

Transcripts of Interview of Maureen Crossman conducted by Pat Crossman at 3214 Keokuk at three pm on April 3, 2002

Pat: What year did you start teaching?

Maureen: In the 1953-1954 school year. I taught 1st Grade at the Longfellow School in Butte Montana

Pat: How many years did you teach in the Butte area?

Maureen: 36.

Pat: What were the spans of those?

Maureen: I taught two years at the Longfellow when I began. Then I was married and quit until 1957 came back and substituted until 1965 when I went back and taught full time until 1995?

Pat: What were the teacher qualifications at the time?

Maureen: I began on a two year diploma and in 1965 the legislature decreed that if you had not earned your two year diploma before 1952 then you had to go back and get a degree. And I went back and got a degree.

Pat: Where did you get your degree?

Maureen: Western Montana College.

Pat: Were priests and nuns automatically qualified to teach in the private schools?

Maureen: Most of the priests and nuns had degrees before they began to teach.

Pat: Just because they couldn't....

Maureen: No, they couldn't automatically teach.

Pat: How many schools were in the Butte area when you began to teach?

Maureen: At the time I began there were 18 schools in the Butte area. And then the Franklin and the Cleveland closed And the Webster-Garfield, the Webster and the Garfield consolidated to become the Webster-Garfield, subsequently, they built the Kennedy, the Hillcrest and the Margaret Leary at one point there were twenty grade schools in our area.

Pat: And How many were left by the time you retired?

Maureen: By the time I retired, there were... seven. Eight, because the Longfellow was still open.

Pat: What were some of the circumstances of these schools shutting down?

Maureen: Well, the Grant, the Washington, the Jefferson, the Harrison, they all closed because of the mining operations, they were all in the path of the mining operations.

Pat: So those must have been up in Meaderville and McQueen?

Maureen: Meaderville and East Butte. And then the other schools, because, as mining decreased in the area, the enrollment went down and the neighborhood schools began to close.

Pat: The population decrease caused the rest of them to close?

Maureen: Yes it did.

Pat: What levels of school did you teach?

Maureen: I taught third grade, first grade, first and second combination, I taught privately for the Rocky Mountain Association, I taught their nursery school. And I substituted in whatever grade they sent me to.

Pat: At which schools did you have full-time teaching positions?

Maureen: I taught at the Hawthorne, at Saint Anne's, at Saint Mary's, and at the Kennedy.

Pat: So, all of your teaching experience wasn't just in public schools?

Maureen: No, no. I taught in two different Catholic schools under two different orders of nuns.

Pat: Were there denominations, any different denominations of private schools, Or were they strictly Catholic schools?

Maureen: As far as I know, they were just Catholic schools.

Pat: Were there any schools for alternate religions, like Mormon or....

Maureen: Not at that time. Now there are Christian schools but not then.

Pat: They were all just public or Catholic schools then? How has the discipline changed over the years in the Butte system? And what discretion were you given for punishment?

Maureen: Well, mostly the punishment thing has stayed the same. Teachers could timeout, take away recesses, take away privileges, anything of a real disciplinary nature went to the principal.

Pat: You weren't allowed to wrap knuckles or anything?

Maureen: I didn't

Pat: Would a teacher be disciplined for doing something like that?

Maureen: I don't think so, I knew teachers who did.

Pat: So it was somewhat acceptable?

Maureen: It was acceptable. Nothing that would be considered corporal punishment, but that kind of thing was...

Pat: I remember you telling me that part of the reason for the change was that parents saw it as something they did wrong rather than trying to blame the teachers or make excuses for their children.

Maureen: Yeah, when I first started, you know, children were responsible for their own actions, but as things have gone along, parents are more defensive and the child is never at fault, it's got to be the teacher or the school system.

Pat: So, more than likely then, if a child was sent to the principal the parents would be more likely to...

Maureen: ...back the teacher.

Pat: What do you feel about that evolution? Which do you think was the more effective?

Maureen: Much more effective if parents will work with a teacher than try to work against.

Pat: If they'll take responsibility...

Maureen: ...take responsibility for their children. Make their children responsible for their own actions.

Pat: Were there more, less, or about the same number of minorities in the Butte area when you first began as opposed to now?

Maureen: I think about the same. We have always had a good percentage of Hispanic children and we have had, considering what area you taught in we have had Indian children. We had very few black families when I began teaching. My children went to

school with children from a black family when they went to the Catholic schools but I never had any.

Pat: You never had any...

Maureen: I have had a lot of Hispanic children and a lot of Indian children.

Pat: Were there any... At that point when you began teaching were there any immigrant children?

Maureen: Not when I began, that was before... We were all pretty much gelled.

Pat: The mining had already begun to decline by that point. Was segregation ever an issue in the Butte schools or through out Montana.

