

An Interview of

Tom Holter

By Teresa Hayward

PREPARED OUTLINE

Tom Holter is the husband of my grandmother's cousin, Barbara Holter.

The topics I would like to cover during this interview are:

Parents-Where are they from, how much schooling did they have, what type of employment did they have, and their ethnic background.

Tom- Where and when was he born, his schooling, jobs from childhood to present, family life, and wife's history.

Other- Columbia Gardens, involvement with the Lady of the Rockies, personal interest in the history of the Butte mines.

ACTUAL OUTLINE

Tom and I did one complete interview and then found the recorder had eaten the tape, so by the time we got to the second interview we were covering the same material and may have forgotten some of the details. So I added a couple of things in parentheses that I would like to have included.

- Grandparents Life
- Parents Life
- Sibling
- The Army
- Marriage & Children
- Jobs in the Mines
- Jobs as a Child
- Meaderville
- Butte's Ethnic Groups
- Jobs while Union on Strike
- Columbia Gardens
- Wife's Family History
- Residences in Butte
- Mining Continued
- Job Related Accident
- Lady of the Rockies

This is an interview of Tom Holter by Teresa Hayward at 3004 Harvard Ave., Butte, MT on November 12, 1998.

Question: Okay, so your grandparents?

Answer: My grandparents on my mother's side came from Italy, Michael and Marguerit (Ciabattari), and my grandfather, he eventually ended up running a grocery store up in a part of Butte called Meaderville. That's an Italian residence, it was all Italian people in Meaderville. He ran the Ciabattari Grocery down there. My grandmother, she was just a housewife and raised the children. My grandfather and grandmother on the Holter's side (Andrew and Agnes), my grandfather Holter, he was in the mines and my grandmother I think she did chores for other people. Of course, my grandfather Holter died before I was born. My grandmother eventually ended up in Tacoma, Washington and my grandfather Ciabattari, he died in the late 60's.

Q: So, Ciabattari was their last name (mother's side)?

A: Ciabattari, yeah.

Q: And what about schooling for them?

A: I don't know how much they did. I don't think they had a lot of schooling. Well, he had schooling enough to run a grocery store and he was pretty good at it. And one of his sons and daughter continued running the store after he had died, but eventually had to sell out to the mines in Meaderville. When the Anaconda Company bought out Meaderville, they had to sell their store and the company moved them up to McQueen Heights.

Q: And the whole are now is in the pit?

A: It's in the pit, yeah. It's all full of water, in fact.

Q: And so how many children did they have? Your father and...

A: The Ciabattari's had two daughters and two sons. In fact, my mother, she is still alive. (His mother was a nurses aide at the hospital.) She is 91 and her sister is 85. Her brother just died two years ago, he was 90, and one brother is alive and 94. The Holter's, they had just two brothers, the both of them died young. My father (His father was a station tender at the Black Rock Mine.) and my uncle, and I was born in 1934, in fact, by birthday is going to be next week, November 18th. I just had to go and renew my drivers license. I was scared to death, I thought I couldn't see good enough. It was a piece of cake.

Q: Then you had one sister?

A: I had one sister, yeah. She is two years younger than I am, she still works for the welfare department. I am retired, I had to retire in 1981, I fell 43 feet and got pretty busted up. I went back to work after nine months, but I couldn't handle it. I had to go back for more operations and they finally retired me, but I am getting way ahead of myself now.

Q: Okay, do you want to start with what you did when you were a child, like where you went to school, or your hobbies then?

(2)

A: I went to Holy Savior Grade School, graduated in 1948. I was an altar boy there for seven years and from Holy Savior I went to Butte High, I graduated in 1952. When I graduated in 1952, I went to work as a carpenter for Kenwood Realty and we were working the St. Ann's project. When we finished that, I got transferred to McGloin Heights and I worked there until I got drafted in 1954, September 1954. I got sent to Germany, I was under German occupation, German occupation troops. Well, first I met Barbara (his wife) in 1953, May 16, 1953. I caught her coming out of a mixer, her and her friend Helen, gave her a ride home.

Q: What did you guys do for dates? Did you go to movies or dinner?

A: Uh, yeah we'd go to the movie or to the mixers.

Q: Is that just a dance?

