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Restrictions:

6/7/86

Date of Agreement

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NOTES ON USING MATERIALS FROM

"IS THERE LIFE AFTER COPPER?" ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Because of limited funds available for this project, audited transcriptions of the tapes were not possible. However, there are detailed notes for most of the interviews. The user should be aware of a few limitations on the use of these notes. Unless otherwise specified, the notes were taken at the time of the interview and were not later audited against the tape. They can give you a good idea of what was covered in the interview. However, if you find something specific that interests you, you should verify it with the tape. Because the notes were taken quickly during the interview, they may include inaccuracies. If you use information for attribution, you must go back to the original tape.

There are rough transcriptions for many of the interviews. Again, because of time and funds available, these transcriptions were not later audited against the tape. They are more accurate than the notes, but again, if you use information for attribution, check it against the original tape.

A few interviews have restrictions against use of the tape. The notes for these have generally been read and corrected by the subject of the interview and are accurate. Check the releases for further information.

Randy and Barbara Mongar

Randy and Barbara Mongar, interviewed in their home in Colstrip, Montana, June 10, 1986, by Teresa Jordan. Randy was a machinist with Anaconda/ARCO in Butte; laid off in 1982. Now works as a mechanic for the power plant in Colstrip.

Notes taken from tape. Not a transcript except as noted.

R was born in Livingston. Father went to work in the mines, then worked for the Butte Water Company. He was a day's pay underground miner. Retired from the Water Company. R's family felt the Anaconda Company was good to them, provided steady employment. R started for Ana in November of '66, after he got out of high school. B was born in Butte; her father drove truck over the road; started with Anaconda Company in about '73. He worked until the '81 layoff. R was laid off in May of '82. R was a machinist with Anaconda: made parts, repaired machinery for the pit and the mines. Worked in the main shop. Started out as a machinist helper, then apprentice, then journeyman. Apprentice program takes four years. R became a journeyman in about '75. Always worked in Butte -- with different parts of the operation, but all out of the machine shop. B did not work outside the home.

Q: How long before you were laid off did you begin to sense it was coming?

R says that they thought they were going to hang on until a month before the layoff. They bought a new car not long before that. They thought they would miss the layoff because R had fifteen and a half years. Had about a three week's to a month's notice.

Q: Do you remember that day you were told? What was your initial reaction?

R says shock. "We had planned on retiring there. It was kind of hard to take, I guess."

Q: How did you tell Barbara?

R: "I said, 'I don't have a job anymore.'" (laughs).

Q: Barbara, what was your reaction?

just shock. R says, they wondered what they were going to do. They thought it couldn't happen to them. They had friends who had been laid off. But they thought that they would never shut it all down. B: "We always thought that they would just bring it up tight and just have a few people, but never [shut down completely]."

Q: Had your father and the other people you'd known had success in getting jobs once they had been laid off.

No. B's father still doesn't work steady.

Q: If you can remember back to the different stages you went through, what did you think your options were?

They just kind of laid back and waited for awhile. They thought they might hire back on. They worked on the house -- painted it, built a patio, "just kind of slid by there for awhile."

Q: Did you get TRA?

No, but they got a SUB from the company to go along with the unemployment, for a year, they think.

Q: What total were you getting on a weekly income?

They have trouble remembering, but they think it was \$100 from the company, \$145 on unemployment. That compared to \$10.51 an hour when laid off -- about \$400 and some a week.

Q: Did you have savings?

B: "We had some savings, but by the time the year was up, we didn't."

Q: Had you known other people who had come to Colstrip?

Just construction. There was one other person from R's shop who had come; he stayed two weeks; didn't like it -- didn't like the company, the country, anything about it. R was unemployed a year -- he had two weeks left on unemployment when they got the interview in Colstrip.

Q: Was that a strain on your marriage?

They say it was. It was a tough year.

Q: Can you remember changes you had to make, or specific events that were causing that sort of stress?

They had to cut down on everything. They had a cabin outside Basin, and they found out they couldn't go up there much because it cost too much; it was cheaper to stay home than to do anything else. All three of their children were born at the time. Mandy is 11; Eric is 9; and Carrie is almost 5. Carrie was about a year old at that time. During that year of unemployment, R couldn't find anything in his line of employment in town -- and they wanted to stay in town at first.

Q: what was your attitude toward the idea of leaving Butte?

In a way they kind of wanted to leave. Toward the end, they wanted to start over again.

