

Sue and Mike Kenney, interviewed in their home by Teresa Jordan, 4/17/85. Mike was a painter and then mechanic for the Anaconda Company. Sue works as a secretary for the Urban Revitalization Agency.

Notes taken from tape; not exact transcript.

M: born in Idaho, moved Butte 3 mos. old. Lived in Butte all his life. Worked for the company 2 years as a painter, 9 1/2 years as a mechanic--half a year short of vesting his rights. Have to have 10 years w/o a break to get a retirement. Father worked for Company. He was an underground miner. Everybody I knew worked for the Co.

S: moved to Butte when six; born in Michigan. Father worked for Company for 20-some, thirty years, something like that. Medical retirement. Retired just before the shutdown. Kind of lucked out. But retired for medical reasons. Sue never worked for ACM; worked Metals Banks for 9 years, worked up at the Courthouse for July will be 3 years.

M: started working for ACM from around 23 years old, around 1971. Worked for Buttrey Food and Holiday Inn before that, and ranch jobs. Was going to school, working in the summers. Worked as a painter for 2 years for the Co, then went to Missoula for two years--Univ, accounting. Didn't finish the degree. Have a degree program at Tech now at night. But now I'm w/ Operating Engineers and I'm never at home so...

M: Laid off March 31, 1981. Since then, worked for UPS for Christmas after laid off, got apprenticeship w/ Operating Engineers. Not through training program--that just last two years. Got app. through want ads. Was in Machinist union at Company. Not a problem to change, but have to have \$1000 to join Operating Engineers. Apprenticeship as heavy eqpt operator. Have 300 hours left to go. Work during the summer, off during the winter.

S: This is basically one of the longest layoffs, tho. Last year went to work by Mar 12; laid off now since October. But could be any day for a phone call.

T: Susan's phone number is listed, too. Work parttime out at Fritz's motel and flower shop.

S: If he's out there and I'm outside, I usually set up the intercom to make sure I hear the phone.

T: They only give a half hour to call.

S: Tell Janet [Cornish, her boss] in case they call, I'm going to be at the YMCA or someplace.

T: worked Colstrip last three years, but cut that out since

didn't get increase, finished the dam, finished 3 and 4 this last year. When at Colstrip, first time, was there on backhoe from 6/12/82 until just before Christmas, then transferred up here to Opportunity for a month on the crusher. Then went back the next year, 4/7/83, worked clear up until first part of December. This time went down in March worked clear up until the end of October.

S: But you can get called down there, then the job gets done, come home.

M: I came home for 2 weeks last year, went down on the push cat for three weeks. Wasn't worth it. 350 miles, one way. Put 15,000 miles on the truck last year. Last year we were riding the bus from Billings everyday. 120 miles. Working six 12-hour shifts a week; one-day weekend, six hour drive. If came home, would just turn around and go back.

S: Kids 9, 6, and 1 1/2. I kind of got it a lot easier--at least I got the kids to keep me busy. It's nice to have him home, no 2 ways about it.

Q: change when ARCO came in comp. to ACM?

M: No. Kept their same supervisors. Did bring some efficiency experts in, paid them \$200,000 or whatever, didn't make any difference. Went back to same old way it was.

Q: What was company like to work for?

M: Probably one of the best places I ever worked for. Lot of dead weight at the bottom, lot of people who weren't doing their jobs, and a lot of bosses on the top--you'd have seven people and you'd have two or three bosses. That's not too good. But you were getting top wages and their benefits were excellent.

S: I Don't think a person realizes that when they are just working for them.

M: Just take your health benefits, when I first got laid off, it was \$150 at that time if you paid for itself. Probably \$200 now.

S: Have insurance now through Operating Engineers. Went w/o insurance one month.

