

Outline of Mike Lewis Interview, October 17, 2006

1. Interviewee Mike Lewis

- Born December 1942 in Butte, MT
- Grew up in Butte and Anaconda
- Father was a salesman, mother a housewife
- Graduated Butte High School and School of Mines

2. Mike's Childhood

- Lived in Butte through 3rd grade
- Moved to Anaconda for seven years when his father went to work for Dee Motor Company
- Favorite activity was Kids Day at the Columbia Gardens
- Spent time hunting, fishing, and camping with his father
- Moved back to Butte in 1959 and graduated from Butte High School

3. Mike's Work History

- Graduated School of Mines with a degree in Petroleum Engineering
- Left Butte in 1966 and moved around the country working for different companies
- Returned to Butte in 1991 to work for MSE

4. Childhood memories of Butte

- Compared Uptown Butte in the late 1940's and early 1950's to New York City
- Not many cars because the miners lived uptown and close to the mines so they could walk to work
- Multiple ethnicities and diversified population
- Professional baseball, horseracing
- There were always jobs available for anyone wanting to work, especially for the School of Mines students

5. Working in the Mines

- First job was working in the Mountain Conn mine at age 17
- Went on to work in the Stewart Mine and a couple other underground mines in Butte
- Also worked in the open pit and at the Maiden Rock Mine, a phosphate mine between Divide and Melrose
- Worked in the mines all through college
- Remembers the work being very hard and dangerous
- Had some "near misses" in the mines but was never injured or witnessed anyone seriously hurt or killed
- Had a good friend killed after falling 5000 feet from a gallus frame down a shaft
- Worked with "old timers" who had interesting stories to tell

- Worked with Benny Reynolds at the Maiden Rock Mine, who had been a world champion cowboy and the crew would watch him on TV game shows

6. Ethnic Diversity

- Irish lived on the north end of town in Walkerville, the Germans were on the west side, the Italians lived in Meaderville, and the Finnish in Finn town
- Mike's mother's family was Finnish
- Mike's grandparents were born in Finland and came to America to work, and his mother was born in Wyoming and moved to Butte as a child
- Didn't notice prejudice or racial issues as a child but realizes they were there
- Remembers Chinese laundries and restaurants, such as the Pekin Noodle Parlor

7. Change in Butte

- Mike is happy to see the new jobs and new technology coming to Butte
- Likes the new jobs that require a good education
- Remembers miners with many children that had very little extra money

8. Bars and Alcohol

- Alcohol use has always been very big in Butte
- Remembers 5 or 6 bars in Finn town alone
- Most people of similar descent would congregate in the same bars because of the language barrier
- The bars "never really closed" and you could always find an open bar, even in the middle of night
- Butte was the origin of the drink the "Ditch" which came from the term the miners used for the ditches on the sides of the railroad tracks in the underground mines

9. The Miners

- All men worked 8 hour shifts; 2 weeks day shift, 2 weeks afternoon shift, 2 weeks night shift
- Most men not highly educated, but had great knowledge of mechanics and electronics
- Many couldn't speak English
- The foreign miners were directed to Butte by saying they were looking for the "Seven Stacks of the Neversweat," and everyone knew they meant Butte, MT
- "Seven Stacks of the Neversweat" referred to one of the mines in Butte that had seven smokestacks; it was unique and the only one in the country
- Most foreign miners came to find a better life for themselves and their families
- Few jobs for women in the mines. Many women ran boarding houses.
- Boys started working in the mines at a young age- sometimes 13 or 14 years old.
- Copper mines were hot, wet, and had poor ventilation, while phosphate mines were cool, dry, and had good ventilation

10. The School of Mines

- Mike graduated in Petroleum Engineering
- At that time there were only 6 or 7 degree programs such as metallurgy, geology, mineral dressing, petroleum engineering, engineering science
- Mike's first year had a record enrollment of 600 students, with 8 females
- Many students worked in the mines on weekends and during the summer

11. The Changes in Butte while Mike was gone

- Mike's father lost his job at MT Hardware when the ACM closed
- Remembers hearing about the many union strikes, the closing of the Columbia Gardens, and of people they knew passing away

12. Mike's family

- Grandfather didn't want either of his sons to work in the mines, and neither ever did
- His wife was born and raised in Walkerville. They met in high school and have been married 46 years. She now works as an aide at Whittier.
- His children don't remember much of Butte because they left at a pretty young age

13. Unions

- Butte was a very strong union town
- ACM in control and safety issues not being addresses
- Unions became very strong and would strike a lot
- Some strikes lasted 6-8 months. Merchants would carry the miners and then miners would pay them back when they went back to work
- The town would "dry up" during the strikes
- Bars would continue to do well
- During strikes only the supervisors would work to keep the mines from flooding
- Mining was the best paying job
- You had no choice but to join the union if you wanted to work
- Wobblies
- Scabs- those who would go to work during a strike

14. Railroads

- Butte Anaconda Pacific Railroad hauled ore from Butte Mines to Anaconda
- Many passenger trains in and out of Butte; Northern Pacific, Milwaukee
- A lot of train traffic

15. The Flats

- Just starting to become populated when Mike was growing up
- No running water
- Many people that weren't miners and had cars would live on the flats
- Neighborhoods such as the McQueen, Meaderville taken out by the Pit

16. Recreation

- Many restaurants, bars
- Gambling
- Prostitution
- Lots of fights
- Professional boxing
- Theater
- Many celebrities visited Butte
- A lot of culture and art

17. The Old Timers

- Old timers were “goosey” and would start jumping and shaking if you messed with them
- Miners would work into their 60’s if they were healthy enough
- Many developed lung conditions from years of working in the mines
- Other miners were merciless with the “goosey” old timers and would give them a hard time
- Old timers would also mess with the young newcomers
- Most maintained a pretty good morale and stayed jovial
- Felt good about getting their shift in
- Some worn out but many still had a lot of spunk