

Mike Samples, former machinist with ACM, current owner/operator of Mike's Auto Repair on Harrison, interviewed in his home by Teresa Jordan. Wife, Joan, comes into interview later; she runs day care in her home.

M's grandfather worked for the mines, contract miner. M born in Butte. His parents were teachers. Didn't have sense growing up that his family had any feelings one way or another about working for ACM. Was in Service--Texas, Missouri, in Vietnam '66 and '67. Then worked in Seattle for Boeing--first on assembly, later as mechanic. Wanted to get back to Butte. Called, talked to a supervisor. He said I can't hire you over the phone, but come for an interview and you'll get the job. Came for the interview and a physical, got job. Had worked on planes, member of machinist union, transferred membership.

Worked for ACM over 13 years. Laid off in 1982 as part of reduction in force. Had seen it coming--but never knew exactly when it would come. M thought that it would be a total shutdown. (J sits in on interview for moment).

Q: At the time, how was the possibility discussed in the family?

It was a big question--whether to take a chance with the Co, or find something else. A lot had already been laid off, had gone away to find work and come back, after spending a lot of money. Decided that M wouldn't leave unless he had a definite job.

After lay off, M was only off about 2 weeks. Went to work for Montgomery Elevator Co. His neighbor needed a partner to go work on a job in Thermopolis, new prison there. M went to Thermop for about 5 mos. Was making good money. Could afford to come home, even fly home, fairly often. When that job was over, a friend hired him in Boulder, MT--Boulder Welding and Auto Repair. Worked there about a year. The work there sort of dried up. M started working on his own, out of his garage. Problems with county and zoning over that--restrictions. Leased building on Harrison. Started about 2 1/2 year ago.

No problem getting building. Had been doing work for Larry King, who owns Honest Abe's Car Lot--he was adding onto his facilities, and they worked out deal w/ lease on building he owns. No problems w/ county about that.

About probs w/ working at home--M is "not unbiased" but he wasn't bothering anybody. He knows that it's against the law and that there are good reasons for that. But he wasn't making any noise or parking cars around the street or anything like that. J: He was trying to make a living, keep off welfare, support his family. M: guy from county was snotty w/ him; they had discussion, M told him to get out, he calmed down, they talked, M finally told him that he wouldn't work there more than 2 months, that the building would be ready by then. That was agreeable. He said go ahead and work the 2 months, and he never came back.

Borrowed \$1000 to go into business; not an investment he couldn't handle. He had lots of tools. To go into retail, the sizable investment there, borrowing heavily--that might be scary. Still, you gotta eat. When you're thinking about survival. This wasn't that big investment.

J: Also, you had work coming in steadily from Larry, which helped some, so not that big questionmark, when am I going to be earning something.

M: Takes awhile for any consumer facility to establish business, and if you've already got your hand on something, it tides you over. M had Larry's car lot, and one or 2 other companies in town that he could depend on besides just waiting for people to find out that Mike's Auto Repair was there. Larry had not been a friend before--M went around town drumming up business; doesn't think you can just open your door and wait for people to walk in. You've got to solicit one way or another. And if you can go out and confront people face to face, and if they see you are out looking for something to do, they are more apt to do business with you.

Fox Boiler Co is another client.

Mike thinks he had some breaks, and also, he went out and looked for business.

Q: How does business compare financially w/ working for ACM?

Anaconda better because it was steadier and you had a lot of benefits insurancewise and vacationwise that you can't afford yourself.

Learned of layoff at ACM--posted on bulletin board about a week in advance. Some notices came two weeks, some 3 days. M doesn't feel that was good enough notice. They Co knew; they could have notified people far ahead, given them more time to make arrangements. Short notice was just the way they'd always done it.

Q: W/ change from Anaconda to ARCO, differences?

Yes, in the attitude of the Co. W/ ARCO, signs of greed, bad management, bad mining practices. Saw it in upkeep of equipment; also, tho M is "no mining expert", he feels they were "high grading"--when find pocket of ore, would go directly into it without taking out overburden, take the easiest, leave the waste, not planning for the future. Sloppy mining.

Also, prob of management. If going to mine, they should have mining engineers running mining programs, instead of mechanical engrs, elect. engrs.

Top heavy--more evident w/ ARCO taking over. Heavy in management.

Q: How feel when first learn ARCO coming in?

Impending doom. Relative had done work for ARCO in Alaska w/ pipeline project. He told M then that things were going to go downhill.

Q: Do you think they were sincere when they came in, or intended to take a loss and get out?