M: Didn't mind going to work, but could expect to be transferred to some other type of machinery every two, three years, w/ layoffs. Have to start out green. When have reduction in force, transferred. Spent three years in the pit on shovels and drills. When had red. in force, then I bumped somebody else out of a job, worked on the Cats for three years, spent one year on the pickups, three years on electrical. Toward end, you were just waiting. Said they were going to go through attrition, people retiring, but you were just waiting to get your pink slip. For three years, we'd be laid off for three months during the winter. Then back on, work pretty much through Christmas. Company likes to say suspension rather than shutdown because of

tax breaks. Sounds better. I don't think you'll see mining in Butte again in my lifetime.

S: I think you'll see small ones, but not big scale. Like Sunlight--you'll see more of that.

M: I would bet on Sunlight, too. But gold prices are marginal. Gold and silver kept the Co running as long as it did. But you don't count gold and silver in your profits because it is a copper mine. And then the smelter, they could have sold the smelter a couple times, but they get more of a tax write off if they demolish it. Probaby isn't right, but that's probably a tax incentive for them.

Q: Why do you think it shut down. What was the scenario, who's to blame?

M: I give a lot of credit to the gov't. At that time, they said they were going to stock market [pile?]. Well after getting their copper from Chile and S. Africa, cheaper--we can't compete w/ them becuse they are gov't supported. Same for our friends that work in the lumber industry. They are competing w/ Canada, we can't compete w/ gov't subsidized industry.

Had a lot of probs w/ management, too. Don't think there was any long term planning, all short term. Price of copper went up that one time, during that one strike--we never even went out on strike, we just continued to work. After that, the price of copper just declined. Plus what really hurt them was digging the pit--from the bottom of the pit to the east ridge is 9 miles. Killing them on their hauling. Long ways up there to get one trip every half hour. That's the reason they went to the 170 tonners [trucks] instead of the 100 tonners. When they closed the main pit and went to the East ridge, they cut their work force in half and doubled their production becuae their haulage was only a mile and a half. Same tonnage w/ half the amt of people. I don't think the price of copper has come up in the last...think they were producing (selling) copper at 80 cents and it was costing them a dollar.

Q: Some people put part of the blame on unions. How do you react to that?

M: Like I said, when I was working in the garage, you'd have a lot of people standing around. On the other hand, having three or four bosses for 7 men, I don't think was any good. 50/50. If you worked hard, you were looked on sort of like a freak, a little bit. I was surprised that they did make money, the amount of slackness they had around there. I think they'd carry it over just from years and years, people were just accustomed to it. Like I said, it was new management, didn't make any difference, it was the same way.

Q: Progression of sacrifices for jobs--Meaderville, Columbia Gardens, talk even of moving the whole uptown...

M: That was fine as long as the price of copper was high. But when the cost of producing it was more than what they were getting, it's just a matter of time, can't operate at a loss. Think the oil companies picked it up just for taxes. Think we would have been better off going with Crane [another company that talked about buying Anaconda]. Copper source for their valves. We would have been better off there, producing for their product. Where with oil, it's just a write off anyway. So when they start losing it, they just look for somebody to dump it on.

M: Don't think the guys were too happy when ARCO took over. But think what really hurt us was too many imports. We got training funds--when I got laid off, we were supposed to get it for two years. Then laid off for three months, by time you signed up for a class, you'd be back to work. I think that was a waste of money. From the Federal Government--TRA. That didn't give you any incentive--the amount of money we were getting was more than my take home pay--tax free for that Trade Adjustment. And then we knew we'd be called back. So we just sat around. I can't name two people that were on that that got any training. Got the pay whether you took classes or not.

M: Got apprenticeship pretty much right after laid off. Signed up for app. w/ carpenters and was approved, signed up with electricians, and operators. Operators were only ones who hired enough people to get on with them. '82 went to work with Operators. So off for a year, more than a year. But approved for apprenticeship, when in the spring got 3 weeks training. But until you were hired on an actual job, you weren't actually involved in the apprentice program. So I was off about 6 months. Worked out pretty good. That fall went to work for UPS, and have been working for Fritz's flower shop from '79 to '85. Just part time. Do work up until Memorial Day for him.

S: Lots of times I'll come home at 3:00 and he'll take off, work out there for 3 or 4 hours.

