

Questions?

- Where you born in Butte?
- At what hospital?
- Where at in Butte did you live?
- Was the city segregated in any way?
- What school(s) did you attend?
- Did you play any sports?
- For what teams?
- How long did you live in Butte?
- Does your family still live there?
- Do you have any brothers or sisters?
- What did you parents do for a living?
- What kind of role model did your father play in your life?
- What job(s) did you have while living in Butte?
- Did you Attend Montana Tech?
- Did you work in the mines?
- Did women work in the mines?

We, Ray Burns and BRAD RICHINS
 (Person Interviewed) (Interviewer)

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Signed: Ray Burns Address: (St.;Box)
 (Person Interviewed)

1204 GRAND - MISSOULA, MT 59801 City, State, Zip
Brad Richins Address: (St.;Box)
 (Interviewer)

City, State, Zip

(Date)

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(City & State)

Missoula, MT.

A Boy's Life of Growing Up in Butte

Interviewer : Brad Richins
Being Interviewed : Ray Burns

This is an interview of Ray Burns conducted by Brad Richins in Missoula, Montana on November 23, 2005 at 7:10pm.

Brad :
Were you born in Butte?

Mr. Burns :
Yes

Brad :
In what hospital?

Mr. Burns :
St. James Hospital

Brad :
Alright ... Where at in Butte did you live?

Mr. Burns :
I lived at 718 West Broadway, which is kind of up on the hill.

Brad :
Was the city segregated in anyway?

Mr. Burns :
Ah, pretty much was, yeah, we had the hill people, then we had the flat people. In Butte most of the, most of the a ... a lot of the town is located up on the hill, which is kind of up the side of the mountain, then the rest of it is located down on the flats, so we were the "hill guys" and then we had the "flat guys".

Brad :
What school or schools did you attend?

Mr. Burns:
I went to a ... my grade school was St, well we were , we were Catholic, Irish Catholic, so my grade school was St. Pats grade school, and then I went to Butte Central which was a Catholic high school.

Brad :
Did you play any sports?

Mr. Burns :
Yep, I played football and basketball.

Brad :
On what teams?

Mr. Burns :
I played for the a, for Butte Central, and then I played of coarse all my, all the years growing up, we played all through grade school, played basketball from oh I think we started from 5th grade on up. Basketball and football, but I played both in high school too.

Brad :

Did you ah ... attend Montana Tech?

Mr. Burns :

Yeah, I went to Tech for one year. My first year, my freshman year.

Brad :

How long in you live in Butte?

Mr. Burns :

I left Butte when I was ... about 24. So, for 24 years. The first 24 years of my life, but then of coarse I've been back and forth since I have left, my parents still live there, my brother still lives there.

Brad :

So, your family is still there?

Mr. Burns :

Uh huh.

Brad :

Your parents are (cough)...

Brad :

So, you have brother and sisters?

Mr. Burns :

Uh huh.

Brad :

What do they do for a living?

Mr. Burns :

I have a brother who works for the Montana Power Company, but it's not Montana Power anymore, it's uh Northwestern Energy no in Butte, and I have 3 sisters ... in um, one of my sisters is in Great Falls. She's a teacher, uh the other sister, the other 2 are here, one the other one a physical therapist and the other ones just a home maker.

Brad :

So what do your parents do for a living?

Mr. Burns :

My dad was an engineering accountant for the Montana Power Company. Which was the old Montana Power Company, before it got sold off and changed to Northwestern Energy.

Brad :

What did your mom do?

Mr. Burns :

My mom was pretty much a stay at home mom, she stayed at home and took care of us, but she did have, she took a job for awhile at the phone company, she worked for like 10 years at the local phone company for awhile, but that's the only job she ever had ... most the time she was home with us kids.

Brad :

What kind of role model did your father play in your life?

Mr. Burns :

He was pretty ... actually (laughs). My dad wasn't around a whole lot, he was busy working. He worked as an accountant and he drove cabs on the weekends, because

of the, uh um, you know, there was so many of us kids and you know he taught me pretty much he taught me I think my basic, all the morals and stuff I have as far as work, my work ethic is concerned. You know, by always having a job and always having to work. But, he wasn't around a whole lot for anything else. Lot of the other stuff I picked up, I picked up from my friends, my hunting and fishing that I do, my dads never hunted and fished in his life. Um but, you know as far as being a good father and everything he was always there for us and always provided for us.