M thinks they had mining at heart, but they weren't miners and the people they brought in weren't miners, and of course the market wasn't right. If ACM had held onto it and done something w/ their management, M thinks they would have done something about it if they could have gotten unions to cooperate.

Q: Factors leading to shutdown?

M: Not going in any order--
Management and practices
Market
Union
State--county taxes and so forth, made overhead too high

Q: How unions hurt

By failing to make concessions. The men would have made concessions, but the Internationals would't.

Q: Was there any talk about concessions?

M: That was my understanding, that there was. And that the unions would not give up on a lot of their points.

Q: Future of unions in Butte?

M thinks they have levelled off. Don't think they will be any bigger or any smaller. M doesn't think that new businesses will be union if they come to Butte. He doesn't think Washington Construction will be union if they mine in Butte. M thinks certain people would have hard feelings about that, but most people would be glad to get a job back, w/ or w/o the union.

M doesn't hire anyone; hasn't had trouble about doing work himself. Had his signs painted by painter's union. M was never too enthusiastic about unions. And since they have become so politically involved over the years, M doesn't have any use for them at all.

Q: Has the union rep hurt Butte?

That's M's understanding. But he thinks that Helena and Great Falls are reportedly bigger union towns than Butte.

M thinks Washington Corporation will start up mining in Butte.

Q: If he offered you a mechanics job for what you were making w/

ARCO, would you go back now that you have own business?

Have to give it some thought, by looking at long range. If he was going to be here for a year and then shut down...if you couldn't get a firm commitment that they were going to be here for the duration of the mining project, then I don't think I would.

After the layoff, M and his family never got behind on any bills, never had to go without. Did give up some recreation time. They feel they are lucky; a lot of people had a harder time because of it.

Q: Future for Butte:

M thinks that things started getting better in a sense right after the pit shut down and people started doing businesses themselves or found other jobs. He thinks things are coming up in Butte, though he knows it is still hard to find a job in Butte and some people had not found a job yet.

M had not seriously thought of starting his own business before layoff. Likes working for himself, but liked steadiness and benefits of working for ARCO.

Q: Any benefits to being laid off?

No.

Tape 1, Side B

Joan runs a day care in the home; started about 5 years ago. And about 6 months ago, started selling Avon. Both she and Mike are self employed. She is registered. During last strike time, decided to do it. Nice because she can be at home, wanted someone home for kids.

Four children--Barbara--19, college in Missoula
Patrick--16
Dennis--11
Emily--9

Joan is from Missouri. Had never lived in a town this small. Likes the people, thinks its easier to get to know people here. And the schools are very important to M and J, and they have been fairly satisfied with them. She is pretty satisfied w/ living here. Met M while he in was in the service.

Q: If you had your choice of anywhere to live, would you stay in Butte:

J: We have probably pretty strong ties here, and our children feel like this is their home. I feel we both feel pretty secure here. We've just been very fortunate that we haven't had to leave. Mike just got jobs one two three right after another.

Butte was smallest area she had come to. An adjustment.

Mike notes that a lot of jobs you find in Butte come because you are related to somebody or you know somebody. It might be easier to find a job in a city where there are more jobs.

Q: What sort of support systems are available here?

Only thing M knows about is welfare dept, and he doesn't know how available that is to people who have been working, own property and resources. He knows that during one of the strikes, guys went to try and get food stamps and the welfare people wouldn't issue them because they owned 2 cars or motorcycles, a thousand different reasons. They wanted them to liquidate their property. Most people would have considered that, M would have, but who's going to buy it when nobody has a job? J notes that she and M feel it's better for them to pay their own way. They didn't want to depend on someone. There are times people need that, when there is nothing else.

M's experience w/ people who have ended up on subsidies and welfare is that it is really a hard blow for them and for the whole family.

M doesn't know the system of getting jobs. He went to the employment agency--he calls it the unemployment office, but they don't like that. He never saw anyone get a job through them. All he did was sit up there for hours. He finally, since he was a veteran, got a preference, but that never helped him any. He found out from the interviewer that if you are just a white man w/ no military or no disabilities, you are wasting your time going up there, except for the fact that you have to satisfy the system. He said that he had never hired anyone in five years that wasn't disabled, a minority, a woman, or a veteran. M went up there a lot, but never got any leads.

Q: Some people say that the jobs that have opened up in the past few years have been primarily "pink collar" jobs that go to women. Do you agree? What is your reaction?

Thinks that the businesses that have hired, the hospital, and probably Mt Power Co, M's general observations on hiring, they hire a lot pink collar. They do hire a lot of women, and a lot of them come from the free govt programs. They get the training because of hardship, they are a single mother or whatever, they get training, as in computer, paid for by govt, and they get pref. in hiring. M thinks that they do get top heavy in their preferred hiring. They have to hire certain % of minorities, which includes everyone but white man. And a lot of those people are getting free training.