M: Working for Co, last 3 years was when I was affected by layoffs. Started for Co as mechanic in '72. Started w/ the layoffs in '74. I had four or five hundred people under me on the machinists lists. Lot of people working for them. You'd see a lot of relatives down there working. M has one brother working for the railroad, just barely hanging on w/ them. Another bro when Pacific Hide and Fur closed, hasn't worked since, 3 years ago. He had worked for the Co too, Patrick. Also have a sister here. Brother w/ Burlington Northern knows he's going to be laid off, but doesn't know when.

Q: What happens when you find yourself with a 3-month layoff?

M: Three months was sort of nice, because they pay for your insurance for 3 months, and it always was that just before the insurance ran out, you were called back.

S: But there's always that constant question--are WE going to get called back? And you can't plan that because you don't know. Like this job he's on now, you'd like to go someplace but you can't spend the money because you don't know. It would be nice if they'd say like June 1, you're going to go to work. You don't know until that phone rings.

M: I'd like to know how many of the ones they retrained for the Operating Engineers last year went to work. Operating Engineers from the pit was a different local. They had to pay the \$1000 to join, well that puts you on the C list. You hardly never get out on the C list, because they continue to go through the A list. You have to work 3 years to be on the A list. Will be on when finish apprenticeship. I have a friend from the pit who has 26 years as a crane operator, and he's on the B list. You start right on the bottom of the list, it's a brand new union. He didn't lose his seniority with the company, he'll get his retirement. He went up and talked to one of the contractors up at Tech and they hired him, they called him.

M: '74, when started cutting down on the underground mines. They all went to diff jobs in the pit. They made good money contract under ground. Like blood money, though, because they deserved every penny that they god.

S: My father sure enjoyed it [contract mining]. They had the incentive, too, the harder they worked, the more money they made.

M: That's what killed the mines, too. Like you got the Mountain Con, that they wrote the book Mile High and Mile Deep, you see, to hoist their ore, they'd have to hoist it twice. The ore was more of a high grade, but the cost of hoisting it was killing them. That's the reason they went to the open pit. It was a low grade ore, so you needed more tonnage for the same profit. Kellogg--all that's gone, your silver mines, too. I think the mining is about done in MT. And they were talking about adding some more taxes to them--there isn't any mines left to tax, that I know of.

Q: Susan, have you worked all the time you've been married?

S: No. Worked 9 years for bank, quit to have a family. When Michael came along, quit. Just went back in July 3 years, for the insurance [didn't keep insurance through Courthouse because proved better to get it through Operating Engineers, but Sue originally went back to work to get coverage for the family.] married 12 years. We were married 3 years before I quit bank. Stayed home w/ kids until last 2 1/2 years.

Q: had to readjust plans?

M: can't make any real far range plans. Can't plan vacations.

Q: With layoff, have you had to sell any assets?

M: No, lucky there. w/ unemployment and stuff, I was only off 6 months or so.

S: Right now we've got 4 weeks left of the Federal extension. And I'll be going full time when Janet takes off 3 months to have her baby.

M: And I'll still be making enough out at Fritz's to make house payments.

S: The only thing we're looking at right now--if Mike doesn't get work, the insurance runs out in July.

M: So you're talking about \$150 if I pay for it myself.

S: Might be worthwhile for me to go through a physical and everything and get back on it up at Butte-Silver Box.

M: But I'll be working by then.

S: But when that phone rings--the phone doesn't ring but I think whether or not it's working time up in Helena.

M: They'll call like at 3:00 and you have to be there by 7 the next morning.

Talks about expenses, working Colstrip--living, bought trailer, joining union, problems with vehicles.

S: We're keeping our heads above water.

M: Barely keeping even. But we're luckier than a lot we know. One friend moved to San Diego. Funny thing about Butte people--they go to other places, but they always come back. Can't find jobs, your relatives and friends are here, you get support from them. It's just that kind of town.

Q: Alternatives?

