

Growing up in a miner's family during the 1960's and 1970's

The Transcription of my Interview with my mother about growing up in a miner's family during the 1960's and 1970's;

Laci: My name is Laci Peck and I will be conducting an interview with my mother Victoria Atcheson Peck. This interview is being held at her home at 331 East Broadway on October 23, 2006.

Laci: Will you please state your name for the record?

Vickie: Victoria Atcheson Peck

Laci: Where were you born?

Vickie: Butte Montana, Silver Bow....St. James Hospital

Laci: When were you born?

Vickie: March 13, 1957

Laci: What was it like growing up in Butte during the 1960's and 1970's?

Vickie: Ah... Well... Growing up in Butte during the 1960's was pretty cool. Butte was a very busy town. I lived on Timber Butte in Clark's Old Mill, which was turned into two houses at the time... it wasn't the mill anymore. We used to go uptown to shop, and we literally got dressed up to go shopping, I mean high heels and the whole bit. And we

always went on Saturdays and it was a big deal. And it was crowded with tons of people uptown. There was a big Sears's store, a Saxton's Hobby Shop; that had everything and anything, Hennessy's; which had a huge escalator, that I was scared to death of when I was little for fear it would swallow me. There was a Woolworth's; where a big bag of popcorn was only five cents and it was a big bag of popcorn. There was a huge JCPenney's store, a Ben Franklin's, a P.O. News Stand, Len waters Music Store, and a Trethaway Music Store. There were three theaters; The Montana, which used to have lots of plays, The Fox, and The Rialto. There was a store named Brinks on Front Street where you could buy used 45's albums and they were only ten cents at the time. And there were tons of skating rinks and we would skate all winter long all over town.

Kids didn't sit in the house and watch TV's and games. We were out side constantly. We played kick the can and hide and seek. We went sled riding, skating and horseback riding, and we walked everywhere we went because it was safe. We had the Columbia Gardens, of course and it was beautiful and it was sad when it was closed and destroyed.

Butte was Company town and you didn't cross the picket lines, not the Anaconda Company or anybody else's. They would tell you as a warning, "We know where your dad works" and we all knew not to cross the picket line because they told us they would write down license plate numbers. I can remember my dad doing picket duty once at the Mountain Con and getting shot at and he came home and said he didn't get paid enough for that crap.

1970's everything changed ...the mines closed... my dad was one of the last under ground miners in the mines. He worked at the L.H.D. mine and the opening for that

was in the pit. It was right on the side...sometimes...I think you can still see the gallows frames to it down there. Tons of people lost there jobs ...tons of people moved and it was scary.

Laci: What was it like growing up in a miner's family?

Vickie: Uh...Let's see it was kind of scary. There were a lot of dangers involved in the mines. My dad worked almost 33 years in the mines, he worked the Orphan girl, the Orphan boy, the Badger, the Belmont, the Kelly, the majority of the time he worked the Mountain Con. He retired from the L.H.D. mine in 1975. The only reason he retired was because it was mandatory. He had lung cancer, emphysema and silicosis.

The mine whistles were scary when it wasn't shift changes. You knew when it was shift changes because it was around 4 o'clock and 8 o'clock and you knew if the whistles blew that something had happened in the mines... an accident of some sort.

My dad's hands were always stained a really dark color...they looked almost dirty from working underground. Now after he quit the mines and retired they started to get white over the years... and it looked pretty funny to see my dad's hands white.

The Company was a strong union town, and that's something we don't see too much of now. Strikes were scary. I can remember when my dad went to West Yellowstone and worked in a saw mill down there...because the strike had lasted so long. But the company always gave you a turkey if you stood in line long enough for it...and it made everything ok.

Dad was a hard worker and liked by a lot of co-workers and shift bosses. He always received the "good housekeeping" certificates from OSHA because he had a safe

work space. He never missed work until he got too sick to go in 1975. Working so long in the mines played part of his problems with his health. It made him sicker... the silicosis is definitely a mine disease.

Laci: Miner's Lung, right?

Vickie: uhmm...

Laci: What has changed in Butte and what do you believe was the biggest change?

Vickie: Uh...Let's see... a lot of things have changed in Butte. Ummm...Not just the lack of jobs but also the attitude has changed. There are a lot more people in Butte that didn't grow up in Butte, you can tell who didn't by just there attitudes...There not as friendly...There not as caring. And I think the biggest change, other than the lack of jobs is the homeless, pre release all the mentally ill...and I mean most of that is centered in Uptown Butte...it is a very different Butte that what I grew up in.

Laci: How did you spend your days growing up?