Brad :

What job or jobs did you have while you were in Butte?

Mr. Burns :

Oh I worked at a ... I worked, well while I was going to school I worked at the school as a janitor to pay my way through school cause it was a Catholic school so you had to pay tuition. Um, and then I, after that I worked at a gas station for awhile. And then I a, when I quit school I worked for a glass and paint shop in Butte and then when I moved here to Missoula I bought my own business, my own paint and glass business.

Brad :

Did you worked in the mines?

Mr. Burns :

I did work in the mines for awhile too. Yeah, I forgot that I had a stint that I worked 2 years, in the mines, I worked in the Kelly at the Kelly Shaft. John Swinesides dad who was a friend of mine hired me and uh, he told me he would let me work for 2 years then he was going to fire me. So I worked for 2 years then he let me go cause he said you don't want to do this for the rest of your life, and I made good money I in the, on what they call the pump crew, which is when your underground that for mining you have to pump water. You're always dealing with underground water so you have to keep the water under control, pump it out. We used to build mud walls, cause the walls in the shaft were constantly getting wet and of course they would collapse so we would have to build these mud walls, it was a good experience. It was hard work

Brad :

Did any woman work in the mines?

Mr. Burns :

No, back in those days none!

Brad :

So you thought it was taboo then?

Mr. Burns :

Well, it was just ... it would have been to hard of work for a women. I, it would have been ... it was tough it was ... I just don't think a women, it had to be an awful tough women to do it, It was hard work.

Brad :

Did anyone think it was bad luck to have a woman down there?

Mr. Burns :

Um, well you know I don't know, I never heard anyone say anything about that you know it's kind of funny because I don't think so. I, I never heard that ever said. It was never brought up and I don't know that there was ever a woman that ever tired to go to work down there (laughing). Most of them wouldn't want to. You know when I went,

when I was working down there we'd go to work it was 20 below zero sometimes up above on the ground and you'd go up there you know on the cable car and they'd take you underground. We go down sometimes as far as a mile and a half down, depending on where you were going. And you work in your t-shirt and I mean it was that warm underground. It was 20 below zero up above but underground it was warm, with all the machinery and all the people working underground it created, it generated a lot of warmth, that what happened to a lot of the guys over there a lot of the guys you had to be really careful. They used to really school us, because you'd come out of there and you'd be hot and sweaty and uh, you'd come out of there and basically you weren't dressed right and take care of yourself a lot of them died from pneumonia. They'd get sick and died from pneumonia and working and of course a lot of them died from silicosis and stuff of the lungs, breathing all that dust and stuff from being underground. It's tough on guys.

Brad :

What about during the summers, did the underground stay ...

Mr. Burns :

Exactly the opposite, cause it's really weird, cause in the summer it could be 90 degrees up above, and you could go underground and it's just as cool. Same temperature. You know it was just unreal it's surprising.

Brad :

Was the local economy dependent on the mines?

Mr. Burns :

Yeah the mines, the underground mines where big back then, but also the Berkley Pit which is the big open mine, was also running full bore. That was you know probably 60 - 65 % of the people in Butte Montana worked in the mines, the rest of them worked for the Montana Power Company. Back in those days the Montana Power Company of course was the big, that was the big, uh oh I guess how do you put it ... the big conglomerate supplier of power in the state and their home office was in Butte so they employed a lot of people.

Brad :

Do you know how many mines were in operation during that point?

Mr. Burns :

You know I think there were 7 different shafts and I'm not positive about that. I'd have to go through and count them all. I think there were 7 or 8 different shafts around town. And there may be more than that but that seems, that strikes my memory. It's been so long since I looked and I got a map at home I should look over cause I look at it once in awhile, but it's quite a few.

Brad :

Could you tell me where you were when JFK was shot?

Mr. Burns :

Yeah, I could. I remember exactly where I was, most of that went through that remember. I was in the 5th grade and I was in my English class at St. Pats grade school, cause we came out of the class and the nun was Sister Mary English and she said to us pray for the president. The president was just shot and killed. And we all, and it was like wow we all went to the auditorium they had a big prayer session for him. Yeah, we were huh ... I don't think anybody my age doesn't remember where they were when he was

shot. That was kind of a horrific event.