A: Yeah, and we went up fishing and things like that. Then I went into the Army, 1954, and I got out in 1956. Soon as I got out of the Army, I went right back into carpentry. I went to work and we were building the Safeway warehouse. I was the first man on the job and the last to leave it. Then I was transferred from the Safeway warehouse to the Texas Ave. bridge. At that time, work was kind of slow, so I got laid-off. And eventually I went to work at the Vogue Cleaners. I was assistant manager under G.I. Bill Reynolds at the Vogue Cleaners. In the mean time, I was having children, well we got married first, October 20, 1956 and in 1957 our daughter, Vicki, was born. And in 1959 our oldest boy, Billy, was born. And in 1961, Tommy was born. And in '67 C.D. was born.

Q: What kind of things did you do in the Army when you were in German?

A: I was in the infantry for a year, then got transferred from the infantry to the transportation company and I was driving semi's and I was hauling tank parts and different parts for different outfits all over Germany, driving the semi, driving a Diamond T semi and we had 39' trailers.

Q: When you were in Germany, did you live on a base?

A: Oh yeah, we were in the barracks. We were pretty isolated, you see at this time, we occupied Germany. We were still occupation troops over there, we had to watch ourselves, we had to go on border patrols. On the other side of the Czech border, there was the Russians and they were guarding that side of the border, we were guarding the German side of the border and we had to go on different border patrols and stay there for 30 days, at the borders. I went to work for the Anaconda Company in 1960. I worked up at the Mountain Conn as a slime runner. Now you asked before, what slimes were. When they are mining a stope, you have to mine it in drifts and the crosscuts go to the drifts and they drill raises from one level to another level. The levels were 100' apart. They'd go up the raises, then the miners come in, the stope miners, and they drill out a stope. After they drill out one stope, you fill it with slime, it is just like filling a cavity in a tooth, filling a tooth.

Q: So why did you drill the stopes?

A: Well, the stopes is where the ore was, where the copper veins were. They drill and mine that out and fill it up with slimes. The slime would settle, and they would cut out another level, then we would fill that up with slimes.

Q: So they wouldn't have empty cavities below them, or something?

A: Yeah, and the slimes was waste from what they got from the concentrator. They separated the ore from the waste and the waste would get sent back down the mines. It went back real wet, just like mud and then the water went up and settled real hard. Like I said, just like filling a cavity in a tooth. And I worked there, I worked in the mines for two and a half years before I went down to the Berkeley Pit. And I was mining down the Berkeley Pit, I was drilling and mining in what they call a blender. We were about 100' down on Mercury Street in the mining blender, that was the process of blending the solid ore with the mining ore and sending it to the concentrator. While I was there, I had the chance to go on a rope gang and I went on the rope gang. A rope gang is a team of ironworkers, structural ironworkers, and the rope gang was they installed all the gallows frames that was put in by the ironworkers. My job was also to haul all the heavy equipment down under ground, anything the miners couldn't put in the cages we had to sling underneath, drop it down to what level they were going to go to and put it together down there. We also soldered all the steel buildings, we put the metal fences in and we did all the heavy rigging, anything that had to be rigged heavy, that was our job. And that is how I met my retirement. I rigged something heavy and fell 43' later on. We all did different jobs, in fact, I might be, in one day, I might be in 3 or 4 different mines in just one shift.

Q: Did it take a lot of people to put up those gallows frames, and how long did they take to construct those?

A: Well, they had cranes. Well at first they had what they called jig-poles, they used jig-poles, they didn't have big cranes. They installed them with jig-poles and then the cranes came, the mobile cranes. Then they used cranes to install the gallows frames. Piece by piece, one piece of iron at a time.

Q: And it took a lot of people and a lot of time?

A: Well it took time and a crew of 2 or 3 men underground and 3 or 4 up in the air. And of course, like I said, we put all the metal buildings, we installed all the hoists than ran the cables, the chains on the cable we installed. The cables on the hoist and the cable had to be chained, so we chained the cables. I think I am getting a little ahead of myself, I want to tell you what I did in my younger days, before I went mining. When I was in high school, I worked in the Hennessey's building in Christmas time. I ran the freight elevator and worked in the room in the back where they send stuff before it went out.

Q: Like a stock person?

