

Original Questions for Interview with Tom Holter

1. What was it like being a child on the butte area and living in Meaderville?
2. What is the best memory you have about growing up in Butte?
3. What did your parents do for a living?
4. What made you decide you wanted to work in the mining industry?
5. What years did you work in the mines?
6. What was your job in the mines and what mines did you work in?
7. What was your favorite part about working in the mines?
8. What was the hardest part about working in the mines?
9. Anything special you want to share with future generations living in Montana?

Actual Questions for Interview with Tom Holter

1. What was it like being a child on the butte area and living in Meaderville?
2. What was your favorite memory growing up?
3. What did your parents do when you were growing up?
4. So, What was your favorite part about working in the mines?
5. What did you wear underground?
6. Did you work in all the different mines in Butte?
7. Is there any part you didn't like?
8. So what did you feel when they started all they mining on the pit?
9. So what did you do after that?
10. How did it effect butte when the Columbia Gardens got shut down?
11. Do you think there is a good outlook for jobs in the future?
12. What year did that get taken?
13. Were you kids born in McQueen?
14. Was Barbara born in Butte?
15. Is there any words of advice you would like to share with future generation of Butte?

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Interview of Thomas Holter Given by Mary Ferriter on April 12, 2005

Transcription

This is an Interview of Thomas Holter Conducted by Mary Ferriter at 3004 Harvard Avenue in Butte Montana on April 12, 2005.

What was it like being a child in Butte Montana and living in Meaderville?

I was born in Meaderville, in the house in Meaderville not in the hospital. On Front Street, next to the Creek, Silver Bow Creek. When I was three we moved to McQueen. I do not have a lot of memories living in Meaderville but I do have a lot of memories after that. My grandfather owned a store in Meaderville. We used to go up to the store, he lived behind the store. And we used to have all our holidays there. Italian holiday because we were all Italian. My Mother was Italian all my mothers family was Italian. And my dad he was part Norwegian and part French, French Canadian. He was born just North of Meaderville; there was South Meaderville and North Meaderville. My Parents, my Mother they were in South Meaderville that's where the grocery store was and my dad was born in well North Meaderville but it was just a little bit North of there. Just below the Black Rock Mine. Miners could walk past my grandparent's house and walk to the mine. There was no cars then and they used to walk to work. Walk up to the Black Rock. And The Leonard Mine of course that was in Meaderville in center Meaderville right on East Calusa, West Calusa that was in Meaderville too.

I was born in Meaderville and when I was three a moved to McQueen. And I spent 33 years in McQueen before the company bought me out. That was when they were open pit mining and their dumps and waste dumps were just North of McQueen. And they kept getting closer and closer so they bought us out of McQueen. And that when I moved down here but I spent 33 years in McQueen. And the company bought me out and we bought this house here.

See McQueen I mean Meaderville was an Italian community. Mostly Italians and they had a lot of restaurants and a lot of nightclubs. There was the Rocky Mountain and that was across the street from my grandfathers' store. And next to that was another store called the Miners Market and next to the Miners Market there was Arrow Café and that was owned by the Grosso's. And the Rocky Mountain was owned by Duperies. And then lets see west of there west of the Arrow was a was owned by Duperies was the old Rocky Mountain Café that burnt down the old Rocky Mountain burnt down then they built the new place. Then next to that place was the Savoid that used to be owned by Lydia. And then he got out of there and opened up Lydia's. There was two Lydia's, the old Lydia's and the new Lydia's. The place now is the new Lydia's. I worked for Lydia's, Let's see 64 years ago I worked for Lydia's I was a helper. The old Lydia's not where it's at now a little bit south of that the old Lydia's. Let's see next to the Savoid there was a bar called

Gus Rails and just a little further west of that was the Leonard Mine Of course they had a couple of Barbers there. There was Joe Montana they were the two Barbers of Meaderville. We had a Huey Hair shop that was on Everwood. We had two Italians the McQueen brothers they made their own sausage and Salami that was a grocery store. Of course we had a lot of bars there; Pioneer Lounge, Sam's Club, Rex's, the Glass Rail the Calusa Bar that was all in Meaderville.

In McQueen, we had the McQueen club and then we had the McQueen Bar that was just south of the McQueen Club. We had a little fire department. Meaderville had their own fire department. I was a fireman, a volunteer fireman for McQueen for seven years then we moved down here. In fact, right now I drive the old McQueen fire truck in the Fourth of July Parade. I have been doing that for the last seven years.