Q: Do you think future for Butte is non-industrial, lots of service jobs at min wage, also information, high tech?

M: Yes, at the best. M doesn't think there will be large-scale industrial jobs--outside, perhaps, of Washington. Thinks that the future of mining projects is like Sunlight Mine in Whitehall--small, efficient. Pay well, but not much turnover in the jobs. "But the high paying jobs are going to go to the highly educated."

Q: What do you tell your kids re. planning for the future.

M: To do some research, and listen to whatever the counselors have to say. I see on the news tonight they are projecting so many thousands of jobs for certain engineering fields. I think my kids, and everybody's kids should look at that and see what the future holds.

M has some college education--was taking education. He has never seriously considered going back.

Joan: Has finished HS--would like to try college. And in her opinion, she thinks Mike should too. He does very well as a mechanic, but he has the potential to do more with his mind.

Q: Pushing your kids toward college?

Not necessarily towards college, but some type of a career. Our oldest daughter is in her 2nd year of college, that was her choice, so we encouraged her. She is in education. M's father was superintendant when he retired, and he is telling her which fields are good--math and science have always been good; history and English have not had good employment record.

Q: Looking back, how do you feel about ARCO as an employer?
Good feelings?

M: Yeah. They were always basically fair with me. They never cheated me out of nothing that I knew about, they always paid me well, and whatever I asked for, as far as getting any breaks--time off or change of shift--I was never refused.

Q: Washington has said he will start up mining again if he gets breaks like in labor, taxes, freight, power, environmental. Some people feel that Butte has given breaks before, and they have lost a lot--Meaderville, the Gardens. In the end, haven't gained a lot. Are you of that opinion?

M: No. thinks every request that Washington or any corporation makes of a community has to be assessed by the corporate structure of the community to see if it is going to better the town. Meaderville, McQueen, a lot of people didn't like that, but it's progress, and if you're going to mine the ore, you have to move things in order to do it.

Q: 3500 laid off since 1970, 2500 of them in last few years. What happened to all those men?

M: A lot he knew were old enough to retire, or they found other work, or they left. There are still some who haven't been able to find anything. A lot of people didn't have any skilled--I won't say unskilled, but their skill wasn't necessarily marketable other than mining.

Teamsters, drillers, operating engineers, the underground miners themselves, some of the laborers.

Have friends who have left--Wyoming, Colstrip, Colorado. Permanent moves. One of our neighbor's family still lives across the alley; he works in Gillette, drives home every few weeks.

When worked in Thermopolis, worked for Montgomery Elevator Co. Working on new prison. That is nepotism at its best--everyone is related to someone. Catch 22 about union--you have to work for them 6 mos to join the union, and you can't get a job unless you belong to the union. M worked for them 5 months; if had had another month, could have worked as steady as there was work.

Samples--relatives came from Ireland, and got to Ireland from St. Pierre, Mormandy. M's grandfather was Scotch. A strict Presbyterian so wasn't really a part of Irish Catholic community. He married a Scandinavian woman, so M was raised Lutheran.

Didn't realize ethnic differences so much growing up as neighborhood differences. If you were from the flats and went into uptown neighborhood, you would get beat up--not so much because of your ethnic background as because you were not in your own neighborhood. M remembers mixed feelings about the Mexicans. And if you went into Mexican neighborhood--Mike thinks maybe up above Granite, you were in trouble.

J is from Kansas City. Hated Butte when she first came. Mike had close relatives, so that made it special. There is not as much to do here, you have to be more creative with your free time. It doesn't have as much to offer. But it does grow on you. But once kids got into school, M and J got involved with community, it was good--church, scouts, school. Butte is good if you are outdoorsy, primitive.

Tape 2, Side A

J--she and M are kind of people who commit themselves to community. Lutheran church--Mike's family had gone for years; J was raised Presbyterian.

Q: What was community support like during strikes? Sense of aloneness, or being a part of something.

M: A sense of aloneness. Everyone was mad at the unions for being on strike, as far back as M can remember. Every one of them as far as M can remember. Some, the membership actually voted not to strike and they struck anyway.

J: Unions had their place originally. But things got out of hand in Butte. Don't think workers could have gotten benefits on their own.

M: Yeah, but when internationals took it out of control of locals, took it out of the hands of the men, all they've done now is get politically oriented. They aren't really concerned about the membership.

