

Dr. William Antonioli Interviewed by Chris Antonioli

Chris: O.k. this is an interview conducted by Chris Antonioli of Dr. William Antonioli at 2210 Massachutes Street, Butte, Montana, March 27, 2002. First of all what year were you born?

Doc: O.k. I was born in Butte on March 10,1921.

Chris: What school did you go to?

Doc: Well, I attended the old Webster school on Aluminum and Idaho Street which has been since demolished, I then attended the Washington Junior High School up on East Broadway Street then attended the old Butte High School on Park Street which is were Central is, and then I attended the new Butte High School which is were the present high school is.

Chris: And where did you attend college?

Doc: And then I attended Carroll College in 1939 to 43 with a bachelor of science in chemistry, and I attended medical school at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 1943 to 1946 during World War 2.

Chris: O.k. tell me about your parents.

Doc: All right, my father's parents from the Antonioli side. His father came to Butte in 1878, came from northern Italy, and probably came to California first and then came up to Montana, and then his wife Teresa Butinni also came from Italy before they were married she went to California and he went down to California and picked her up in California and brought her up through Nevada probably by horse and wagon, and they got married in Eureka Nevada, and just in the last year we've been able to locate where they were married, and to get a copy of their marriage license. Then they came to Butte. He settled in Browns Gulch where he was a rancher dairy farmer, and continued in that until the time that he died. My mother's parents were Slovenian and they probably came to Butte around 1890, her father was a miner and they lived out near the five mile south of Butte, they had a little acreage, and a house, and they had three children, my mother, my aunt Mary, and a brother Joe. The brother died at the age of eighteen, he went to work for The Milwaukee Railway, and on the first day of the job he was electrocuted, and killed. The father lived only two weeks after my mother was born, and he died probably of appendicitis. Subsequently to that a few years later my maternal grandmother remarried the gentleman that she married was a drinker and abusive, but they had three more children. Those would be my aunt Rose, my aunt Annie, and my uncle Teddy. All of these people have died, Teddy was in the army during World War II, stationed in the Ulutions, and like so many army people in the Ulutions there were almost no battle casualties, but they lost like twenty percent of the troops to illness like yemoniua.

Doc: This is a brief account of what happened with my father. He was born in Browns Gulch; he was delivered by Bertha Brecktal who was the local midwife. He was the

eighth child and the rest of the children were girls a the. His mother died shortly after the birth of his sister Rose who was born after my father, and Rose only lived to the age of two. My fathers father then subsequently married a widow lady who had one child of her own, and she was apparently very difficult to live with, she was probably mentally unbalanced, and my father, and his sister Ida were both sent to the Catholic Sister School in Missoula, and they were their for two years probably from the age of ten for my father until he was maybe thirteen or fourteen. When he left the school down there he came back to Butte. He apparently did not go back to live with his father and his stepmother, but went to live with a old gentleman called Lockhart who was an early pioneer and politician in southwestern Montana, and they lived on a little ranch down near what is now Fairmont Hot Springs. My father lived with Mr. Lockhart, and did chores, the cooking, and kept care of the house, and the horses and the cows I guess, and I subsequently after that, my father went to work for the mines in Butte. He worked at the Blackrock Mine, and was a specialist of a degree in that he worked in the shaft sinking shaft, and repairing shaft. He, a married a local lady Rose Parko, and they had one child, my older brother Pete who has since died, and then his wife Rose died in the 1918 flu epidemic. About 1920 he met my mother and at the time my mother was working at Armsted Montana, which is buried in the bottom of Clark Canyon Reservoir at present. She was working at the boarding house their, and he used to come down on the train from Butte to Armstead to court her. After a suitable period of time they got married and moved back up to Butte, and then I was born about a year later.

Chris: So, What was your childhood like here in Butte Montana?