Brad :

How big of a role did religion play in your life?

Mr. Burns :

Big part back in those days. A really big part back in those days. Being raised Catholic and being schooled in a Catholic grade school and high school it was a big part of all of our lives (laughter). Although I have to say ... growing up in Butte was a real experience and it did, it played a big part in our life but we were still all pretty wild.

Brad :

So how much did religion play in the community? Was everybody mostly Catholic?

Mr. Burns :

Yeah Butte, Butte became, Butte is a very, very unique town, it's probably one of the greatest places the world to live and grow up, if you're married and have children. But Butte is a melting pot of people and back in those days it became a melting pot. It's kind of like San Francisco in a lot of ways, but because your working in the mines you had to, you had all kinds of people. The Irish were real big cause the Irish did a lot of mining. So there's a big Irish faction. We had a lot of Bow hunts, we had a lot of Swedes. They had a lot of Italians, and I mean in Butte. You live in Butte now so you see a lot of the different factions. Liddia's is one old eating places that has been there forever. Travalina Tamales that's kind of part of the, the Italian part of the city. I mean the, I mean we had the, it was just a melting pot of different nationalities and people, and it was kind of neat. And, of coarse, St. Patty's Day is a bigger day in Butte then Christmas. I mean everybody celebrates so much, it's just incredible. You'll find that out of coarse when your over there for St. Patty's Day. There's just a, it's really just a neat place to be and the people, you won't find nicer people then you'll find in Butte Montana anywhere.

Brad :

So did they kind of have it segregated at all?

Mr. Burns :

No, it wasn't. No back in our days we didn't have those problems. Course we never had a lot of black people in out town, back then but we had ... shit I mean we had every nationality there was, we had Indians we had a lot of Mexican families that I grew up with, shit there was no ... you never heard of it. Christ, the two kids, my two, my best friends I ran around with Tommy Marino was Mexican, full blooded Mexican, and Dean Hawkis was a full blooded Indian, and I mean we all ran around together, and I mean there was never any of that stuff with us growing up. I think being, Butte was kind of a ... you know we were all pretty much a working class people. Everybody was just struggling to get by and work, and we didn't have time for that bullshit, I mean we were all just trying to make a living and raise their kids and live their lives. And I mean, you just don't see it like you would in bigger cities.

Brad :

Did religious background influence any of your friends like, who became your friend when you were a kid?

Mr. Burns :

No, uh huh, not really, (interruption) We never had a problem. I never even heard of segregation until I moved out of Butte to other towns, just kind of saw other shit. It

was never anything, you know everybody was ... I don't know it was just a neat town, people were just not like that back then ... not in Butte at least.

Brad :

How strong did alcohol play a role in the society?

Mr. Burns :

(laughter) Alcohol was a, alcohol was a huge role in our, all of our, back in the mining community drinking was, incredible it was, was a big part in everybody's life. As it is now and in almost every town in Montana, but back then it was huge. There was a lot of alcoholism in our family. I had 2 uncles that had to go dry out, actually 3 uncles, and 1 aunt had to dry out. I mean drinking was a big part of the culture. The culture back in those days, it wasn't always good ... it was bad. Drinking to the extent that it really effected people. But, we all got through it and made it so it worked.

Brad :

Was there a drinking age of 18?

Mr. Burns :

There was for awhile and I can't remember exactly at some point, and it was ... God it was right when I was turning 18 or 19 and the age was lowered and it lasted I think for 2 years, and then they changed it back, because the found, of course, that drinking age was 21 you had all the 18 and 19 year olds drinking, and when they changed it to 18 then you got all the 15 and 16 year olds drinking. So they jumped it back up, and a lot of that was in that time it was related to, if you remember at that time it was right in the middle of the big Vietnam conflict and everyone was screaming, you know, you know, your old enough to vote, your old enough to go to Vietnam but you can't even have a drink. And uh, go to war and everything and go in the service and stuff and in that point in time, you know, they got to all of, of people and they repealed the age and lowered it and then they found out that wasn't a good idea.

Brad :

Did the war have an effect on the mines at Butte?