M: You can get an attitude like my uncle, he worked for the Co. He got into some trouble and they terminated him. He just signed up for welfare, and he's never going to go to work.

S: He says he'll stay home and make babies

M: We've been lucky, though.

S: We have to admit that somebody up there is watching over us. It's worked out fine for us

M: Not fine, but it could have been a lot worse.

Q: Any benefits? Hardship pull a family together...

S: We don't have time to fight.

M: I don't see any benefits. Being away from home and all, I don't see any benefits at all except to keep the bills paid up.

S: Possibly Mike, even though he is away from home for several months of the year, but he's with the kids too, for four or five months, constantly.

M: When laid off from the Co every year for the three months, with the kids when they were young.

S: He's always been like that, even when he was working full time, he'd go graveyard shift just to be home w/ the kids in the day time.

M: I had some good times with the Company. Doesn't matter if the job's lousy, if the people you are working for are good, you tolerate a lot.

Q: Kept close touch w/ people you worked with?

M: yes. some retired. Most have stayed here. Getting to the age can't afford to go somewhere, start over.

Talks about people of Butte friendly. Butte a melting pot--Irish, all diff kinds. Kenny is German background. Not really a German community here, but Italian, diff communities. Not much left of them now.

Q: Columbia Gardens?

M: I miss Columbia Gardens for the kids. We went up there and worked, couldn't have been more than a year, and we left. [Company mined Garden] I was really disgusted with that. And that was supposed to have been given by the company, I can't remember if it was Msarcus Daly or Clark, I think it was Clark gave it to the people. I don't think the company wanted to pay for that anymore either--they kept the upkeep and everything. It's gone forever. They've got a lot of money out. But like that guy said. We're the riches hill on earth, but what good does it do us now?

Q: will Butte survive?

S: Something is going to happen.

M: There is something in the udercurrent, too. All the oil drilling they've done for Dillon. Seems like there's just something under the surface, seems like something

S: All these motels going up, McDonalds coming in, Arby's coming in.

M: They were talking about the Olympics or the World's Fair coming up in Canada, but you wouldn't think that would be enough

to sustain them.

S: one year isn't enough to sustain them. They must do surveys and that.

M: Other places like Billing are going great guns. I don't know what sort of a base they have.

Q: economy changing with high tech...

M: I have a problem w/ high tech, because most of the jobs there, if you are blue collar, you are just out of luck. Because there isn't so far, w/ any of the companies that have come in, haven't seen anyplace where you can get any training. Bringing people in.

Q: How feel about newcomers?

S: They are bringing their money, too. I'd rather see people from Butte working. But a lot of times they just don't have the education.

M: I think there, though, they want to use the unions as a hindrance. Although like MHD, they had shutdown after shutdown out there. I couldn't believe that. I think the unions are changing their attitude now too. I worked for UPS--it's one of the most efficient places I've ever worked. You miss a day and your boss takes your job. I think that the unions are finding out that if they don't work hard, just like in construction, if you don't do your job, you are a part of a team, if that contractor doesn't make any money, if he's out of business, you're not working then either. I think unions, all of them, should get together, try to work together. You can't be on opposing sides.

S: you know in the long run, all these layoffs and people not working, might turn out--like Mike was saying before there was a lot of dead weight, you really didn't work hard. But maybe with people being laid off and that, when they do get a job, they are going to work harder to hold that job.

M: Course, I felt like the last couple years, when you knew you were going to get laid off, I could have cared less. Instead of them giving you two weeks notice, I'd just have soon they'd given one day notice. I'd just as soon have left the beginning of the 2 weeks. You could care less.

Talks about retirement. M feels a little cheated, 6 months short of vested rights, won't get anything from money paid into retirement. Didn't come out of his pay, but was part of it.

Q: any thoughts of starting own business?

M: last 20 years! but have to have money, too. A friend of



mine is the one going to open that McDonalds. They are very selective on who they take to open them. Talking about a couple hundred thousand dollars.