A: Yeah, in the stock room, I worked in the stock room. Then I ran the elevator and I used to help with the (?- can't understand) once in awhile. I did that for two years, in the Hennessey's building. I worked out at Lydia's, the old Lydia's south of where it is now, about a couple hundred feet south of where it is now. I was 14 or 15 years old when I worked down there as a bus boy. And once in awhile, my mother would wash dishes. They didn't have automatic dishwashers then, you did it with your hands. I liked working down there, it was hard on my feet because I was on my feet all the time, but the best part of it was that at 11:00 they fed us. You could have anything you want, but steak. You'd have chicken, spaghetti, ravioli's, anything you wanted to eat.

Q: Did you get tips?

A: Oh yeah, well I got tips from the waitresses, the waitresses that I helped would give me the tips. For a 15 year old kid I did pretty good.

Q: I know, that is why I like my job.

A: But I was just bussing.

Q: How you got the job at Lydia's was because you lived next to ...

A: Well my grandfather, my family and Lydia's family lived next to each other in Meaderville. Well now, let's talk about Meaderville. Meaderville was a location, a community of Italians. There was several restaurants, the Rocky Mountain Cafe, the Arrow Cafe, the Savoy Cafe (the precursor to Lydia's). There was probably a couple of others, the 45 Club, the Las Vegas Club and then there was different bars. There was the Pioneer Lounge, Rex's Bar, there was a couple of others, the Colusa.

Q: None of those are open now?

A: No, Meaderville is in the pit.

Q: The whole Meaderville is gone?

A: Meaderville and McQueen. See, I was born in Meaderville, in a house on Front Street, we lived there until I was three years old, and then we moved to a location just east of there, which was called McQueen. And it was all one area, Meaderville and McQueen. The people in McQueen were mostly English and Austrian and Meaderville was Italian. Then there was two schools, the Holy Savior and the Franklin. I went to the Holy Savior and they were only about a hundred yards apart, but we were all real friendly. I mean nobody was fighting over what school you went to, we were friendly both Meaderville and McQueen.

Q: What were the other neighborhoods, Walkerville and ...?

A: Well there was Walkerville, Centerville, Corktown and Fintown and then there was east Butte, just south of McQueen.

Q: And different ethnic groups lived in each?

A: Well yeah, the Irish lived in Corktown and a lot of Irish lived up in Walkerville and Centerville, and the Fins down in Fintown-that was down on the east part, the main part of Butte. Meaderville was further north of Butte and McQueen was just east of Meaderville.

Q: So where was the main part of Butte? Centerville?

A: No, no, like Park and Main Street.

Q: Uptown?

A: Yeah, Walkerville and Centerville was north of Butte, well Meaderville and McQueen were east of Butte, I take that back. And Walkerville and Centerville and Corktown were north of Butte and of course, you had the Flats, which is still here, in fact, we are here right now.

Q: What kind of people lived out here (Flats)?

A: Well, everybody, they came from different parts.

Q: Were these expensive houses?

A: Newer houses. It was the newer part of town, and they were still building newer houses out (pointed south).

Q: So then I think we were at the job you had when Tommy was born.

A: I had different jobs when the kids were born. When Vicki was born I was a carpenter for Kenwood Realty, and when Billy was born I worked up in the Mountain Conn mine, no when Billy was born I was at the Vogue Cleaners, when Tommy was born I was at the Mountain Conn mine and when C.D. was born I was in Washington, up in Bellingham, Washington. And the reason I was up there was because we were on strike here. So I just took off and went to work up there, working the aluminum plant for Intalco Aluminum.

Q: How long did you have to stay gone?

A: When C.D. was born, he was four months old before I even seen him, no four weeks old when I seen him. I come back over Labor Day, I was just here for one day and had to go back again.

Q: And did they have lots of strikes?

A: Well, they had a different contract every three years. We didn't have a strike every three years, but we had several strikes, when we couldn't settle a contract, of course. This wasn't only Butte, this was the whole copper mining company. There was Butte, Anaconda, Kenny Cot, Phillips Dodge, they all worked at the same time, you know these copper mining outfits all over the country, in the western part of the country.

Q: So, where else would you go for jobs? Or would you still be doing mining jobs elsewhere or ...?