Mr. Burns :

No, not really, Uh-ah they just kept on going, I mean, it was (sigh) it really didn't.

Brad :

Was it typical for miners to gather at the bars after their shift?

Mr. Burns :

Oh yeah! Yeah, that was the big thing after moth shifts. Guys, you know, it was pretty much almost a nightly thing with, for most of the guys, especially the older ones that had been there a long time, um, a lot of the younger guys during their time didn't do it as much, a lot of the older guys would always stop. There were always bars adjacent to the mines when you would come out and stuff. And guys would go in kind of like neighborhood bars back in those days you had all these neighborhood taverns that were like right on the corner of a, next to a, I mean in most neighborhoods had a neighborhood tavern. It was a big deal, and uh, but yeah, and everyone stopped. Pretty much daily.

Brad :

How big of a role did the workhouses play in society?

Mr. Burns :

Well, back in those days, and I am going back relying on what my grandfather was

telling me too. Back in those days they were big, I mean, guys would, especially on payday guys would come out of these places and filter down into the, to these, there used to be, pretty much almost shacks and one room places. But later on in my life ... when I was in high school and college or in my college years, they had 3, what we called cat houses running in Butte, which were basically places where there were girls and could go there and get just about anything you want as long as you had the money. And they ran for a long time of course when the aids all these STD's came out and herpes and all this stuff came out everything pretty much closed.

Brad :

Did everyone attend them?

Mr. Burns :

Huh?

Brad :

Did everyone attend them?

Mr. Burns :

You know (laughter). Back in those days yeah, there was, you know, most people wouldn't admit to it but I think just about everybody did at, at one time or another. I think there was a lot of people that did more than you think, and more that you'd ever want to admit. You know, when we were in college and we used to go and shit I'd meet a couple of my uncles coming in and out of there a couple of times (laughter). You know there was a lot of stuff that went on. It was quite a place to grow up.

Brad :

How domineering were the men, and what role did the women play in the society when you were growing up?

Mr. Burns :

Um, It was a whole different, it was a whole different scene in Butte. Butte was very, very, unique place in that respect I think because my parent's generation, my, my mother has never drove a car in her life, or had never had a license, my dad's mother never drove a car, and my mom's mother never drove a car. The women's place was pretty much at home and if they wanted a ride or to go someplace or to do something the man took them and they relied on the man to do that. So the man was the dominant figure and the women's place was pretty much at home and with us kids, and it was pretty strict in that respect. It was kind of the way it was, and much different than it is today, were of course everybody has a drivers license and everybody drives. So its kind of the old almost puritanical type deal, but you know not in a bad way, but that was just the way it was.

Brad :

You mentioned something about hunting and fishing.

Mr. Burns :

Yeah

Brad :

Back in then was it as big as it is today?

Mr. Burns :

No, back then, back when I first started hunting and fishing, man it was hard to find people that could go with you. The people didn't do it. Um, mostly because most of them were all working hard, working two jobs. Back in the day when I used to go and I

mean it was totally different. I mean, God there was so much more game and there was not near the competition. And it was just incredible, um, totally different and I mean like now days it's almost like a fad for a lot of people just to go hunting ... you know? So it was really different.

Brad :

Could you give me an example of a typical day growing up in the streets of Butte during the 60's?

Mr. Burns :

(laughter) Well, pretty much the typical day was for us, the winter days were real, pretty much cold, we would get tons of snow, nothing like it is now, the winters seem to be milder now then but we had to go to school, go to grade school and we used to go sleigh riding cause there were always places to go sleigh riding. The summers were pretty much, you know we all had to have summer jobs. I worked part time working at the schools . Almost all the kids had to have summer jobs, because that was another thing Butte, that's another thing about Butte families, there were always um, most of that families in Butte, back in that era people didn't have 1 or 2 kids. People had ... there were 5,6,7,8, I remember one family, the Rice family that had 15 children, I mean it was 5,6,7,8 kids or sometimes bigger. So I mean, kids had to work and had to help support and help, and you know everything so ... it was a lot different than it is now days, kids weren't spoiled back in those days.

Brad :

Not spoiled.

Mr. Burns :

Yeah, not at all.

Brad :

Would you like to elaborate on anything else?