Maureen: No, not as far as I know.

Pat: Everyone was pretty well accepted? Were minorities in the Butte school system... Were they allowed to attend to private schools?

Maureen: A great many of the Hispanic children went to the Catholic school system because they were Catholic.

Pat: So they weren't ever discriminated against?

Maureen: No, mm mm, not in that respect.

Pat: Maybe by the other students or something but...

Maureen: I don't think so. I don't think so.

Pat: Were teachers in Butte more likely to be female or male or was the distribution pretty even?

Maureen: When I began, most of the teachers were female. Most of the principals were female. A great many of the teachers were unmarried. And at that time if you became married, you could no longer belong to the Butte Teacher's Union and therefore you were no longer under contract. I was married on a Sunday I could have gone back to my own job on Monday at substitute teachers' wages.

Pat: So once you were married you had to settle for pretty much half wage? How much was the substitute wage as opposed to full time.

Maureen: You know, I don't know because I did not sub at that period. I did not sub until we got back, after my husband got out of the service.

Pat: Oh, you could teach full time at substitute pay?

Maureen: Mm hm, yeah. But it would cut your salary way down.

Pat: Were women allowed to serve as principals or as any higher authority figures?

Maureen: Most of the women... most of the principals were women in 1953 when I began.

Pat: Were any of the men teachers... were they seen as being, being... Being male teachers seen as feminine... not feminine but were ostracized for being in a profession that was dominated by females?

Maureen: No, the two men who were in the building when I first began... we had grades one through eight and we had two male teachers. We kind of looked to them for disciplinary reasons and guidance and if you had a difficult male student, that's where they went.

Pat: They were just used as authority figures then. Kind of a 'wait 'til your father gets home' kind of thing.

Maureen: They were great fellows, those two.

Pat: And who were those two?

Maureen: Carl Corde and Jim Adams.

Pat: And that was at the Longfellow when you first started?

Maureen: Yes.

Pat: Did the teaching Union exist in Butte before you began teaching?

Maureen: Yes. When I signed my first contract, it stated right in the contract that I would be asked to join the Butte Teachers Union.

Pat: Was it mandatory or was it pretty well recommended?

Maureen: Pretty well everyone belonged to the Union. If you worked steady then you belonged to the Union.

Pat: If not you would have to settle for those substitute wages, which would be kind of...

Maureen: I think everybody at that time did. In recent years there has been some teachers who chose not to join the Union and of course you can't be forced to but at that time everybody belonged to the Union.

Pat: In recent years they weren't forced to take a substitute pay.

Maureen: No, that was when everything began... equal pay for equal work. No more discrimination.

Pat: So all teachers are paid the same now regardless of whether they are in the Union or not.

Maureen: Mm, hmm. The Union negotiates the salary and they are the bargaining power but the other teachers reap the benefits.

Pat: So, do the teachers that are in the Union, do they have to pay Union dues?

Maureen: We do pay Union dues.

Pat: So, In a sense they make a little bit less because they have to pay those Union dues.

Maureen: The Union dues are not very high.

Pat: So it's pretty well worth it then?

Maureen: Pretty... oh, very much so.

Pat: Were teacher paid a better salary today than are back when you first started, according to, like, cost of living. Would you be better off now or then.

Maureen: Now, because, not just with the cost of living thing but teacher are better paid and have been as the years have gone on. Certainly, you could maintain a better lifestyle now than you could back when I began at twenty-eight hundred dollars.

Pat: Was it more desirable to teach in Butte because of the existence of the Union as opposed to other...

Maureen: I think so because it was the Union who met with the board at that time to bargain for salaries. It was the Union who negotiated for health insurance, for sick leave, for personal days, for PIR, days, these were all Union negotiated things that benefited our school system.

Pat: That was part of my next question. Given all those things, you were in favor of the Union?

Maureen: Absolutely.

Pat: It was something that you would rather have?

Maureen: At that time rather have. Now, I don't know that... since the actual Union itself has merged with the MEA...

Pat: What is the MEA?

Maureen: Montana Education Association. Now that they are one collective bargaining group, I'm not sure that ...

Pat: it makes much of a difference anymore?

Maureen:... that it makes much of a difference.

Pat: Why are they still in existence today then?

Maureen: Well, you have to have a bargaining power. And you would have to choose from your teaching membership to negotiate for you benefits, wages and the Union has a negotiating team.

Pat: And they negotiated all of that with...?

Maureen: With the board.

Pat: You already partially answered this question, well, actually answered most of it. Did becoming married have any affect on your career?

Maureen: I taught my last shift as a single woman on a Friday afternoon and before I left the building I was given my Union withdrawal card and in form that I could pick up my teacher's certificate on Monday and after that I could be employed after that at substitute teachers wages.