Vickie: Oh...I played on tailing hills a lot. We went Horse back riding and sled riding, and from what I've been told I should glow in the dark by now. Of course my son would disagree with that. Aside from that we lived outside and spent most every night in the summer time outside...we had sleep out:

We rode horses most everyday except for the winter days...and the last horse I had was Bimbo and he was 17 and ½ hands tall, and you definitely didn't go anywhere without a saddle because if you got off you didn't get back on unless there was a fence close. Sometimes me and my friends would practice jumping onto horses bareback; occasionally we were so good at it we would go completely over the horse. We skated, rode sleds, built snowmen, and had lots of snowball fights usually attacking the adults when they weren't watching.

We hiked Timber Butte, we rode bikes, had slumber parties with tons of friends, and told ghost stories at camp outs until we scared each other skinny. We fished every weekend in the summer; I wasn't brave enough to go ice fishing with my dad in the winter. He had an ice hut and everything...but...no. When you went hunting with my dad, which I did occasionally, you had to walk very fast and be very quiet. You didn't even step on a stick or else you were in big trouble.

We went to the Motor View Drive In every weekend and it was always a double feature. So if you went at ten you weren't out of the theater until after two. And... it was the popular shows and sometimes it was the old shows...and a lot of times on Fridays it was spook shows.

I started driving when I was 12, which I know was definitely illegal... but I could take our station wagon to the Donna Bell down on Harrison Avenue, \. It's where the old Subway Sandwich shop was, is it still there?

Laic: The one by Rainbow Photo?

Vickie: Yeah

Laci: Yeah it's still there.

Vickie: Ok well it used to be the Donna Bell.

Laci: And what was the Donna Bell?

Vickie: It was a drive in kind of like an old fashion Wendy's or an old fashion Burger King. And we'd drive in down there and have "French Fries and a Coke". And we used to loosen the salt and pepper shakers so that when people used them everything would come out on there food. We went for Gizmo Burgers, basically a sloppy Joe's, at the Tinker Bell and it was down by the Civic Center and we would go down there most Friday nights.

I had my brother-in-law, Bob Eva for Driver's Ed, when I was at Butte High and all of my friends got into the class so that was a plus.

Laci: And did they all pass?

Vickie: No...Terry Yates didn't pass. She almost gave Bob a heart attack then. Oh she'd drive up on the curb and came close to hitting the gym...and it was bad. We never went any where with Terry either because if you were in the car with her she would go from

the outside lane into where ever she wanted to go... right through the other lane... it didn't matter.

My dad raise rabbits at time and we had about 300 at times. And he sold them to Ben Franklin's at Easter, and he butchered a lot of them and sold them to Albertson's, Pay-N-Take-It, and a Chinese restaurant, I do believe named the Hong Kong on Harrison Avenue. And when he would take them down to the Chinese restraint the guy down there would always give us a huge bag of fortune cookies that he would bring home. And we had chickens, occasionally ducks, turkeys... pigs... we always had horses and dogs.

Ummm...I still have the same friends I had in grade school. We've been friends for over 40 years. I had a pretty good childhood.

Laci: Did your Dad share any mining experiences with you and if he did would you like share a couple?

Vickie: Ummm...hmmm...Dad didn't talk a lot about work. Let's see...He first started in the mines back in the 1940's with his brother Arthur, before he started building houses. They had a pipe that was blocked, so dad picked it up to blow into it; well unknowingly my uncle hit the other end with a hammer and ...so much for my dad's front teeth.

Laci: And how old was he when that happened?

Vickie: My dad...well it was right after he had come back form World War II, so probably around twenty eight.

And after a day of drilling and blasting, I remember sitting next to my dad at the dinner table and you could be right next to him and he couldn't hear a word that you had said; because they would spend the whole day blasting all day.

One of his friends that he worked with for years had a son start in the mines...and this was in the 70's and he was young... He tripped on a cable and went down the shaft. And that was sad and boy did it really age Herb. Herb was a really good friend of my dad and it just kind of took the wind out of his sails.

I remember my dad talking about...before the mine's closed...a lot of young guys would apply for this job thinking "oh they could handle this job" or would work to get school money or something. Some of them would last a day or two or maybe last a week and it would make my dad so mad because they didn't even respect the job...they didn't care what mining was...they didn't care if it meant anything to the country or at that time nothing. At my dad had started mining copper for the war he was brought here...he signed on for copper for the war. I have the cards for it. So it was important for him.