Q: Were you given any help in looking for work?

R went to the Job Service -- wasn't very impressed. They treated you like the unemployment money was coming out of their own pocket -- which we had never had to do before, and they just kind of herded you around like a bunch of sheep or cattle. They kind of put you down, I thought. I got that impression from other people I talked to, too. It was welfare, is what you were getting. They didn't help in finding a job, either. There were little schools to help you learn how to approach an employer. R didn't think it was helpful. He just put in applications everywhere. He applied to the Water Company -- his father was going to retire, and he wanted the job his father had -- he was a caretaker at one of the reservoirs; the Power Company -- he put in there and forgot about it until they called him for an interview; and the machine shops around town.

Q: Did you get any leads from the Job Service?

R: "No, nobody was hiring and there were all of us on the streets, so it was spend a year on your own." R did get a job out of Job Service when he was just out of school -- cutting poles in Bannack; R never got paid, and the boss ended up in the pen for butchering a neighbor's steer.

Q: What had you heard about Colstrip other than from your friend who didn't like it?

B's brother had been here on construction for a couple years, and said it was just prairie. R and B never heard anything good about Colstrip -- just that it was flat.

that there was nothing here. B: "And it was wrong, because I think it's pretty. It is hot, and you do miss the mountains, but it's still pretty."

R came for an interview on April 19, the company flew both R and B down, as well as the baby. R was impressed with the place; it was a chance to start over, and it was a good paying job. B had mixed feelings. She liked the town when they drove them around, but there was no shopping. And moving away from family was hard. Since R and B have been here, there has always been a gas station -- earlier, people had to go elsewhere for gas. There is a grocery store, and little stores come and go.

After the interview, it was the 5th of July before R went to work. He kept calling and calling. They have now been here about three years. R is a power plant mechanic; it was a lot of new learning. It took him a couple months to find his way around. It's very complex. To learn, he went with another journeyman. [Talk about Colstrip.]

Q: How are working conditions here, compared to the Anaconda Company?

All in all, better. Lunchrooms, break times are better. The company is pretty good to work for; they had a machinist test which R wasn't very happy with, but he passed it. The pay is higher -- \$16.50 an hour. The town is a lot more expensive to live in, though. Benefits are not as good; medical and dental is worse. Comaraderie was a little better in Butte -- you worked with the same people for 10 or 15 years. Here, there are a lot of dissatisfied people who would leave if they could find another job.

Q: did you have that feeling in Butte, that people would leave if they could find another job?

No, not really. Mostly, people were born and raised there, pretty well settled in. R thinks it will be that way in Colstrip, too, but right now, everybody is still in turmoil. Everyone is coming from a different part of the country; it's just like a new community. People are used to old ways, and everything looks better looking back at it. There's not much turnover in the mechanical department here -- R thinks they have only lost three mechanics since he's been there-- but that's because there just aren't jobs out there. There must be 75 or 80 mechanics working for Colstrip.

Q: I was surprised to see that Colstrip is a real town -- I think a lot of people think of it as a man camp -- trailers and tents. Is the development here fairly recent?

When R and B first came, there were a lot of pull-trailers; the houses like they live in were just being built.

Q: How have you found the community to live in and raise a family in?

The people are really friendly, and the schools are terrific. The schools in Butte don't compare with the ones here. B liked the school in Butte when she was there, but she feels that they keep pushing kids into one big school there, it's too crowded. Here, they have a lot of individual attention. The parks are nice here. She likes Colstrip.

Q: In a community where you've been all your life, with family and old friends, there is a sense of support -- if anything happened, there would be someone to help. Do you have that sense of support here?

B says yes, she does know. When they first moved, she didn't have it. She had never moved before and she didn't like the feeling. Her mother had lived one door down from them in Butte; brother two doors down, "So there was always somebody around, you figured, if you wanted to go somewhere, to have a babysitter, or whatever. But when we moved here and I didn't know anyone, you did have a feeling of -- who would you turn to? But now I don't. I know a lot of people, and it didn't take real long to meet people.

You meet people here in the parks. Whole families go to the parks. They know all their neighbors on the street, they all watch each other's places. R says, "You don't do anything in this town without somebody knowing about it." B says that she doesn't know if you moved into another community if you would have the same ease of getting to know each other and help each other as here, because everyone here is so new here, they all are willing to meet you. In other towns, where people are established, they aren't as open.

Q: This seems to be a family town, which comes as a surprise to me.