Doc: Childhood was great. We had a childhood that you wouldn't recognize today, I think the things we did for the most part children don't do today. We were a neighborhood of kids all different ages. We played a lot of games. We played baseball and touch football, and basketball and childhood games like a hide and seek and follow the leader and things such as that. Sometimes during the day, and a lot of times after supper in the summer time we would have games. We'd play marbles at school and coming from school. Some of these things of course were seasonal. Marbles were in the springtime, and of course football and basketball were at other times. We a of all the kids in my grade school there was only one who had a ride to school everybody else walked. We only lived a block and a half from the old Webster School and I came home for lunch everyday, we had an hour for lunch. The teacher were all women except for Mr. Finn who was the manual training and carpentry teacher, and the women were all single, and at that time if one of the teachers got married they were discharged from teaching they weren't allowed to be married and teaching in the schools they were all single. A number of them did leave over the years and got married and subsequently had families. We had bicycles a lot of biking. I remember that we had my older brother Pete had a twenty six inch standard size two wheeled bicycle that was a Cadillac brand and I don't know whether who make Cadillac brand bicycles, but it was a very neat bicycle, and he used the bicycle for a number of years then it came to me and I used it and then my brother Frank used it and then I think that was the end of the bicycle. I don't remember where it went after that. We would ride out to Rocker or we would ride as far as Browns Gulch. We'd ride out to where the County Club is now, there was a lake there called Lake

Havokka which a little before my time was a like a amusement area, and they had boats on the lake and you could go out and rent a boat and row around the lake. I think they had a pavilion for dancing and probably had some food at the lake. We'd take our bikes and ride out there and play in the lake, and play in Blacktail Creek, and in Bell Creek that ran into and out of the lake. The entertainments that we had were like family things, families got together a lot. They would get together to play cards, the women would make candy, they'd sit around and listen to the phonograph records on the old wind up phonographs, which were definitely not very good quality sound, but it was very entertaining. The earliest radios must have come in about the time I was seven or eight years old, and they were a massive big multi-tube thing that again you could pick up probably only two or three stations in Butte. The theaters in Butte I don't remember exactly the number, but there probably were as many as eight different theaters at one time. They had live entertainment at a couple of them where they'd bring in some notionally known performers. The rest of them were movie theaters. The early ones were all silent movies, and at the silent movies there was usually a accompanist either on a organ or a piano down in front and it was usually a lady, one of them who played many of the theaters here was Grace Cunningham, and she was very clever in that she would space and time here music to whatever was going on the film. So if there was a horse thing where the cowboys were chasing the Indians she had nice rhythmic heavy-handed background music for it, and in the love scenes she'd have something soft and sentimental. The theaters were the ones I can remember were the Broadway, Emperies, Fox, American, Peoples, Liberty, the Walkerville theater, the Harrison Ave. theater, and I think there must have been another one or two that I can't recall right now. It was, the

first ones I can remember going to as kids was probably the Liberty which was five cents, and then it went up to ten cents, and then one of the theaters down on Pack Street which was The Peoples had buddy day I think Saturday and you got in two for fifteen cents. They changed the movies about twice a week, they were by that time they were in the later twenties they were sound movies, and the theaters were well attended. A couple of them like the Realto I didn't mention on the corner of Park and Main Street was a very nicely done attractive theater inside with plush carpets, and gold backgrounds, and beautiful curtains. It was just an elegant place to go.

Chris: What do you remember about the Columbia Gardens?

Doc: The Columbia Gardens was built a considerable time before I was born, I think I probably started going there earlier than I can remember because it was the usual thing that parents would take their kids up to Columbia Gardens, because it was such a delightful place. You went to the Gardens usually by riding the street cars even though my parents at that time did have a car, but usually you got out in the street car where ever you were in town, and you rode the street car up to the corner of Park and Main Street where you picked up the Columbia Garden street car, and it went out to the Gardens. I remember down about east Butte the streetcar line went over a high trussel and it was always a thrill for us kids to ride the streetcar. These were the big open jumbo streetcars, so you would be sitting in there and looking down this a probably twenty foot drop off of the streetcar. When you got up to the Gardens, there was a, the street car line made a circle, and the street cars would stop and unload, and then you would take off to do