A: No, no, I was an ironworker. When I was in Bellingham, I worked on an aluminum plant. I worked in Chicago on the John Hancock building, I was 900' in the air, working with the welders on the John Hancock building. I worked in Great Falls and I put up Stacey's Auto Sales and Doll's Beauty College in Great Falls. And I worked in Colstrip, Colstrip 3 and 4. I worked in Pocatello, I worked there for Idaho Iron, I did several jobs for them. I worked in Helena, putting up the federal building in Helena. I worked on the Dillon highway putting up multi-plate tunnels on the highway to Dillon. I worked up in Idaho Falls in ummm, anyways putting up a tank in Idaho Falls.

Q: When the Granite Mountain Mine blew up or whatever, how old were you and where were you?

A: That was before I was born. What happened is the mine didn't blow up, they were lowering some cable down into the mine and one of the mine's foreman, his carbide lamp caught the cable on fire, it slipped and caught the cable on fire. The fire went straight up the shaft because they

(6)

had wind going up the shaft. I caught the cable on fire and immediately the timber started burning, and of course that caused smoke to go through the Granite Mountain Mine and the Speculator, and 166 miners died. But of course there has been miners that have been killed when I worked in the mines. Not like that, but maybe one or two, nothing that major. It was dangerous, you had to watch what you were doing, like you had duggans. When you drilled you had to go into there and knock down the duggans-these rocks that were loose rocks. And if they fall on you, it 'd send you to Duggan's Mortuary. And that is why they were called duggans, because if they fell on ya', you went to Duggan's, and it happened not a lot, but it happened. The miners were safe, they were craftsmen. You had to be a craftsman to be a good miner, because they had to do several things. They had to drill, they had to blast, they had to muck, they had to put in tracks, they had to timber, they had to lay out hoses. A miner had to do a lot of different things.

Q: What about things they couldn't foresee like lung cancer, do miners suffer from ailments like that?

A: Well, years ago miners used to drill what they called buzzies, and they were dry buzzies. They were a drill with no water and the miners used to inhale all that dust, copper dust. And eventually they came with better drills with air and water, of course the water would cut down on the dust. But, oh yeah, a lot of miners died from it, they called it the miners cough, the black lung, a lot because of those buzzing drills. When I was mining we used a jack drill that was ran by water and air, we were lucky, the water kept down the dust.

Q: But you couldn't really foresee that, they didn't really know that was going to happen?

A: Miners knew at that time, you know, that there was a possibility, but they were the good jobs available here and it was good paying jobs. The miners got paid for how much work they did. They got paid for how many cubic feet they mined in a day. The more cubic feet they mined, the more money they made.

Q: What kind of other jobs were available in Butte, besides mining?

A: Mining at that time was the big job, but then you had construction. There was a lot of houses being built, a lot of buildings being built. So, of course, there's carpenters, laborers and ironworkers and machinists, electricians and teamsters. And of course, they were all with the Anaconda Company. We all had them unions in the Anaconda Company.

Q: So the Anaconda Company pretty much owned all the mines?

A: They owned all the mines, at one time they did. They had three copper kings, Daly, Hinsley and Clark. Hinsley was the first one to sell out, when he left Butte he was worth about fifty million dollars, but he lost it all in Wall Street. He died at forty five. He lost his money early. And the last one to leave here, I think, was Clark. He was the one that built the Columbia Gardens, Clark's Park and of course the Clark Mansion in Butte.

Q: When did they build the Columbia Gardens?

A: Oh, I think in the early 1890's or right around 1900, the first Columbia Gardens.

for awhile, then I built a house for my mother in the backyard of her house, our family home was in McQueen. I built a house in the back for my mother, then Barbara and I and the kids moved in to the big house. We lived there until 1968 when the Anaconda Company bought us out.

Q: Your mother never remarried?

A: No, my dad died in 1946, she was 34 years old, I was 11 and my sister was 9. No, she never remarried. She moved into the house in the back in 1968. The company bought us out. They were expanding the mines.

Q: What if you didn't want to go?

A: You had to go.

Q: They could force you to go?

A: There was some kind of state law, Dominant Main, or something like that, anyways you had to sell.

Q: They paid you the right price?

A: Yeah, they offered us a price and then we bought this house on Harvard. We moved here in 1968.

Q: So, those were pretty much the jobs you had in the iron industry?

A: Well yeah, when I worked in the Anaconda Company I worked in all the mines, I could probably name all kinds of mines I worked if you want me to name them all.