Q: Think Butte is a strong community, that there is a strong sense of community here?

J: You can just see it. M: Yes.

Q: How see it manifested?

M: Business growth and civic action. Especially independent of government. The Food Bank, Dallas Doyle and the Rescue Mission, various charities around town. Our consolidated govt, the interaction of it w/ the community, the groups appointed to better Butte, draw business in, the whole planning, M thinks has done a good job.

Q: How evaluate Don Peoples?

M: I think he's done a good job.

Q: What about MHD, NCAT?

M: They are gov't jobs. Like NCAT, all they did was bring in some high paid professionals from someplace else, move them to Butte. Think it's a lot of dumb ideas--they go out and build greenhouses, look at drawings of wood burning stoves. They make a lot of money for non production. MHD, I think it's OK. Gov't program.

Q: Do you think they've had much of an affect on the town?

M: I think MHD has. Dollars and cents that have gone into the town, and it's also stabilized a lot of people from the Anac. Co--the operations end of it. A lot of people that work there worked for Anaconda. M thinks everybody that works out there in the laboring field belongs to electricians union.

Q: What do you see in the future for Butte.

J: Butte seems to always come back up on the top of it. People are fighters. People who have maybe some pull in the community have come together and they are working real hard to encourage new businesses to come, and they are promoting Butte, too.

M: Yeah. I think Butte's going to grow, stabilize. Most people, as a rule, that come to Butte, after the initial transition, they love it, and they like the people. Once they break into the cliques or the clans or whatever.

J: Either they do or they don't--they never do, and if they don't like it, they leave.

M: I know a guy my age who moved here from Livingston. He always heard how rotten a town Butte was, a bad town, and a tough town, and the second week he was here, he told me it was the greatest town he'd ever been to. He's made more friends since he's been in Butte than he did anyplace else in his life. Because he went out and broke in, broke into the clans and the cliques and so forth.

Q: What things hurt Butte toward its success in the future?

M: It's reputation, and also the competition from the other two industrial cities, Great Falls and Billings primarily. Reputation--a union town. It's a nice looking town for a mining town, but it's always been a public eyesore. Compared to Portland or Seattle, not a pretty town, though M likes it. Not a lot of culture--there are cultural things here, but they may not compare to the NY opera.

J: People look at school

M: Butte has maintained high education

J: We hope to keep that

M: A lot of us are willing to make sacrifices to keep it that way. Test results they've conducted nationwide show that Butte is up in the top in the US. Butte schools have always had real high ratings. Overall schooling is really high.

J: Very sports minded town, though, and sometimes that interferes w/ more basic education.

M: One thing they missed here, luckily, was "modern" methods of teaching. Fortunately, some administrators said no to the program.

J: People here are not that open to change.

Q: Examples?

M: In the schools--probably because nearly all the teachers are local people.

J: Clothing styles. And maybe some people have trouble with bringing new businesses into town.

M: Thinks its the same with most Western town--men wear jeans and boots or tennis shoes, don't dress too sporty.

J: I hope that whatever growth is in store for Butte, people will be open for it. And accept it. Since the community has

been in trouble since the mine has closed, they are ready for Butte to take off. Not that it will go that far.

Q: Butte has such a strong mining-town identity, yet mining had been decreasing in importance for a long time before the mine shut down. It's hard for many people to give up that identity. Do you think this helps Butte? Hurts it? Has any affect at all?

M: I think it helps it. As an example, we took Barb over to Missoula in September and I was getting gas and the man across the pump saw I was from Butte and asked me how things in Butte were going. I said, pretty good, and he said, that's something about Butte, the people are all fighters. Butte will pull itself up again and will be rip roaring again. I think a lot of people have that attitude. I think it's typical of any town in this area--99% of the people have always been employed and they've worked, and they aren't going to do anything different, they are going to keep doing it.

J: A lot of men have retrained, too. They have gone out to Tech or somewhere and have decided to go into a different field. And some of them weren't young.

Talks about other people good to talk to.

After tape is turned off, talks about grandfather, Pete Alexander McDonald--a sheep shearer, a miner. He went down to Tierra Del Fuego sheering sheep, ended up having to steal horses to get out of there, rode with a man who had a been an outlaw in the American West, quite a character. Wife, Emily (they call her Julia) is in nursing home in Livingston (or Big Timber--I'm not sure which). She is quite elderly, but has stories.

Joan says about sit'n in Butte, We had it kind of soft--now we'll know what we're made of. M agrees--talks about how Breznief (sp) said he wouldn't attack the United States because those people might be soft, but they were from the toughest immigrant stock, they would fight back if they had to, if threatened.