And on his last job, when he worked at the L.H.D. at the pit they used the Bobcat loaders and he and the other guys would take turns...one driving and one riding in the front of it bouncing up and down the tunnels. He he'd laugh about that... he said that was a great way to do mining.

Laci: would you mind sharing a little bit about what life was like growing up in Butte and how things have changed and what is most memorable during the time you grew up here?

Vickie: Well most memorable is how friendly the people used to be... I mean I work in the Library now and we see a lot of people... the transits and people who just want to use the intranet, and they could care less about Butte. It's not old Butte like the old neighborhoods used to be, now we live in what was considered Fin town... and... there was you know all the different neighborhoods and people had family and everything. You don't see a lot of that in Butte now. One of the things I always found interesting about being in Butte is I literally grew up in what we called Clark's mill and it was his milling place at the time and out in our front yard was a big railroad track and there was a cement square where the ore was dumped and our house was where it was milled and then they took it...or where it was sorted...and then they took it down to what was the old mill, where Bob Corbett tried to build a house out of but indeed up building one next to it. Now he still lives there. He took our gates and put in front of that. But people would look at you funny, like "you live where?" But you really couldn't tell because they took it and changed it completely into a two level house but on the outside of the house was a couple of rims where you could see where the railroad tracks had went into the house and where a couple of the ticket stations were, where the miners stood that would check the stubs of the trains going in and out. And that was kind of interesting because people would look at you like "uh no." And Butte just has an interesting history...I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. My husband's family has been here since the 1860's and there is a lot of history there. You read about the mines and the hard work the miner's did... it was kind of a scary job. And all the gallows frames mean a lot to this town.

Laci: What stands out the most about the 1960's and 1970's when you think about the history, and what went on in your life that tied you to that history?

Vickie: We had a walk out when I was in Junior High because they wouldn't let us wear pants to school. We had to wear dresses all the time, so we literally planned it for us to walk out and for the high school to walk out so that we could at least wear pants and they did give in and let us start wearing pants, and eventually bell bottom jeans to school.

And I can remember wearing a bracelet for one of the Vietnam soldiers in Vietnam that was ...um...missing in action in Vietnam. Unfortunately I can't remember his last name right now, his first name was Robert, and I know he was one of the only six that didn't come home. He was killed and I don't know if they ever found his body or not... I don't think they did. That really kind of stood out...when I was... I can see where my kids come from now because when I was in Junior High and High School I was all pro ... you know... pro Indian, pro everybody should have equal rights, and everybody should do this and everybody should do that and it should be free to everybody. As you get older you see that that doesn't work really well sometimes.

Laci: Would you have considered yourself a hippy?

Vickie: No... I probably was very liberal but I took baths... I did wear love beads and have long hair and I honestly lived in moccasins. I used to make my dad mad because I would wear the bottoms out of my moccasins so I would fold a piece of cardboard and put it in the moccasins because the top was good. My dad would get so mad at me

because I would need new moccasins...but I never wore shoes. We never wore shoes ...we would play in mud puddles on the way home and be soaking wet and moccasins didn't last through that to good.

Laci: What were the major changes to butte during those time periods that stand out in your mind?

Vickie: Uh...well from going from a company town to when that company closed and Butte... it was like it died... for a while I mean it was scary. Population went down and jobs went down and everybody kept saying we were going to be like Virginia City or Bannack , well we showed them, we never got quite that bad. Things have changed a lot. It definitely not a company town anymore and there definitely isn't the good paying jobs that there used to be. And the Unions aren't as strong in Butte, because when I was little the Unions were strong in Butte, it didn't matter if it was the restaurant union or hotel maids, you were all in the union and everyone stuck together. If one union was out the other unions would back them up. So like if the clerks at Safeway went on strike you literally didn't go through that. Everybody stuck together and there were good paying jobs in Butte. Now, it's hard to come up with a good job in Butte, we've got Wal-Mart and Kmart and tons of fast food stores, but they don't pay good. So that's hard and they don't have insurance and stuff like the company did. And see when I was a little kid, everything was the company, I mean there was the trucks...the yellow trucks...up on the hill where I lived on Timber Butte, you could hear the Pit trucks running at night when if you slept outside.

Everything was based on the Anaconda Company when I was little and in the 70's when that ended it was a big era in Butte that just totally left.

Laci: What was the night life like in Butte?

Vickie: Oh...the night life in Butte has always been crazy. It hasn't changed all that much. There have always been the bars, and there's always been the people that were partying all the time and kids sat in bars waiting for their parents to go home that hasn't changed. Lots of bars. Hat's not a good thing for Butte I don't think.

Laic: Would you mind telling me a little bit more about your dad and what he was like and how the mines affected him personally?

