

TRANSCRIPTION OF THE ENTIRE INTERVIEW

Rudolph Martin Petritz interviewed by Keri Petritz

When did your parents come to Butte and what did they do for a living?

In 1894, my mother was born in the same house that I was born.

Where was that house at?

In Meaderville.

In Meaderville?

Fifty nine and a half Atlantic Street.

And what did they do for a living?

My dad worked in the mines, and also a shoemaker.

A shoemaker? What shoe store did he work in?

The McQueen edition shoe shop.

OK. In what areas and sub-areas did you live in?

Meaderville, McQueen, that's it.

Did you notice, I don't know, maybe it's a stereotype that McQueen was all Slavics and Meaderville was all a certain type of ethnicity.

It was a different classification of people English, Irish, Welch, Slovenians, Serbians, and Croatians

All in McQueen and Meaderville?

All in McQueen.

And Meaderville was right next to McQueen, wasn't it?

That's right.

What is the most memorable Butte event that you can remember from your childhood? And how did you feel about it?

Well, in 1934 or 5 I think it was. A bunch of young boys that were older than me, and they went and got powder from the magazines from the Anaconda Company.

They stole them?

Stole them. And they, in turn of that, went down to the Number 5 Baseball Park.

Where was that?

Which was in between Meaderville and McQueen. And those kids were blasting that night, and at about six o'clock that morning there were six of them that were blasted away, period. And that's the deal that I can remember the most from my childhood.

Did you know any of the kids?

Yes, every one of them.

Were they your friends, or were you close to them?

Well, they were older than I was, but I knew them.

They were all from McQueen?

All from McQueen.

What was the result of that? Did they make a law or anything?

It stopped the firecrackers and everything else for a couple of years.

Oh, they did?

What was it like living in a so-called "big city" Butte when there was a 100,000 people in the city.

Well, in the city of Butte there were a lot of people going to and from shopping. And they all dressed up.

In nice clothes?

In Sunday clothes, this is during the week.

Everyday?

Yeah that's right they did. And those that worked around the city and that, well, the people start knowing each one of them that worked in different department stores and everything else. So after that then, it come to the point that it got congested with streetcars, automobiles and stuff like that. And at that time everybody was walking on sidewalks and you would hit each individual person, side by side. That's how many people.

There were that many people?

How many people were in the city of Butte at that time?

Really? That sounds like New York or something.

Yeah, that's the truth too.

You were here when Hennessy's was here weren't you?

Yeah.

That was like the big mine shop wasn't it?

Well Hennessy's originated up in Centerville. And after Centerville then they built this Hennessy's building.

That's up on Main Street now isn't it?

Main Street now, yeah. That's where they moved. And after that they moved....

Was that owned by the Anaconda Company?

Yeah, that was the ACM Company's building.

I thought so, I wasn't sure though.

What were you doing during prohibition?

During probation, there wasn't too much

Fess up.

Only two, There wasn't too much that was going on, but during probation there was a lot of bootlegging going on in Butte and that. People used to make their own wine. They had wineries and everything else.

Like underground or something?

They had them in the basement.

Oh, really? Did a lot of people get busted for that, in trouble?

Just a few, the ones that were selling the whiskey.

Did they get caught a lot?

Oh yeah, there were some that were sent to prison on that.

That lasted for eight years didn't it?

Well, about that somewhere around there.

Alright, tell me about the rise and fall of McQueen.

The rise and fall of McQueen. Well it just, at the time the house that we lived in

That's the one I live in now right?

Yeah, That was owned by the Chinese and different people.

Wasn't it a Chinese Laundromat or something?

Yeah, that's right. And from that time on, McQueen started building up and during the time of the WPA.

What's that?

Worker's administration, that was under Roosevelt.

Oh like the makeshift jobs and stuff.

Yeah, and see they had jobs for people for putting up sidewalks and everything else in McQueen. And they built McQueen.

Under that?

Yeah, and they built McQueen, and McQueen was one of the nicest localities in Butte.

How many people were there at its peak?

350.

350 is all? Oh really, I thought that it was bigger than that.

That's homes.

350 homes.

Homes yeah.

And that was where the Berkley Pit is now right?

Yeah.

How did you feel when you were forced to give your home away to the mines?

Well it was kinda sad in some respects. And others it was good to move away, and into a new home.

What was that law called where the mineral rights were theirs emin.... Something weird.

Mineral rights.

Yeah.

That means that you had no choice

We had no choice.

We had to sell because of eminent domain.

They gave you money for your house, and then they bought you this house now too.

Yeah they gave us money for our house. So we bought the other house back for a dollar.

A dollar?

Yeah.

A handling charge!

What year did you start working in the mines?

1939.

And which mine was it?

The Leonard mine.

And they mined copper? Is that right? Is that the only mineral they mined?

Copper.

OK. How long were you there for?

Only about three months.

How come?

They shut the Leonard down.

Why did they shut it down? Did they run out of things to mine? Or did they go bankrupt?