The company had a lot to do with that. When they hired Randy, they didn't want him to come by his self. They wanted to wait until the whole family could come. Before that, they had taken just men, and had a man camp, but by the time the Mngars came, they wanted whole families.

Q: How hard a decision was it to take that job?

It wasn't too hard. They really had no choice, they were desperate. If there had been other work in Butte, they would never have come down, but as it was, they had no choice.

Q: How did your family react to your coming here?

They weren't too excited. R's father was all for it. He thought it was a way to get ahead, get out of the old Butte, much the same thing as he had had to do in Livingston.

Q: How often do you get back to Butte?

R goes once a year. B goes more often. She had never driven before on the highway, but now she goes at least every three months.

Q: What have been the experiences of other people from Butte you know in getting work?

They can't think of anyone who has moved. Most have just stayed on, taken part time jobs, tried to start businesses.

Q: Why do you think there is that deep reluctance to move?

Everybody is afraid of change. Even after R and B had lived in Colstrip a year, they said it would be hard to move again. The change is hard.

Q: Any regrets about moving?

R says he guesses not. B: "I hated leaving, with my family and stuff, but once I was here, I don't really regret it. I'm happy here."

The power company gave them \$1500 to move. It cost more than that.

R is in the Electrical Workers union here rather than Machinists as in Butte. There are two unions here: the Teamsters have the warehouse and then everyone in the plants is IBEW.

Q: How secure do you feel with your job here now?

Secure. There is need for the power. R: "I think we are in pretty good shape again. Of course we thought that once before. B: I was going to say, I hope it's not a false sense of security." R: "Of course we can always move again."

Talk about Colstrip .

Tape 1, Side B

R's position is long term maintenance rather than building, so it is more secure. There is retirement in 30 years; 10 to invest your rights, as in any big company.

Q: How did the kids weather the move?

Well, They missed their friends, but the Mongars lived up behind Walkerville, and there weren't that many kids there, so they have enjoyed meeting so many kids here. About the only other kids up there in Butte were cousins. It wasn't hard to meet kids here.

Q: How did you feel about the Anaconda Company's treatment of workers through the layoff, and what they did for workers after the layoff?

They were fair. They gave them severance. R: "They never guaranteed us a job for life. Just we all assumed it. No, I think they were fair in their dealings. If they can't make money, they can't stay in business." They got \$100 a week for a year, and then R vested his rights, so he has retirement up there. He will get retirement in 2011, when he is about 65.

Q: With Anaconda smelter workers, there was a lump sum closure settlement, but I understand there wasn't one on the hill.

No, they got the weekly benefit and that was all. R & B had to wait for theirs, too. The Company had run out of money for the supplement. R and B got the supplement for about six months after they moved to Colstrip -- because it had started late.

Q: ARCO called the pit shutdown a suspension rather than a shutdown. Did that make a difference to you in how you viewed your future?

Yes, because they hung around for a year hoping the Company would start it back up. R has doubts now that it ever will open up. He wouldn't go back to work for them. He wouldn't even apply with Washington if he gets the mine going. "They'd be too risky for me. I like security. I like to know that my job's going to be there tomorrow, if at all possible. And we sold most everything up there anyway. We only got one house left." They sold their own house; kept a house they had as rental property. When they sold their home they did all right. They sold to a relation. Everybody wanted their house on the hill, so they did pretty good by it. They had an old schoolhouse up there behind Walkerville, a big yellow duplex schoolhouse. B wanted to just leave it empty in case Colstrip didn't work out. But they sold it right away, R says. They couldn't wait for us to leave so they could get it. The rental house is just down the hill. B's mother lives there.

They miss the availability of recreation here. Everything is restricted and fenced here. They liked the openness up above Walkerville.

Q: Could we talk a little bit more about the year you were laid off. You had said before it was a really tough time.

B: "We had one major blowout. You're not used to -- you're not used to them being home, either. And then all of a sudden, you're put together, and you have no money for the same things you wanted all the time. And we had never fought a lot in our married life."

Q: Did you have any doubts you were going to make it?

Yes. R: "It was coming awful close. We didn't know what we were going to do."

Q: Have you had friends whose marriages did fall apart?

No, everyone has pretty well stuck together and weathered it out.

Talk about community activities in Colstrip. B is more involved here than she was in Butte. It's easier to be involved in community things here; in Butte, they were so used to having family that they didn't try as hard to get involved as they did when they moved here. R had been involved in the Walkerville Fire Department.

