older ones. They realize that company is not coming back. They realize they need a HS diploma, so go to night school or go to Vo Tec and get that. It's fun to work with them, because they have so many stories. They say, in the old days, we didn't have to do this. But most of them come around in maybe the fourth week. Pretty exciting. Really exciting when they pass their G.E.D. test. Test offered once a month up at Tech. If don't pass one part, can take that one part over--like math. Can take it up to three times. They are really excited when they come in with that test score and it is above average. There are a few who don't think the change is good, who don't like change. Try to reach them by talking, listening. And if they have a bigger problem than I can handle, I refer them to alcohol and drug people or the stress center.

Getting a G.E.D. at age of 50, or new things, new training--it would be hard.

Value system of old Butte--work hard, take care of family, not beat kids. Basic hardworking, caring person. Many think that in new system--hard work isn't enough. Mary doesn't think that. The harder you work, the better you're going to be. If you don't care, there's lots out there who do care about job. Don't think it has changed that much. The system has changed--more paper work, more desk work.

Frustrating to write resume--especially to people who don't know how to do it, how to write it. They rewrite it a couple times, then have finished project--helps a lot.

It's hard when have someone in class who can't read. Try to have others in class help them--instead of me. Because sometimes they think, she's younger and knows more, she's the teacher. So have to break them into groups, they help each other. Which is nice to see. And another thing that comes out of class is unity so they know they are not the only ones who are unemployed. Makes them feel better about themselves. It wasn't their fault they were laid off. We try to get that across.

About attempt to limit General Assistance benefits to able bodied--everyone needs some kind of assistance. What they should have done is limited transients or out of state people coming in. People in Butte need benefits, won't go for them because they are too proud. There are hardly any jobs out there--In Butte, MT. People do have to look for work, I understand that. But it doesn't happen right away. I don't want to see people starving here. Then again, I don't want to see transients coming in

either, taking that money away from people that need it. If able bodied, that's one thing. But there just isn't any work. How you going to find a job that isn't there? That's what I disagree w/.

Number of industrial jobs has decreased. If have spouse working, adjustment from high paying job to service job is easier. But if single parent or only one working, its hard--but you live on what you make. And I think they realize that. I know when I wasn't making money, I lived on it. I don't know how I did it then; it seemed like I had more money, but I didn't. I think you live on what you make. And they are always glad to have \$5 rather than zero, which they are getting now. Different points you have to look at it. They were making \$13, they are down to \$5--but between there, they weren't making anything. Most people realize that. Everyone in Butte that is working is lucky to have a job. So think it's handled pretty well.

Guess--maybe 20% have moved away. of work force.

In seventies or late sixties, when all the high tech came out, people maybe began to get scared. In the want adds, always said you needed a college degree. maybe that scared people.

MHD--don't know how long they are going to be here. nobody does. NCAT--all those people engineering.

Q: How did old Butte react to NCAT and MHD, etc coming in, people from outside getting those jobs?

Not very well. Everything should be a Butte job for Butte people. And if you don't have any experience, you can't be hired. But older people just don't understand why Butte people can't be hired.

Q: some newcomers have become involved in fairly visible positions--what reaction to them?

I think that's good. Because they are involved. It's the people that come in and build pipelines from Oklahoma, where we have trained people; but I don't think they have a problem with people who are involved in the community. At least they are making this their home. But people who work on construction sites that are not from Butte, they have probs with those, because we have such a large number of people skilled for those jobs here.

Unions always survive in a thriving economy. When economy down, unions are basically down. The economy is basically the pits, so union membership goes down. I think that people from outside the community perceive Butte as a union town. They don't realize that the majority of the union people are from the Anaconda Co. Basically, all the business agents are human beings. They are willing to work together, too. I think it's just because every two years or three years, whatever, for the company, there was a strike. And that always hit the papers, no matter what paper.

And people read that. The destruction of property--the newspapers just go wild, and everybody reads that. Talk to Darrell Lee from Local Development Corporation. He tried to bring in businesses. He always uses success stories w/ the unions. He always uses Stauffer Chemical, don't think they've had a strike in last 15 or 20 years. Another success is the small businesses that have never had a strike. And 98% of the contracts that business agents settle, they settle w/ no controversy or strikes or anything. And it always hits the paper. It doesn't hit the paper when everything is settled.

Q: To what degree are people who had been union w/ Anaconda working for non-union businesses.

Maybe 25%. They might not belong to the same union they belonged to, but belong to something else. Maybe 25% working non union. I'm terrible on numbers. They are getting money in their pocket. Their philosophy is the same--everyone should be treated fairly. And if there is a need for a union, I'm pretty sure that they would want one. But I think they are just so happy that they are working.

Q: 10 years ago, couldn't have had a non union business in town; now, some have gone non-union, others coming in non-union. Affect on town?

If economy is good, unions are better. They will just keep struggling. They will try to organize, that's their right. But I think everyone here is willing to make concessions, willing to work w/ people, to make sure unions don't have bad reputation like they used to. It's tough for people from CA who have read about Anac Co for 50 years to think Butte is a nice town to live. That's a tough image to change.

Shutdown due to world economy. No market for copper; copper prices plummeted. Why mine it if not going to sell it. Probably were some probs w/ mangement, labor...but the economy went to hell.