S: What's really sad are the ones who are really affected mentally. When you don't have nothing to do, there's a lot of drinking, divorces.

M: the people would just as soon be working. My mother is on welfare, and the garbage she has to go through--I'd just as soon end up robbing banks, like they say. I don't know if a person could have come to that, though.

S: Like Mike says, we're not sinking as fast as some people, but we're sinking. One good thing, though, he's a go getter anyway so I don't have to...

M: Push too hard. Colstrip was just like a little Butte down there because they had absorbed so many. That's finished, don't know what those guys will do. Next power plant in Utah...that's tough on your family, moving all the time, never in one spot.

Q: Argument in paper about able bodied getting G. A.--that they should leave if can't find job here

M: But where do you go?

S: And where do you get the money to go? If you have a family and that, you can't take what money you've got and the guy takes off and leaves his wife.

M: Catch 22--can't afford to go, but you can't afford to stay. Have known a couple who have left.

Talks about two families went to Arizona, and came back. One couple went to Seattle and stayed. But \$30,000 house here is like a \$60,000 house there.

M: Tough when you've got time on your hands. I've been pretty lucky. I've taken up stained glass, taken classes, took a photography class up at Tech. Every year, when come home, take a different class. Took a ham radio class, took up ice fishing to get through the winter, get out of the house.

S: And now we love it. (laughs) So maybe there are benefits.

M: People say, gees, I'd like to have time off to do this or that, but so many of people at work, that was their enjoyment, that was where they wanted to be at. A few of my friends who have retired, didn't have any interests, just watching TV, I read about them when they fell dead. I sort of miss the guys at work, too.

Q: Do you think that the company treated you fairly?

M: I'd say yes, except for a couple times with the layoffs, they

counted the days so that you didn't get your vacation, so that was sort of dirty. They had the days w/i four days--you'd have to work 150 days to get a vacation; well, they'd have 146

Tape 2, Side A

M: have lots of friends who were making 11.82 when laid off in '81. All the job openings I've seen in the paper, like KOA, I have a few friends working for them, they are working for minimum, \$3.75 or whatever it is. That's what is depressing. I took a hydraulics class, one of men came to talk from Utah, most of the jobs there range from \$5 to \$7. Construction now, we're up to \$14, 15 an hour. Where you usually make the money is you work so much overtime. That was another deal for the Co--it was cheaper to have guys working the overtime, just like UPS, that guy gave me an example, soon as they hire somebody, they are paying him for vacation, they are paying him for retirement, workman's comp. It's cheaper to pay the overtime than to hire new person. So you are hurting there.

If any of the kids wanted to go into blue collar, I'd recommend them not to. Any job that comes along, I've put in for that--like for the Post office. I put in for all them. I put in for every job I see--McDonald's. And I still say it's not what you know but who you know. Even when I'm working I watch the help wanted ads. That's the first thing you look at. Sort of a habit. But starting new businesses--like it said in Megatrends--that's a good idea, but most of your employers are going to be with 20 or 30 people. Getting the business started is something else. Like that guy that wants to start that Butte brewery--that's the reason they went out of business, because they couldn't compete with bigger breweries. Used to be two here. I'd like to see them get some more things in, but the rest of the country is competing for those things too. Like the Grain Elevator they opened up the other day--a friend went out looking for a job. A kid working there, the friend said, how did you get on out here. The kid says, well my dad runs the Port of Butte. If you don't know somebody, you are sort of out of luck.

Q: unions help circumvent that?

M: Yeah, but see, you join union after you went to work. Both the jobs I got with the Co, I bugged them for days. the first job, my eyes were too bad so I couldn't work in the mines, so I told them thank you, I was getting ready to leave, they said, what you want to be? A carpenter or a painter? I said, I can paint, so they made me a painter. Every job that I've gotten, I've had some connection. I don't have too much to say good about the Employment Office. Like they told me, it's not their responsibility to get you a job, its yours--I guess it's really up the individual to check their boards.

There are lots of jobs for mechanics around the area--like in Glendive, for \$5 or \$6 an hour.