Q: How close touch do you keep with friends in Butte outside your family?

Not very close touch. Christmas cards are about it. Friends haven't visited in Colstrip. All the relations were just there for graduation; that was the first time that many of them had been to Colstrip. People get busy with their own lives. R's mother and father come once a month, but they are retired.

Q: Did you have costs involved in looking for work?

No, because R just looked right around Butte. The power company paid for the interview here.

Q: What more do you think could have been done, either on the part of the Anaconda Company, or Job Service or other services, to make the year of unemployment easier, or what would have made it easier to find a job?

More jobs! (laughter). There just wasn't anything to do there.

Q: Some people have chosen to stay in Butte even though their financial situation is entirely different than when they worked full time. One frustration they express is that there aren't jobs outside of Butte. You can spend so much money looking for them, and people come back without a job. There is a feeling sometimes of being trapped. Did you have that feeling?

R: "Yes. It seemed like there was nowhere to go. It was very depressing. It really gets to you. But I don't know what I would suggest."

Q: ARCO employs people in lots of different places around the country. Was there anything through ARCO in terms of getting placed within the company?

No. R had a friend, a supervisor, tell him to go down to Thunder Basin in Wyoming. He said R could have gotten on down there. That was just before R was laid off. At that time, R didn't want any part of this part of the country and he didn't go. They never said anything about other jobs. Perhaps if a person had inquired into it, he might have been able to get on with a different branch. But there was nothing ever said that you either could or couldn't. Whereas with the Power Company, they said when R and B came down here, that if units 3 and 4 didn't go on line, they would give them another job somewhere in the state. Whether they would have or not, R and B don't know, but they said they would. It was not written in the contract.

Q: Do you think the move would have been harder if you had been unemployed longer, or easier?

Easier. The longer you are laid off, the easier it is to move. When they first got laid off, they wouldn't have considered moving.

Q: If right after you had been laid off, say within two or three weeks, if this job had come open, would you have taken it?

They don't think so. They would have assumed the company would start back up. They thought it was just like a strike. It would pass over and they'd be back to work again. Strike every three years -- they were used to not working from time to time. They are glad there are no strikes in Colstrip. Labor relations are not too bad here -- they do a lot of fighting and arguing, but it's not too bad. There was a strike for one or two days one time. That was the only one. B notes that you can't afford a strike down here; with the rate of housepayments, you couldn't make it if you didn't work.

Real estate is much higher here. Probably twice as much for the same house. Their house is 80,000 here; it would probably be \$50,000 in Butte. Even in Billings, you

can get a lot nicer homes for the money than in Colstrip. [Talk about high house payments.]

Q: If you look back at it now, were there any benefits from the shakeup your lives have experienced?

R says yes. It got them out of a rut they were stuck in but didn't want to change. It made them change, have new experiences, a lot of new problems. B agrees (less enthusiastically, however), but says she thinks you get in a rut no matter where you live; they just live in another rut now. She likes a routine.

Q: What do you regret about having to make the change?

Leaving family. Leaving the wide open spaces; the cabin in the mountains which they had always wanted and finally got, but had to give up. They had to sell the cabin to pay for their move and get set up. It's a completely different way of life here than in Colstrip. The landscape is different, and neither of them had really lived in town until they came to Colstrip. They weren't used to having close neighbors. You have to drive to do anything here. A big trip in Butte was going to Helena or Bozeman. Here, you go 30 miles to go to the river; it's nothing to go to Miles City or Billings. Butte had everything you needed. People are recreation-oriented here, too. The median age here is about 35, so it's young. It's really strange to see an old person here. They have a senior citizens club which has about five people.

Q: Butte has a lot of old people. Does it seem strange to your kids to not have older people around?

Yes. They miss the old people. B: "We have a neighborhood get-together where we get together once a week, and one lady brought her mother and Carrie was just -- Grandmal" Must be a grandma, you know. She was just surprised to see someone with white hair. Carrie is shy anyway, and I was surprised that she would go up to this lady. It must just have been because it was a grandma. Her grandmas aren't white haired, either. That was neat."

Colstrip is a good place to raise kids -- with schools and swimming lessons and parks, recreation. In Butte, at swimming lessons, there were so many kids. Here, there is more room.

R's folks are retired; B's father is not retired, but he's not working now. They don't think that either of their folks would move here in retirement.

End of interview