Local Development Corps film, Welcome to Butte. Go through school situation, recreation, skiing, hunting, fishing, Vo Tec, MT Tech. Good film. Shows what we have. Schools have lot to do with people moving here--have a choice, Catholic, public.

Mary has 8-month daughter. Wanted to raise her in Butte. Whenever Mary moved away, wanted to come back. Lived in Billings for three years--always wanted to come back. Raised here, knew more people--Butte is easy town to get along in. People more friendly, more helpful. If you have trouble, they help you out, no matter who you are. You don't have to be a MT Power resident. Doesn't matter if you don't have money.

Helpfulness because Butte so small. Lived in Helena, they are all govt people, they are afraid to talk to anybody, or they are better than everybody. That was hard to take. Town is dirty.

But it's a nice place to be.

The pit hurts. It's real ugly. The people make Butte. The gallus frames are neat. The pit is really bad. And the Gardens--the Gardens were beautiful. And it was fun--a fun place to take people. And now that's gone. But the pit works against Butte. We used to have Meaderville, McQueen. The pit is ugly.

Q: Butte has given up a lot for jobs--Meaderville, McQueen, the Gardens. Today there are no jobs. How do people feel about that?

I think they hate the Company. I think it started when the company sold out to ARCO. Everyone thought that was wonderful. Well, ARCO's an oil company. How much do they know about mining? I think ARCO finally realized that. I think they are prob sorry for it now.

Q: Did people, for the most part, like ACM?

Yes. They were good to the community. They employed 3800 people, they were always at the benefits, they always gave. I think the ACM was more well liked. Local people. Didn't take orders from somewhere else.

I think we've kind of leveled off. Everyone says it is going to get worse, but I think we're going to level off and we're going to be a smaller community. We used to be 38,000 and I think now we're 35,000. I think the worst year we ever put in was 82 and 83. And it's going to be white collar, mostly, the majority. It's not going to be a working class, manual labor type any more.

See more two income families now, and more women supporting their families. Stigma against women working has sort of changed because more common for both spouses to work.

Increases in child abuse and alcohol. Last time talked to alcohol and drug abuse people, youngest person they had was 13. So it's hard on the young too. Not just that man who's having trouble. It's everyone in the family. Has been more alcohol and drug abuse. Child abuse, you never hear about, so it's kind of hard to pin down. Spouse abuse probably has increased, divorce rates.

Project Challenge deals primarily w/ white male. Avg age is 40. A few women were laid off from Safeway. Prob 95% are white male.

Q: Do you find any problems, as a woman, dealing with problems that are so tied to self esteem for men?

When I started in 82, I had prob with that, but as you get to talk to them, they think you are a human being. They do have probs w/ me telling them what needs to be done. Don't think any man likes to be told what to do, whether they are young or old. but if you have that rapport w/ them, it gets better as it goes

along. Another thing, during the workbook, if you break them up into groups and have them teach themselves instead of me appear all the time. Another prob--most people don't want to ask anyone for help. That's really hard. Monday is really a hard day, because nobody wants to talk. The first day is always the hardest. But after that, you can't keep them quiet.

During week, we go through it real fast. If I had it my way, we'd go a couple weeks, maybe half days. Toward end of week, they say, gee, I never thought about that--have to be clean for an interview, or have to dress for what you're going for. If going for business, don't want to go in greasy mechanics outfit; or not go in suit and tie for mechanics job. Or never thought about not talking--like "OK Buddy." Or to be honest; not to lie about past. Spelling word right on application. It opens their eyes.

Q: Saying before that for 25 positions each quarter, would have 150 or more applications. Frustrating?

Yes. Can only help 25. What we do, we select that applications to enroll, and those that really wanted call, and it's hard to tell them why. Hard to explain that we go with most in need. Hard to explain. They are out there all by themselves. We try to help all we can, but with the money... it costs, I think, approx \$800 to put a person through the program

Tape 2, side A

If don't get into Project Challenge, we refer them to the Job Service office--they have several programs ongoing through the year. If they have already been there, we always tell them to come back. If they need help, we try to find them some other help. For younger, we can only take 22 years old on up, younger, we refer to Human Resources Development Council.

Butte social services are adequate. We've gotten a lot more since the layoffs. Butte alcohol and drug has helped an enormous amount of people. Stress center could be bigger, but don't know what would do to staff it. Welfare dept is good, all social service agencies are willing to help. Neighborhood center, deal with clothing, the mission. Everybody is out there to help. Another good thing is the ministers and priests and clergy around Butte. They are all willing to help.

Project Challenge programs in other MT towns are shocked at success of Butte program. Five coordinators, get together once a month to discuss what's going on. Shocked when you say that this miner went through training for telephone work and then he went to Michigan, they are shocked he would do that. Think they are shocked at people still trying to live here, survive. They are just surprised that we can do all we do over here. And our wages are a lot higher with Proj Chal in Butte than they are anywhere else, which is surprising. Comes from history of union town; some are not union jobs and they still pay high.

Funding--Private Industry Council's meeting this week. We are funded for two years from 84, so will be in until '86. Unless something unexpected happens. Beyond that, the president has given states block money. Depends on what that figure is whether this project will be refunded. And he might just cut everything out. We just don't know.