In McQueen they had the Copper League. We had McQueen, South Side Miners, Silver Bow Park, then Anaconda got into it for a little while and East Helena. That was all in the in the Copper League that was kind of; kind of semipro. There was good ball players in the Copper League. Very good Ball Players.

Now I don't know what else to tell you about Meaderville and McQueen's

What was your favorite memory growing up?

Oh, Being free! Now the kids to me, the kids now days they are not aloud to be kids. there is to much they go play the old Football, Volleyball, Basketball which is fine but they still should be kids. In McQueen, we didn't have no little league or Babe Ruth we had grade schools, grade school baseball. And we played, we played our game and after the game, we went home and did other things. A lot of times after the games we walked over to the country club and I would caddy. We would caddy over at the country club. Over at the country club and we would caddy, caddy and try to make a dollar. And after that we would walk back to McQueen there was nobody to give us rides. We walked every place we went. One time I had an old broken up bicycle I would ride around. After the game, I was playing for Holy Savior; I was going to the Country Club to Caddy and was going back to McQueen.

McQueen also had it's own, Meaderville and McQueen each also had their own Catholic Church. McQueen had Holy Savoir and Meaderville had Saint Helena's and there was also the Franklins school that was in Meaderville. That was a public school. And also, there was a Methodist church across the street from Franklin's school and that was in Meaderville. Holy Savoir and Franklin were probably about 100 yards apart. But that separated Meaderville and McQueen the two schools. I got baptized at Saint Helena's in 1934, Father Hannah he baptized me in Meaderville. While I was still living there and like I was telling you that was the Italian community in Butte.

Of course we had a lot of different communities we had the Meaderville, McQueen, Meaderville was Italian and McQueen was mostly Croatian/Austrian. Then we had Fin-Town, we had Dublin Gulch, and that was mostly Irish. And- Barbara what was

the other Italian Community? We had Dublin Gulch and what? What was the other Irish Community I forget now? And what was the one right below Walkerville? That was like the Irish Community. We of course had the Boulevard and we had East Butte that was right off McQueen, there was just about 100 yards between McQueen and East Butte. There was a puppy school that was the Harrison school. There was the East Side they had they Sacred Heart School and they had Grand School. On the flats, here we had Saint Anne's that was a Catholic School. There was Webster Garfield, McKinley I can't think of all the names there was Saint Mary's that was up North Main Street the Immaculate Conception, Saint Joe', Saint Johns. There was a lot of schools Catholic schools, public schools.

What did your Parents Do when you were growing up?

Well my dad first he was a station tender, well he was a station tender up at the Black Rock. And then he drove a rope truck for the company. And then he in the early forty's got a job, which you call the school you go to the Montana Tech, at the time called the school of Mines in them days, the school of mines. And he got a job at the School of Mines and he died in 1946 he was 44 years old he had a heart attack. He came home from work and he went to bed and died. I was 11 years old and my sister was 9. He worked up at Montana Tech not Montana Tech it was the School of Mines then.

My Mother when my dad was working she didn't but when he died, she worked for an insurance company .She was a nurse's aide for several years at Saint James.

Me in grade school I went to Holy Savior and then I went to Butte High. In fact, I was the only kid in my class who went to Butte High the rest of them went to Central. I wanted to go to Central but my mother had it in her mind that my dad wanted me to go to Butte High so there's were I went Butte High. I graduated in 1952. Then I started out as a carpenter. For Kentwood realty, down at the house at Saint Anne's the Dry's. Then after that I went up to Cool Heights and then they ran out of work and I got laid off.

Then I went to work at the railroad as a gandy dancer. Then I got drafted to the army. I got drafted and a spent most of my time in Germany. After we defeated the troops in Germany.

Then when I came back in 1956 I went back as a carpenter for Kato Mahoney. It was the first night on the job at the Savory warehouse south of Butte down there and I was the first one on that job and the last one to leave. One time we got to the Texas Avenue Bridge and we finished that and then they ran out of work. So, I didn't work as a carpenter after that. I went to work at the little queen as the assistant manager.

When the strike the 59 strike started, there wasn't any work everyone was getting laid off. And in 1960, I went to work in the mines. I went to work at the Con. Mike Casolani and I were we were slank man at the Con I worked there for two and a half years. Then I transferred out to the Berkley Pit. And I did some mining out there drilling and blasting and running a muck of things. Then I got on the rope gang. I spent the rest of my time on

the rope gang. I spent most of my time underground. We did a lot of underground work. I loved it, I loved the underground work.

So, What was your favorite part about working in the mines?