Well my dad came here in 1942 to mine copper as I said. And he had signed up for the draft in Pennsylvania in Sprinkles Mills before he left...umm... So he came here with my mom and my sister was born here and he did get drafted so they went back to Pennsylvania and he went over seas to World War II. And came back and he came back here with his brother Clint who had went to World War II. And his two other brothers had stayed here and mined, Arthur and Ken, and he went back to work in the mines and like I said he worked in quite a few mines. He always had a good reputation but he got on at the Mountain Con, and he probably spent about ...23 years at the Mountain Con. And he was really well liked, like I said his funeral had schwinside and even the OSHA guys came to my dad's funeral. It was kind of funny because all of the miners would stand in the corner in whisper "you know those stupid Osh guys shouldn't be anywhere near us,

you know” because if you had bad sights or did something wrong you were in trouble with OSHA. You had to have you know the good housekeeping thing sounds kind of funny on a certificate but it meant that you had a clean work space and that it was a safe work space and no body was going to get hurt in it. And dad always got those, he never fought with anybody. He always got along with everybody and had lots of friends. And he worked hard. He liked his job... he was proud of his job.

I can remember once coming home from going with my sister and going in the house and there was a pink slip lying on the table and it had he had been injured in the mines and I couldn't find him anywhere, and I was scared to death, I thought “Oh no”. I didn't know what had happened, but he had just went to the store and he had had rocks fall on his hand and it had smashed his hand up pretty good. But I think that's... other than having his teeth knocked out... was the worst he had ever gotten hurt in the mines, he was pretty careful. But he put in a lot of years there, he didn't want to quit when he had to quit. It was mandatory...they made him quit because he was to sick to work. And he liked work, he never missed it. He got up every morning, early, and went and took care of all the animals and had his lunch, and off he went and he was quite happy. I can remember him bringing home the boots and jeans...his coveralls... he had wore in the minds and they were full of holes. His boots...they wore big rubber boots that were black...would be eaten full of wholes from the copper, and the old coveralls would just be full of holes. He would find something to use pieces of...he was always patching and fixing or minding something and put it together. And he would bring home his old lamps, and hats from the mines and he also bogarted quite a few rocks from the mines in his

lunch bucket, which at the time was illegal because if you got by the company you would get blackballed. And if you got blackballed from the Anaconda Company at that time you didn't get a job any where in Butte. Not even at the dump. You just didn't work. But we ended up with a lot of nice rocks, mostly from the Mountain Con.

Laci: What kind of rocks?

Vickie: Oh....crystals and it was really good crystals I mean the kind that had the beautiful formations that looked like ice sculptures and stuff and then he brought quite a bit of copper, some zinc, the zinc that had was a pure form in a round shape was pretty neat but mainly a lot of quartz and crystals. They were pretty nice, some pretty big ones. His lunch bucket must have weighed a ton, if anyone would have picked it up they would have knew something was going on.

Laci: Do you know what your dad did in World War II? Did he ever talk about it with you?

Vickie: No, He was an expert riffle man and he became a staff sergeant. He went through the Battle of the Bulge and followed Patton through the Zigfield Wall. And he said no one got in front of Patton because he would run over his own guys. And he went through Ireland and Germany, he said when they went over it was beautiful but he said coming back after the war went through, he said that it didn't even look like the same country. Didn't talk to much about the war, his best friend a sergeant DeFilipo got shot

next to him, and dad carried him back to camp and he died on the way back and dad didn't talk to much about the war. Most of what I learned about his war, was gathering up research and lucky for us because World War II records were destroyed ...he had all his papers. He carried them with him and he had a copy he carried in his wallet with his ACM card, and we were able to get a lot off of that and go back and do research.

Laci: Do you think he came back to Butte as a personal decision or do you think he came back for the good job?

Vickie: The job...I think if need be he would have stayed back in Pennsylvania with family.... Cause his mom and dad were back there and his sisters. Him and two brothers...three brothers moved out here. They had 11 kids in the family so most everybody stayed in Pennsylvania and Sprinkle Mills in that area and everything...and it was really hard on him to get time off work when his mom died. I think he would have preferred to be back there. But it was a good job... I mean... he became a contract miner which meant you pretty much did... you did your shift and you did certain things. You didn't do a lot of the labor and you made extra pay and you didn't end up... and he worked long enough in the mines he didn't end up with the night shift he had the day shift ...unless something happened. He made pretty good money as a contract miner. It was good pay. Yeah pretty sure that's why he... and he loved to hunt and fish. And that was a big thing. I mean every weekend he was either hunting or fishing one way or another. So that probably kept him here to.