Pat: Most of the Union officials were females themselves, right?

Maureen: At that time yes, because most of the teachers were female and most of them were, or a great many of them were unmarried. And I think, at the time it was a perfectly rational thing because they felt that a married woman had a husband with an income to take care of her and the other teachers needed their job to sustain their ...

Pat: So having a dual income wasn't...

Maureen: It was frowned upon at the time. And it was many years, many years before they would let a husband and a wife teach in the same building in our district.

Pat: Did you and Grampa ever teach in the same building?

Maureen: Grampa was the Guidance counselor at the Hawthorne when I taught there. But actually as far as classroom teaching, I subbed in the building where he was regularly employed.

Pat: At the Hawthorne... That's what you said, at the Hawthorne, right?

Maureen: Mm hmm.

Pat: If were to have been a teacher would that have been a problem or did that get settled.

Maureen: That had already... yeah. There were several other couples in the district in the same buildings at that point.

Pat: When did that discrimination end against the married teachers? Female teachers?

Maureen: I'd like to say maybe, like 1963 or 4. I'm not really certain but my friend Pat Searle said that her first year back in the district, married women could go back into the Union and I hadn't come into the district at that point, but she had all of my children, all of them in second grade and so judging on...

Pat: Me too.

Maureen: And Patrick, too. Judging on their... on the grades they would be I would say about '63 or '64. When I came back into the district in '65, '64 whatever year that was, I was given a Union reinstatement and did not have to pay initiation dues again. I just had to pay the cost, whatever the thing was to reinstate, and I went right back to work.

Pat: So, was there any discrepancy between a male teacher's salary and a female teacher's salary?

Maureen: No, we work on a step scale and it's your education, your experience and your... Fortunately it isn't merit pay. Which I think is a good thing, it... they don't grade you on how you teach, you get paid for your education and your experience.

Pat: So, you're in favor of the merit pay, then?

Maureen: No, not I.

Pat: Oh, you're not. I'm not too sure about that myself. You had five kids, were you allowed to teach while you were pregnant?

Maureen: Not in the beginning. You almost had to tell the superintendent before you told your husband. They definitely wanted you to quit before you began to show. Joan Stroup, who was in our district for many years, was the teacher who eventually fought that. She was the one who created the process where the rest of us could teach if we wanted to.

Pat: As long as they were comfortable they could remain teaching?

Maureen: And as long as you were able to do your job.

Pat: So, as soon as you began to show, you had to quit?

Pat: And what year was that that you went back?

Maureen: I think it was 1965.

Pat: By then all of your children were...

Maureen: In school.

Pat: Even Chris (the youngest)?

Maureen: My youngest son was only three, almost three and he stayed with our neighbor next door and then with our neighbor across the alley, and my father lived with us at the time so they were never neglected.

Pat: Did you ever teach any of your own children?

Maureen: No.

Pat: Was that allowed?

Maureen: I don't know whether it would have been or not. We had two of every grade at the Hawthorne and fortunately, I was never put in that position.

Pat: Probably would have been better off anyway?

Maureen: I don't think you can teach your own children. There is a different relationship between parent and child than there is between teacher and child.

Pat: They think that they can get away with more or...

Maureen: ... or you'll just expect way too much of them.

Pat: And probably more of that gets reported home back to Grampa where he has to break out the blue stick.

Maureen: Are you gonna put that on there?

Pat: How has the makeup of the school system changed from 1953 until now?

Maureen: In 1953 the grade schools were all grades one through eight. There were no kindergartens and there was no junior high. One through eight and then the high school years.

Pat: How did the kindergarten become part of the school system?

Maureen: The district received Model Cities monies to implement a kindergarten program and all of the kindergarten students in town went to the Grant School on the East Side. And when the Grant fell to the mining operations, then kindergartens were put into the neighborhood schools. Not all of the neighborhood schools had kindergartens, but the kindergarteners from the smaller neighborhood schools went to kindergarten in the larger ones and then came back to the first grade.

Pat: Were there any private schools with kindergartens that children could attend?

Maureen: Before the Model Cities money came into affect, St Joseph's had a private, Catholic kindergarten and all of the children from all of the parishes could go. And there were several private kindergarten teachers in other facilities. Two of my children went to St. Joseph's to private kindergarten and one of them went to the Alder's Gate Methodist Church to a private kindergarten.

Pat: Were there any private... tutors kind of thing , a kind of Head Start that you could send your children to?

Maureen: I don't remember any Head Start program at that time. Some of the daycare... well then they were just called babysitters would do a little work with the children but it wasn't anything like a preschool or anything like that.

Pat: When and under what circumstances did the junior high schools open?