My favorite part, just Being away from home. It was nice and warm underground, it was very hot underground. On the rope gang, we used to, I spent a big part of my time underground as a rope man. We had a lot of service work too but underground. We go chase full units we worked with coolers, we put cooling systems underground. The lines were really hot and they had to have cooling systems underground. How that worked they had a project on top that had a cooling system in it. They had pipelines going underground and the cooling solution would go underground. And would go through radiators. We had a stack, four stacks of radiators, 20 radiators high, four stacks and a big fan behind the radiators, and a big fan, that fan would blow the hot air behind the radiator and the cold solution would cool the air off. And the cooler air would go down were the miners were working. And made it more comfortable for them to work in, and that was part of our work putting in those cooling systems.

We used to put in underground pumps. That would pump the water out of the shaft. We had well in fact on the 4600 in Stewart there was a pump station there. When we went down at the end when they closed the Stewart down to take the pumps out the water seeping through the dirt walls I wanted to say that she was 144 degrees. So, you can imagine how hot it was down there. Of course if the pumps not running the water will start to get a little bit of iron too. Start to get the pump and the pump odors out of there.

Now the Stewart went down 4600 feet. That was the bottom of the Stewart. The Leonard that went down 4,000 feet. The Kelly went down 4800 feet. The Mountain Con that went down one mile. In fact I lowered the krideiman that was like a clam shell. They drill a blast that was like a clamshell and they would go down and pick up the mucket so it skips. Well me and my crew we had to lower that clamshell down and when it got to one mile we had to one-mile underground. Go down and get that clamshell out of there. I was a mile under ground which is pretty interesting and it was hot down there.

But we had a lot of mines in Butte. In fact I was I was probably in the biggest pot of them like at the Kelly. You know the Kelly, after the Leonard shut down we get on to the Kelly in the 2000 and we get on the motors and the mad cars, they had mad cars down there. We had the motors over there to the Kelly on the 2000 and in fact, we put a double jump hoist down there on a 2000 and a single drum. And then they would lower the men down from there on the 2000. When you were looking at the Con, I mean the Leonard. The double drum had the skip on it that was for the ore and single drum that had the cages on it that would lower the men down to work. And also on the 15 hundred Kelly you would go to the Parrot and the liquidator that was underground you would go to all the different mines. The 4600 hundred in the Stewart or the Kelly you could go to the 4700 of the Con. That was the same level because the Kelly was a 100 feet higher than

the Con was. So, you would go to the 4600 of the Con and that was the 4700 of the Kelly. So, the mines you could go from one mine to the other after you go underground.

Then there was a lot of underground hoists too. The Kelly not the Kelly but the Con they had an underground hoist on the 4000, the Stewart had an underground hoist at the 3900, the Con they also had a secret hoist at the 5100. There was hoist that you could go down further they just made it one-mile further down. Then the east Calusa. You could go from the east Calusa all the way to the west Calusa that had a underground hoist in it. A lot of these mines had underground hoist to go for deep levels. Deep level mining.

What did you wear underground?

What did we wear underground? Some people might not believe this but we used to wear long underwear because it protected us from the heat. We wore long under wear underground. We also had the them yellow slickers to protect us from the wet. A lot of them shafts coming up and down they are wet. If some of the drifts we would be walking up and there would be wet. And then when you got to where you worked you took the slicker and the coats off. Cause it is too hot to keep them on when you have a job to do.

So you worked in all of the different mines uptown?

Oh yeah. Yeah our job as a rope man I might be in two three different mines in one day. Doing different things. I would go to one mine and change a motor unit and I might go to another mine and do some electrical stuff. Like a GM set or stuff. When we finished that there might be enough time to go to another mine and do some other stuff. But most of the time if we went down a mine the job took us all day long.

Then we used to go after wreck of the shaft. These cages use to wreck in the shaft, not a lot. But when they did it was our job to go and get the wreck out of there. If there was any miners in the cage we would have to get the miners out first. Then we would go after the wreck. We would have to save the cable. That was most of our job to save that cable. If the cable came up the wrong way and opened up that caused them, oh several, several thousands dollars. That was our main purpose, well first to get the miners out and then save the cable. We had a certain process we used to do it to save the cable. So, when it came up we had a way to keep it from opening up. It would be hard to tell you on that. See if you came up to the Anselmo, See I am, at the Anselmo I show them how we do it up there. At the Anselmo.

But the mines I like the mine I like it underground. You bet.

Is there any part you didn't like?