No, they just shut the mines down.

All of the mines?

The Leonard mine was one of them.

What other ones were...

There were some of the mines like the Tramway and West Colusa and all of them. Some of them were working but the Leonard was the only one.

You don't know why they shut it down?

I really don't.

You don't?

No.

Do you remember who your boss was there?

John Bessini.

John Bessini.

He was the surface foreman. And we used to... We worked at the Leonard mine in the yard loading crates and timber to go down the mine.

Where was the Leonard mine?

Meaderville.

It was over where the Berkley Pit is now?

Where did you go after the Leonard mine shut down?

I went up to the Badger State

And where's that at?

That's Northwest of Meaderville.

Is it still standing today?

Yeah, it's still standing.

Oh, it is?

The only... That and the Granite Mountain are together.

Oh, I didn't know that.

And what did you mine up there?

Copper, zinc, and silver.

You were drafted to go to World War II after Badger State, right? In 1942.

Yeah, that's right.

World War II started in 1941. What was Butte like during that time period in between 41 and 42? Can you remember?

People... All the mines were going full blast at that time. And a the reason for that was because they wanted copper for ammunition for the war.

Oh, so the war helped Butte?

You bet.

Profits coming in. I wouldn't have guessed that.

What did you do when you returned from World War II? What year was that?

46.

46.

Yeah, what did you do in 46?

In 46, I didn't want to go back to work because of the strike. So, I worked in the shoe shop.

In the McQueen Shoe Shop under your uncle and your dad?

Yeah.

And do you know what the strike was about then? Do you remember?

Wages was one thing. I think that is what it was.

What did the average miner make back then?

Oh, geezers. That I don't know.

You don't know that?

No I Don't.

When we first met, you told me about scabs, and how they were treated and what they did. What were some of the things that the people in the Union did to the scabs?

It wasn't the Union that was behind it.

Oh, it wasn't?

It was the people.

The mine owners or something?

No, it was the people.

Just People?

Like myself, or somebody else. Well, it wasn't me, but it was other people. The ones that were working during that time of the strike. And see the Union had no jurisdiction over what happened by all of the people that were wrecking the houses and that.

It was just the people itself that belonged to the Union. It wasn't the Union's fault.

Oh, I see. And they went into the people that were working, which were called scabs, and just destroyed their houses and stole things from them and stuff?

That was down in Meaderville, the East Side, and McQueen.

Did you know scabs that this happened to?

Oh yeah, Massie was one of them from McQueen. And I can't even think of those names now. It's been too long.

Why didn't you stay in the mines when it was on strike?

Because the company would ask me to go to work for them, but I didn't want to is why.

Because of your ethics or something?

That's right.

After you came back from World War II, you worked in the shoe store like you said. You worked in the McQueen Shoe Sore, and what was the other one you worked uptown in?

The Shoetorium.

Do you remember who your boss was up there?

Johnny Bender.

Johnny Bender.

And you made shoes up there? Or shined shoes?

I used to do shoe repair work.

Shoe repair work.

Back then, was that a pretty decent job? Was it good work?

Oh, it was good work, then.

Good pay?

But there were a lot of shoe stores at that time.

Oh, there were.

Oh, yeah

For repairs of shoes?

Shoes, Miner's shoes and everything else.

Miner's shoes?

Yeah, we used to take care of miner's boots; you know leather boots and stuff like that they had. And we would put new soles and heels, and everything else on them.

It was just cheaper to do that?

Yeah.

Then, after you worked at the Shoetorium, where did you go?

Then I went back to the Leonard.

To the Leonard? Do you have any big experiences that happened at the Leonard Mine that really stand out in your mind?

Yes, I went down the shaft with 28 men.

Down the shaft as in?

What happened?

You could put down elevator, but that was the cages then. We were lowering the shift, that's what happened. They were supposed to let the men off at the 3400 station, the engineer had dropped us 300 feet on top of all of that cable. They didn't know whether we were dead or alive.

So it went from the top to the bottom, right into the bottom?

Right to the bottom of the sub.

And you hit the ground?

Yeah.

Did anyone die?

No, but they were all injured.

Were you?

Yes.

You were injured?

Oh yeah.

What happened?

My bones and that were all...

Did you go to the hospital?

I did, but they released me. But, the other ones that were in the top deck, the second deck them were the ones that had severe back injuries.

And you were on the bottom?

The bottom. And I told the men to grab the hand bar that was on the cages.

Did you jump when you hit the bottom or something?

Well, it saved the men by holding the man bar that they call on the cage end. That when we hit the bottom of the shaft, that's all you could hear was aches and pains. Then when that happened, I just went ahead and did all I could do and taking all the men out of the cages and putting them on the side of the shaft, where all of the timber was at. And after that I called up the surface and George Salvan was our foreman, and he listened to me on the phone, and he said, "who's this?" and I said "Rudy" Is that you Rudy? And I said "yes" and he said, "I thought you were all dead."

Who's fault was it that that happened?