Maureen: Well, the Catholic schools phased out all of their grade schools over a period of time. They started by phasing out their first grade, and then I believe two more and eventually they phased out all of their grades. Because of those nine Catholic schools closing, our public grade schools became crowded. And at that time we need to have two classes for each grade within the grade school system and so they went to the junior high school concept and in 1956, they opened East Junior High and all of the junior high students went to East. That was less than satisfactory and still pretty crowded and so eventually they opened West Junior High for the children in the uptown area, and they went to junior high up there. Also at this time the Catholic school system had evolved into two junior highs, South Central Junior High at St. Anne's and North Central Junior High at the Immaculate Conception. And so actually at this point in time we were operating four junior high facilities. The Catholic ones of course not as large as the public ones but still helping take up some of that student load for the junior high system. As the population decreased, the junior high system evolved back to one and West Junior High became West Elementary. And all of the children came back to East and now it's a middle school instead of a junior high school.

Pat: Do you happen to know when the two Catholic high schools... junior high schools consolidated?

Maureen: I think that they came into being. Well I know they came into being when my oldest son was in the 7th grade. So...

Pat: So, 1968?

Maureen: About 1968 because...

Pat: That would have made him about twelve in seventh grade.

Maureen: So they established then that all of their grade schools had been phased out and stayed as two Catholic junior highs.

Pat: What grades were the junior high schools at the time?

Maureen: Seventh, eight, and ninth for the public ones, the Catholic ones were just seventh and eighth.

Pat: That was my next question right there. Is if there was any difference between when a person attending a private school went to high school as opposed to public school.

Maureen: They started high school right as freshman. And at that point the freshman were in the public junior high schools.

Pat: What were the private schools that began shutting down that created all of these need for the junior high system?

Maureen: All of the parishes, the Catholic parishes, had a grade school. Holy Savior out in Meaderville, Sacred Heart on the East Side, St. Lawrence and St. Mary's on the North Side Immaculate Conception and St. Patrick's on the West Side. St. Joseph, St. John's and St. Anne's on the Flat. And that many schools, nine of them closing caused quite an impact on our public school system.

Pat: Did they close for pretty much the same reason as the public school system?

Maureen: I think they closed... low enrollment and the teachers were getting better salaries and there weren't as many nuns and they had to hire more lay teachers, so they needed more money and the tuition got to the point where maybe families couldn't afford it anymore. And so they phased them out one grade at a time.

Pat: Did some of these schools shut down because they were in direct path of the mining?

Maureen: Absolutely. Sacred Heart was in the path of the mining. St. Mary's was actually built in one of the mine yards. And the schools was designed to be built and then moved if it had to be but it was closed before there was any need to do that. Holy Savior was in Meaderville and it definitely closed because of the mining impact. St. Lawrence and St. Mary's were up on the hill and there were a lot of underground mines up there and eventually of course they closed and the others just followed suit.

Pat: For the most part all of these buildings are in tact except for the ones in Meaderville and McQueen that were in the direct path of the mining?

Maureen: A lot of them are. St. Anne's is now a developmental center. St. Joseph houses the current Catholic grade school. St. Patrick's is part of the current Catholic junior high school. St. Mary's was just taken down, torn down. St. Lawrence was, Sacred Heart and Holy Savior both went the way of the mines. As far as I know, the school building at St. John's is not used now but at one point the school district rented it and called it the Emerson Annex and we used it for a grade school for a while. And as far as the other buildings, the public school buildings that closed, most of them are just gone. The Franklin, the Harrison, the Jefferson, the Grant, the Washington. The Sherman is still standing and I know that they have some aerobics and gymnastics up there. The Blaine is still standing and they do use it as a community center. The Lincoln is still standing and the last I knew the Lincoln had been used as a daycare. The McKinley is still standing and it was bought out by I'm sure it was a church, a religion of some kind. Monroe now houses Head Start. The Madison is the sight of the Christian school. The Christian school bought the Madison. The Webster-Garfield is now the alternative school. And the Longfellow at this point is just sitting empty because it just closed and I don't know what they're going to do with that.

Pat: Before the Webster-Garfield, was there any kind of alternative school?

Maureen: At the Lincoln. And I don't know that they called it the alternative school but the Lincoln had a program at one point for children who couldn't achieve in a normal classroom. I think they did call it the alternative school.

Pat: It doesn't seem like I have any more questions. Well, just one more; if you had it to do over, would you change anything?

Maureen: No. I would have gone back to worked just as I did when my children were small. I think a happy parent is a better parent and I love my job and it was something I wanted to do with my life, I think I did what I wanted to do.

Pat: I'm glad. And I hoped there are more teachers in the future that teach because they honestly want to like you, rather than just as a way to get by. I hope more teachers are out there like you who do it for the love of the children and the love of teaching. Thank you for this interview.

Maureen: Thank you.