Mr. Burns :

No you pretty much hit all the high-lights um ... the schools and um ... you know I can't think of anything else ... mining, houses were a big thing back in those days ... there was just a lot of thing ... Butte was just a great place to grow up. I really enjoyed it. It was a great town. I'll tell you, you will never find nicer people then in Butte. Another thing that you'll never find is that Butte is one of the best places in the world to eat ... people in Butte love their food, I mean they have the best places to eat then anywhere you want to go.

Brad :

Yeah, I've noticed that since I have moved here.

Mr. Burns :

Yeah, the food you know is a ... I mean Johnny's Pork chops is always good, Artic Circle is a great food, um, you can go down to Liddia's if you want ... the Swankier places and the food is excellent, and yet there's a place there on Harrison called uh, its starts with a D. the new place on Harrison. It's a steak kind of a steak place and its just incredible and then you always got the M&M. I mean the food, my, every time I go to the M&M when I'm in town to visit my parents, my mom and I go to breakfast together, and sit at the bar and eat, have breakfast with everyone ... we just love it. There is so much culture and it just feels good, you know what I mean?

Brad :

Yeah.

Mr. Burns :

Butte has retained a lot of, even though the mines closed, and there's nothing going on, although the open pit is still being run by Denny Washington owns it now. But he's running kind of a separate entity but there employing people but nothing like it used to. But that only going to last as long as the prices of copper and silver stay up high, once they go low then they will just close it again. But it's a ... it was a great town to grow up in and I, I miss it but ... there's just not much there anymore, it's too bad because they've lost so many things, the Montana Power Company got sold off and now it's been digested into, they don't have the people working there that used to. It's though for kids to find jobs in Butte and stay there.

Brad :

Well, when you were there, did uh ... did the mines ever like ... close?

Mr. Burns :

Well, yep, well, we never, never closed but you know the one thing that did really effect the town is when they would have. Back in those days the unions were really big, and uh you could, you would have these strikes, and the Anaconda Company, mines would go out, and if they didn't give them what they wanted then they would go on strike. I mean fuck that whole town would shut town, when the Anaconda Company would go on strike, because, some of those strikes lasted 2 years, before guys would go back to work again, and it was really tough on everybody. Cause none of these got checks, and then you got into the deal where a lot of the guys would cross the picket lines, and you know. You had scabs, and people. I'll never forget one year, my grandpa took me up, and he said I want to watch this, he said this ... and he know this was going to happen, and he worked for the Montana Power Company, thank God, and found out this one guy that worked for the mines had been crossing the picket line and scabbing it. And what they did, this guy gets up and goes to work and leaves his home, and about, oh, it must have been about 12 people. They went up to his house, and just broke into his house, took every bit of his furniture in his house and threw it out in the street, broke all the widows in his house, and wrote scab all over his house, with ah, spray paint, and walked away, and that guys came out and found his home that way, after he got done working his shift, and um. Back in those days stuff wasn't taken very lightly, oh and boy when you, if you were a scab and you crossed the picket like it was, it was bad, I'll never forget my grandpa, I was only probably 6 years old when my grandpa showed me that, and I have never forgotten it. Cause it was ah, that was a big deal back in those days.

Brad :

That wouldn't be the 1959 strike would it be?

Mr. Burns :

Ah, that was real close to that, yeah exactly, real close to that.

Brad :

Did it effect your family?

Mr. Burns :

No, my family all worked for the Montana Power Company. So they stayed working, you know, so that a nice thing working for a utility company. People always got

to have power, either working for utility or a grocery store. People always got to have power and got to eat, so you know. My dad and my Grandpa worked for the power company, so the strikes didn't effect us. Thank God I wasn't working for the company during the periods when they had those strikes, cause it was, it wasn't good.

Brad :

I think that pretty much covers it.

Mr. Burns :

Okay.

Brad :

I appreciate it.

Mr. Burns :

Well I hope I helped you a little bit.

Brad :

Yeah, That's a big help.

Mr. Burns :

Yeah, that a lot of information. Butte is a great town but uh ... you will get a hell of an education at the Tech too, I mean it's a great school. I should of stayed up there, and if I would of finished I would have been, I might have been doing something different but I got lucky and ended up buying this business down here. Its kind of worked out for me, but Tech is a good school.