The engineer's fault.

The hoist man's up above. He just let go of the cord or something?

Well see, in the morning before they lower the shift, they'd always run the cages down through the shaft, and if there was any rock that was on the hanging wall or on the side of the shaft timber. Well, they'd run the cage through so all the loose rock wouldn't hurt the people being on the cage going to work that morning.

Oh really?

Hmm Hmm.

After that, the engineer that forgot to raise the cable on the one-side 300 feet up. Instead he forgot, and that's what happened. We got 300 feet of cable on us.

So how fast did you fall, do you think?

About 3200 feet per minute.

And how far was it to the bottom?

About 3600 feet.

Did the mine get a lot of lawsuits from the people that were injured?

Oh, they probably did.

Did they?

Yeah.

But I didn't.

You were innocent. After this event did you have any desire to go underground again?

NO I didn't

Did you go down ever again?

No, I never did.

That was the last time, after that?

I was scared; I just didn't have the guts to go back into the mine, period, that was it.

So after that event were you fell down and everyone got injured, you never worked underground again?

And I never worked underground again. After that happened then I went down to Christie Transfer and I was working down there.

Doing what?

Teamster. I was a teamster.

Driving trucks and stuff?

Driving trucks and stuff.

What was your route?

I used to haul tanks to the smelter in Anaconda, and all that. I was on a tank truck for quite awhile. Then after that, I got laid off. And I went back up to the hill again.

I thought you said you never wanted to work in the mine again.

Well that was the hill at the Original, see that's where I got my job. I was a teamster there.

What did you do at the Emma? That was after you worked at Christie Transfer right?

Yeah.

What did you do at the Emma?

I was loading timber; I was taking timber off the Railroad cars, putting them on the truck and bringing them over to the Interstate Lumber to the Emma Mine.

And that was while you were working at Christie Transfer that was one of your routes?

Christie Transfer, I got laid off. Then I was working at the Emma mine as a Teamster.

Oh, I finally understand.

And then that's when you got promoted.

Yeah, and I worked there for what must have been 8 or 10 years.

As surface foreman?

No, as teamster.

So then our surface foreman retired, and our superintendent asked if I wanted the job. And I said yeas, so I took it.

So you took it. Did you think that it was unusual that they offered that job to you?

No, not really because I knew what was going on, I knew everything about the yard and how much timber they used in the mine and everything.

And did you work in the Emma before, I can't remember. You worked there after you got back from World War II didn't you?

That was when I was down at Christie Transfer that I went to the Emma. See officially, I was working under the Original Garage. When I worked at the Emma.

And the Original Garage, where was that?

That was our main office for all the Teamsters and trucks and everything.

For Everywhere?

Was it owned by the Anaconda Company?

Anaconda Company.

Oh, it was?

Where were you working at the time of the big miner's strike of 59?

Berkley Garage. I was a mechanic. A diesel mechanic.

And you went on strike with them on that?

All the machinists and electricians and all them, they all walked and we were on picket duty with the miners.

You were?

Yeah.

How long did that last?

Nine months.

Nine months. And then you went back to work at the Berkley Garage again?

Then we went back to our old jobs again.

What was that about, was it over wages again?

Wages again, yeah.

Did the miners win? Did they get their raises?

Yeah, they won.

How long did you stay at the Berkley Garage?

All the way from '59 up till '82.

Berkley was shut down in '82?

I think so.

Besides the firecracker incident or the Leonard Mine where you fell, what was the most memorable thing in the mines that you can remember?

Now see the Emselmo and the Emma Mine were owned by Queen Palomino, she was from Holland. She, in turn, she gets so many cars would be for manganese and silver and gold would go to her, you know, and then after that, the Anaconda Company wanted to buy, they wanted to have full shares in the stock that was in the Enselmo and Emma Mines.

What did they mine at those two mines?

Silver and Manganese. What happened, she in turn told the people at the Anaconda Company that she would sell.

She owned 51%?

She owned 51%. After that, they shut the Emma down.

After the Anaconda Company bought it from her?

Yeah.

That was the end of it, it never opened again?

The Emma wasn't open after that.

Why did they even buy it if they just wanted to close it down?

The reason for that is, they wanted to expand. And right at the Butte carriage works and the Stadium of Butte High School, just only, I'd say maybe a foot is where the ore started.

Underground?

Underground.

Right on the football field. At Butte High School.

Where was that at, not where it is now, right?

Yeah, that's the old football field. That's what they use for practice now.

That is where that ore was?

The ore was right there. They wanted to buy all that property

From Butte High?

They wanted all that property because they could have mined all of that Manganese. Which was easy for them to get. But that was it, they never...

They never bought it from them?

No.

So it's still there?

It's still there.

Really?

No kidding. The football field is loaded with manganese. That's the truth.

What happened with that eminent domain? Why couldn't they take it from them like they did at

MCQueen?

No, I don't know what happened there.

Oh, that's weird, kind of funny.

They'd have to buy the mineral rights that's it.