Well there was some hot spots, I was telling you about the liquidator. That was hot and wet. We used to have to go in and put the cage in so the miners could go down there and inspect the shaft. My job was to get the cage in the shaft and the miners would go down and inspect the shaft so they think it's alright. That was an air shaft and it was hot and wet. We used to keep the cages out. We never kept them in the shaft because the water would eat them up. So, after the miners left we would go and take the cages and put them on the side. In case the cable came out we couldn't keep the cable in there that held the cages, we would have to take the cable out and take the cages out because the water would eat them up. That's how strong that water was. In all the cages except maybe in the Kelly, water was real strong. There was enough acidity in the water that it would eat everything that was metal up in a matter of time. It was interesting.

So what did you feel when they started all they mining on the pit?

Well when they started, the start of the pit they still had someone run the Condastewart ramp at the Stewart, Leonard and the Kelly. And then started to close them up. They started fronting all the mines. They started letting the water go down the mine and then they took the pumps out. Except the Kelly, they left the pumps down there because they were stainless.

All the pumps at the Kelly were stainless. Well the first pumps that they used, used to be the high ore. That is where they pump all the water out. The water level at all the mines were at the 3800 all the water that was drained to the 38, so it didn't go over the high ore. Then we had pumps at the high ore. They weren't as powerful as the pumps at the Kelly. The pumps at the Kelly were put up later. The high ore pumps went up to the 3800 and a different level and a different level and to a different until they reach a different surface. But the pumps that were put out at the Kelly they changed the pump shaft at the Kelly. And we put real powerful pumps down there. And that what pumped from the 3800 feet from the surface. They were powerful pumps. The pipes were all stainless steel pipes. The storm water wouldn't eat the stainless steel pipes. But that was on the 3800 Kelly.

Could you repeat the question?

I was asking about when they started doing all the open pit mining.

Oh yeah, when they started shutting down the mines, in fact when they were ready to start shutting down the Kelly. That was actually the last mine running and the Con and Stewart. They were the last mine they shut down.

I got hurt. They ask me to do a job up at the concentrator. One of the foremen's asked me to come over and do a job for them and I did that job. And he asked me if I would do another job, this is the 30th of December. He said before quitting time could you do one more job for me, and I said I'll do it. So, I went over and he wanted me to move a tank. It was suppose to be empty. And they put 2400 gallons of fumes in that thing. And I didn't now it was that full. So I slang it, I had metal slings on. If I had known there were fumes in it I wouldn't of slang it. Because it was metal against metal. One spark and she would have blew. That's 2800 gallons of fumes that's a lot of fumes.

So anyway, I rigid it brought it up put it on a semi. We were suppose to move it about 300 feet. So, we got it over to that 300 feet. We when moved it over the semi the fumes were drifting back and fourth. That's 2400 gallons. So, I got on top of it and I rigid it up again. I told the operator I was going to stay on it because it was so slippery it was all icy wet and snow. Instead of climbing up and down, I figured I would stay safe by staying on it until we put it in place. When what happened was when we the fumes shifted all to one side and the tank flipped up. And it threw me. I fell about 43 feet. So that I was hurt pretty bad.

I was in intensive care for three weeks. They didn't expect me to live. I guess for three or four days they didn't expect me to live. I was in intensive care for three weeks before I came out of it. But I was in the hospital for a while. After nine and a half months, I went back to work on my own. I hated staying at home, not that I hate my home. I just wanted to go to work I was young; I was only 48 years old. I went back to work. I still had to go back in for more operations. I had to take a bone out of my hip and put it in my shoulder. I had three factures in my back. I broke all my ribs. I fracture my skull broke my eardrum. Like I said, I had a few fractures in my back. Then I had to retire. That was the end of my mining days.

So what did you do after that?

Well then I started volunteering and doing things. When I started feeling a little better then I volunteered for the Lady of the Rocky's, the museum, the Mining Museum, The Anselmo mine and doing different things.

So how did it affect Butte when the Columbia Garden got shut down?

Oh, the Columbia Gardens that was the most beautiful place in the world. When we were kids, we used to go up to the Garden a lot. They had those things, They had a nice ballpark up there and the rides, they had the airplanes and the roller coaster, the horses that went around in circles, what do you call that, We used to call it the Merry Go Round.

The company figured they were going to get all kinds of gold up in that area. Of course the tore everything down. And they went mining up there. Of course they do get a lot of mauly up there, they do get mauly out of there. But I don't think that they got the

gold and silver they thought they were going to get. Of course, the silver comes from the north part of Butte. The Lexington mine. The Badger, they did, they don't now get the pink magnesite out of the out of the badger mine. The Lexington that was mostly silver. The Con was copper or course, the Stewart was copper, the Kelly was mostly copper. Back there out in the east they do get a lot of Molybdenum out of there, now and that's really high. I think it's up to like \$34 a pound and that's mauly. And copper up to a \$1.54, which is really high. When we were working we were lucky if it got to \$0.65 a pound but that was high then. Now it's \$1.54 that was what I seen yesterday.