Q: What one was the one you lived by, do you remember?

A: In Meaderville, it was the Leonard Mine, in McQueen they had the Rains, but that was an old, old mine. But the first mine I worked in was the Kelly Mine, we went down to the 6 or 700, we were carrying a bunch of stuff out because we weren't needed there anymore. From there I worked in the Leonard, the Stewart. I worked in the Mountain Conn-the original, I worked in the Badger. These were all as an ironworker on a rope gang. We used to go underground in the Kelly and go to different mines from the Kelly. The Elma Alleu mine and the Qualimine, the Parrot, the Black Rock, the Liquidator. We used to go to the mines from the underground of the Kelly and we had to go and do things underground in them mines.

Q: Underground tunnels would take you to other mines?

A: To different mines, yeah. See, them mines weren't open at the surface anymore, but they were still open underground. Some still had underground hoisting. We used to go to underground mines, of course, you could get from the Conn to the Kelly, and to the Leonard from the Kelly. You could get from the Stewart to the Kelly.

Q: How far away are they from each other, pretty close?

A: Miles, there's hundreds of miles of tunnels under Butte.

Q: Was the purpose to get from one mine to the other?

(9)

A: At first they were the ore veins, they used to go to the ore veins. Then they connected one mine with the other. Many times they just connect on different levels. That's how they get the ore, they had to drill these tunnels. The drifts were a hundred feet apart, like say it was on a 4200 and the next one is on the 4300 or 4400.

Q: Would there be stairs or just gradual?

A: No, no. They're straight, then there's these raises, they go up to the stopes. Then they go to shoots and they come up and go down to the shoots, and go to the ??? (can't understand) and pick them up at the station, pick them up at pockets and raise them up to skips. Then send them to Anaconda.

Q: By train?

A: Yep, originally by train. Then after the concentrator moved here, then by truck. They'd haul it by truck, ship them to the concentrator.

Q: The reason they sent it to Anaconda was because of the smelter?

A: That's because of where the smelter is, the concentrator/smelter is in Anaconda. Then they closed the smelter down and moved the concentrator to Butte. And after they concentrated the ore they shipped it out of town to be smelted because there was no smelter in Anaconda.

Q: After the mines, what kind of jobs did you have then?

A: I worked in the mines until after I got hurt. I worked as an ironworker clear up until I got hurt in 1981. Then I was off for nine months. I fell 43', I fractured my skull in two places, I broke my eardrums, I broke my shoulder, I broke all of my ribs on the left side, I broke my back. They didn't think I would live for a couple of days, then finally I came out of it. I don't remember anything about it.

Q: I bet you didn't want to live when you were in so much pain.

A: Yeah, I wanted to live, it wasn't that bad. I was kind of drowsy, they kept me on painkillers, no I wasn't that bad. I didn't realize how bad I was hurt after I first woke up. I was hurt pretty bad, after 9 1/2 months I went to work on my own, but I had to go back for more operations and they finally retired me.

Q: So what is your involvement with the Lady of the Rockies?

A: Well, in 1985 Bill Bartsch called me. Of course I was, well before in 1983, Bob O'Bill-he's the one that decided on this. He asked me when he's ready to put up the statue, if I wanted to do it. So, in 1985, Bill Bartsch called me up and he said we were going to start putting the base up. The blueprints were under a color code, if I'd come up there and read for him and point out the iron that had to in the base. And to this day, I've been stuck with it ever since, I've been up there ever since. I helped put the statue up.

Q: Why did they start the statue?

A: Well, Bob O'Bill's wife was in the hospital very sick. I think she had cancer or something. And he made a promise to God and the Blessed Mother, that if his wife would be cured he would

put a small statue of the Blessed Mother, Mary. He was thinking in a park somewhere. The more he talked about it, the more people he talked to, it ended up being a 90' statue up on the mountain.

Q: So, what do you do now? Do you have to do maintenance or anything?

A: It needs to be maintained all the time.

Q: Do you help with that?

A: Well, I help. There's a group of us that go up there, I've done a lot of things. I have, of course, helped put up the statue. Then I started running the bus to bring people up there, I've done welding, I've done electrical work, I've done carpentry work, I've done survey work, I ran the cranes-a mobile crane up there, I was a crane operator and a hoister. Of course, we have all done that, everybody does everything up there.