Laci: So you said your dad was originally from Pennsylvania and I know that you have traveled there before ...umm..., what would you say the biggest distinctions between Butte and Pennsylvania and would you have wanted to grow up there instead of here in Butte?

Vickie: Well I was about nine the first time we went to Pennsylvania and we took the train back to Pennsylvania and that was an experience in itself. That was a long trip and a lot of motion sickness. And when we got back....its beautiful back there ...I mean the trees are beautiful. Lots of colors...lots of green...lots and lots of green. But my great Uncle Carl took us up in the Mountains in Pennsylvania and we got out to look the a Loral and he tells me you know theses are the highest mountains in Pennsylvania, and I turn around and I'm looking and its green and its lush...and I turned around and asked where the mountains were. I mean I grew up next to the East Ridge...that's part of the Continental Divide. .. And you know the mountains back in Pennsylvania if they get 2,000 feet there doing good. And it's totally different, and trips. From Valier were my Grandma lived to Punxsutawney was about 13 miles ...that is a day trip in Pennsylvania. You got ready in the morning because it was going to be a drive and you went. And if you were going to Brookville, god forbid that was thirty miles...that was two days ...we had to spend the night at my Uncle Carl's. It was like I don't know if things have changed a lot and I certainly hope they did, but It was just ...it was taxing for them...and I mean here a trip to Anaconda you know...Whoopee...a trip to Whitehall...whoopee. I mean its no big deal and some people drive from here to Billings in a day, back there....no. I mean like I sad going from Valier to Punxy was 13 miles and it was an all

day trip. And you got dressed up and you had lunch ...and you had dinner and when you got home you were wore out and you went to bed. And everything was just kind of quite there...of course Valier was not a big town...if you blinked your eyes you missed it. And my Uncle Jim and Aunt Betty lived in Valier and Jim was the head of the Punxsutawney Phil, who was the ground hog. He was the head of that group for a while and he kept the ground hog in his basement for a couple years. And he was a very famous ground hog...my Uncle Jim's was even in Groundhog's Day with Bill Murray. But that's you know you talk about Punxsutawney Pennsylvania people look at you like...huh? But...

Laci: So are you happy you grew up in Butte instead of Pennsylvania?

Vickie: Yeah...I like Butte. Butte has a lot of history and a lot of character. Things have changed a lot. We've lost a lot of people that had substance and grit. There isn't a lot of people like that...the old miners were a unique breed. They were tough and they were funny and they were strong and they loved there families. They worked hard but they played hard to but that group is kid of gone... but I still like Butte. It's pretty neat...my three kids have grown up pretty good in Butte.

Laci: What would you say the biggest difference is between you growing up in Butte and your children growing up in Butte?

Vickie: My kids have exercised there mentality a lot better than I did. I think I came from such a laid...there's one thing that the 60's did for you , they made everything laid back,

and whatever... you know you don't got to do nothing and my kids are all over achievers and have accomplished a lot and they do a lot more than I did when I was growing up. And they're smarter, and they don't party like we used to do when we were younger. NO...you look at me funny but when I graduated form high school we had already lost 13 kids to the drinking and driving, and that's not good...it started when I was a sophomore in high school. You kids are smarter about it... I mean there are still accidents and stuff but you at least use your heads a little bit. So Butte's gone forward in a lot of ways.

Laci: What about society wise, what would you say the biggest difference is from you growing up to your children growing up?

Vickie: We have a lot more vagrancy and poor in Butte now, because we get a lot of people from out of town that don't have jobs. And they live here on the system, which is sad because the miners had grit and they worked hard and it was a mining town when I was little. And everybody's parents worked, nobody was on welfare. Nobody lived on the system. I mean everybody...there probably were families out there...but I didn't know any. I mean...you know...everybody had a mom and a dad...and half the time moms didn't work they were home with the kids. A few moms' worked. Everybody did smoke. Everybody smoked and everybody had a drink here and there. But there was family and I mean and it was important to have family. And the dad's worked, it was important, everybody worked. A lot of people worked for the Company or the Railroad. But there were very few people that didn't, you know, there were bums here and there but not like

there is now. And the mentally ill weren't like they are now where no one cares. If you had problems you were in the state hospital or somewhere to be taken care of not just left wondering the streets on your own and you see a lot of that it butte now...and that's kind of Butte's down fall right now.

Laci: is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Vickie: This just makes me fell really old that I can talk about all this. Happy Birthday Mom...huh.

Laci: Is that everything?

Vickie: Yes.