What did you think about when they started closing down the other mines, did it create less jobs?

Well, it was a lot less jobs, these mines hired a lot of men. When I worked up there they had 1,000 men working in the Mount Con alone. The Stewart probably had about 500 then at the Stewart, employed a lot of lot of men.

So, it comes back on the amount of people that worked in Butte. As long as they were going that was good, but when they shut down, that was bad for Butte. Really bad. I am glad they opened up again. It didn't affect me in anyway as far as working I was really glad when they opened up. Everything helps. But to me you've probably heard me say this before; **Everyday in Butte, Montana is a lovely day.** I love Butte Montana and I like to see it going.

Do you think there is a good outlook for jobs in the future?

I well I hope so; I am not a guy that likes to see Butte grow. But I want to see enough jobs for the people that are already here. I don't want to see Butte like Billings or Missoula. I don't even like to go to Missoula or Billings, I just always hope there is enough jobs to keep Butte prospering, with the amount of people that are here now. I don't want to see it get big like that. You get to many people here, I mean not butte people I guess.

I still like the good old days. Everybody new everybody at Christmas time. All you're neighbors would come over and go to different houses. Up in McQueen that was great. At Christmas time all you neighbors would come around and you would go see and have drink, stop at another house and have a drink. By the time you got home, you had enough drinks. It was nice. Everybody took care of the place they lived. It was a beautiful place to live. If you were working on you house doing something, you would have half a dozen neighbors come over and help you right now. They wanted to help you do things. You don't see that anymore. That was a wonderful place to live.

What year did that get taken?

Well they bought me out in McQueen in 1968, they bought me out and I bought this house here. They started buying houses there in 1966 and 1967, probably 1967 when they started buying the houses out of McQueen. They bought the houses out of Meaderville first. See the people in Meadville they owned their homes but they didn't own the ground that their homes were on. In Meaderville, the company owned the ground. See that was a little different they kind of forced the people out of Meaderville. In McQueen, we owned the ground too and they had to pay a little more money for the houses in McQueen then they did in Meaderville.

Were you kids born in McQueen?

Lets see Ricky was born in McQueen, Billy, Tommy they were born in McQueen and CD we were in this house when CD was born. But when CD was born, I was working down in Bellingham, Washington we were on strike so I went to work in Bellingham, Washington as an ironworker. We were building and aluminum plant to put pot lines in for an aluminum plant in Washington. That's what I would do during the strikes, uh couldn't afford to just sit around. Being a union man and an ironworker, they were always looking for ironworkers.

There was one strike that was in 67, yeah 67; I went to work in Chicago at the John Hancock building. I was 900 feet in the air. I was working on a 3-foot by 3-foot platform on the side of the building. I was welder, a welder helpers. I had to make sure he was safe and get things for him and tack on the back up strip. I had to inspect and x-ray every pass. That's how we built that building. There was one flight that we had to go back on the pass and re-weld it again. So, I was 90 feet in the air and a mile underground. I went a mile in the Con

Was Barbara born in Butte?

Yeah Barbara was born in Butte, she was born in the flats. We go married, well her and I started going together in 1953. I go drafted in 1954. I gave her a ring before I went in the army. We got married when I go out in 1956. Then we lived your Uncle Buster's house on Harrison Ave. What's that name of the Mexican restaurant on Cobban Street? Your Uncle Buster had a house there. And we rented off of him. I built a house in McQueen for my mother. And on the back of that family home a built her a house and she moved into that. Then Barbara and I and the kids moved into the family home after we go married.

Is there any words of advice you would like to share with future generation of Butte?

Go to School, you've got to learn. I wouldn't advice them to go underground, I liked it. I glad my kids didn't have to go underground or be and ironworker. But you know those guys like me we liked the mines. I loved the underground I really did. Like on the cold day's it was nice and warm down there. And the work was good, the work we did underground was good. Really good work. There was day's that it was hard that you have to be careful.

You have to use common sense. Just use common sense, you have to use common since in just about anything you do. Regardless of what you are doing, just plain old common sense.

So that's my advice to kids use your common sense and do what you want to do. Do what makes you happy.

*(That's all you want to talk about
I think so
Okay
Thank you
I enjoyed doing that.)*