S: But I don't know how a family can survive on just one paycheck.

M: I don't know how my friend working at KOA or mini mart--for \$4/ hour. Course it's lucky for us--our vehicles are paid for, our house we got low interest. The payment is less than if you were renting a place.

S: We're going to wait until our kids are old enough to go to college and then they can support us.

M: I can't think of too many people who are working. Most of it is just part time. What kills you, working with these different unions, even when you're not working, you have to pay dues, like \$40 a month. I was going to get on the list for the electricians, but you got 300 people ahead of you on the list. Like I said, for the blue collar worker, things don't look too good.

My attitude has changed a little bit, too. I'd just as soon be making 7, 8 dollars an hour and be at home. Because you are supporting two households. You make the money with the overtime, but all you are doing is eating and sleeping and working. I don't think it's worth it. Learn how to write letters and make big phone bills by calling.

S: Like I told Mike, they were having a meeting over here for Washington Construction for up on the hill and I told Mike I was going to hurry and type a little resume and put on everybody's windshield for him to go to work right up here at Elk Park [highway construction]

M: A person can get discouraged. It's pretty tough. I've had quite a few friends who were pretty heavy drinkers before and they are probably better than better drinkers, even better drinkers now. Puts a lot of pressure on you.

S: Just like Joe--Jose. He did get a medical retirement. I just wonder if that didn't contribute to all the stress, because it was shortly after the layoffs. And he's in his early 50's.

M: I know a couple from the union who went and seen psychiatrists and had mental problems. Just couldn't handle it. A lot of stress.

S: Jose--had a slight stroke, he has five or six kids, his wife is working as a waitress or something.

M: That's another thing I like about the welfare. To get welfare, you've got to go and sell everything you've got. Like me, my trailer--I had to buy the trailer to work in Colstrip. I think it's interesting that you take and buy this stuff for yourself and then end up selling it for nothing just to get welfare, food stamps, whatever. I agree that if you are able you probably should be working. I'd just as soon be doing anything

rather than be on welfare. Rather than go through all the garbage you have to go through up there. But jobs are scarce. A person gets bitter. You get to where you don't want to say anything good about the company. But can't blame the Company, like I said, if they are not making money. You can blame that on the gov't. They turn around and loan the money to Mexico to open up a copper pit that is going to be bigger than all the ones in the United States. The only way to get the people back to work is to have another war. That's a nice way to put your people to work! Or you can become like England has done, run the second generation over there of their industrial people who were working in the steel mills, they just pay them to stay at home. That's the reason their taxes are so high. But they are all just a welfare type deal, their health and everything is paid for. But the thing is, you don't have any respect or anything then. Your self respect is all gone. Working for the Company, you are making probably twice as much as everybody else. Like I told Susan, I would have been better off to stay at Buttries, I'd have three or four weeks vacation. That's hindsight though. Then I was going to quit and go to work for the railroad--that one strike, we were on strike for one month, I worked for them. I felt real bad because I went back to the Company and then a friend of mine got laid off five years later with them. I don't know if you can find any job unless it's a gov't job where you are going to have the security you want. There are a few companies now that are incorporating that into their plan of doing business, that if you work for less, you've got the job security for life. Like that lady that they laid off in the paper [Flannagan, laid off by Prudential, won judgment of something like \$13 M against bank] They do a lot of that too, lay off the older ones just before they retire.

S: I feel sorry for these people who are so much older. At least Mike is still young enough to interest employers.

M: Like my brother, they wanted him to take a 50% cut in wages for Pacific Hide and Fur--they were paying their non union help more. They didn't want to take the cut, so they closed it down. Or that meatpacking place out of Billings, they took all the concessions and they still closed it down.

I think you are looking at the time when there will just be one union and you won't be good at anything, you'll just do everything.

Have a friend up at Tech who sent out 200 resumes, and it took him 6 months to get a job. Statistics show unemployment is dropping--I just laugh. make the gov't look good. I'd like to know where all the new jobs are.