whatever you were going to do. It had the roller coaster and the airplane ride and the merry go round. It had the big arcade where there was all sorts of carnival type games, places to eat, places to buy popcorn, and cotton candy. Then below that was the big pavilion the big dance hall, which was probably one of the largest dancing areas in the Pacific Northwest. It was a beautiful place, with all hardwood floors, and a bandstand on one side and a central bandstand in the middle. It had a probably about a four or five foot multi-mirrored ball that hung from the ceiling with a light shinny on it, a spotlight, and as it rotated it would flash all of its little lights around the dance hall. The dance hall had a balcony around the upper level and lots of people would go not to dance but just to sit in the balcony and watch the other people dance. They had dance competitions, there were some dancers who were absolutely elegant, not as professional as what you might see on TV today with dance competitions, but real beautiful dancers, and I don't know what the place would hold, but I imagine it would be a couple thousand people. In the Gardens itself there were playground equipment with swings and slides, there was picnic tables, there was a covered pavilion where you could eat, or you could barbeque your meals. They had a large hot house system, something which was fascinating for us coming from Butte, they had a big tropical room maybe a forty foot square with palm trees, orange trees, banana trees, and tropical flowers, and this was there all year round they kept it heated and were able to grow these things. In other parts of the hot houses they grew all their flowers that they displaced out in the Gardens themselves. There was one area up near the playground area, perhaps an area about fifty feet wide by a hundred feet that they planted nothing but pansies in and every Thursday the children were allowed to go in and pick all of the pansies that they wanted, so this was their special day on Thursdays. Also

up in the green house section there was a fish hatchery where they raised trout, and I don't remember where they planted them, but it was one of the early fish hatcheries in this part of Montana.

Doc: I think will look at another entertainment that we didn't cover yet, and that was skating. When we were children as even today the city had several rinks that they flooded in the wintertime and there was no charge of course they were public rinks. The rink that we used since we lived on Washington Street was the one where St. James hospital is now, and we would walk up there and bring our skates and we'd go skating. In the middle of winter right after Christmas the kids would gather all the discarded Christmas trees and they would build a shelter house out of the Christmas trees, and it seems unbelievable today, but inside of the shelter house made up of all these old dry Christmas trees they had a fire in a metal stove to keep the place warm, and its just a miracle that it never caught on fire. The fancier place to go skating was the Holland rink on south Montana. This was a, one where you had to pay, and I think it was a minimal amount you paid I don't remember, but probably like maybe twenty-five cents to skate, and they had a clubhouse where you could change, and leave your shoes. They had a place for something to eat, they had rental skates. The skating rink itself was about well half a square city block, and on the south side of it they had a fifty-foot louvered fence that was built there to keep the ice shaded so the ice would stay a little later on in the springtime. It wouldn't melt because this big louvered fence would keep the sun off it. On the east end of it was a hockey rink, and they had a, I think they were amateur hockey teams that played on that rink. They periodically to at the Holland rink had speed skating

competitions and I remember that there were two rivals for the state speed skating title, and one of them was a Tony Melensic, and Tommy Pentaluna. Pentaluna usually won, but once in a while Melensic would beat him out, but they were excellent speed skaters.

Doc: We'll talk about sleigh riding. This was our winter entertainment. In front of our house on Washington Street you could go from Porphyry Street to Iron Street that was a distance of four city blocks with a pretty good speed. The streets were dirt and they were snow packed, and most winters made very good sleigh riding. I could remember as a small child my brother Frank being, he must have been about maybe two years old, he was in an apple box that was nailed to a top of the sled, and my mother would kneel on behind him, and down the hill they'd go. I think that at that time I was probably about five, and I don't know whether I had my own sled, but my aunt Rose who lived with us probably rode down the hill with me. The older kids and the adults used bobsleds. These bobsleds were as far as I know homemade things. They would seat six to ten people with two movable runners on the front for steering, and two fixed runners on the back, and a pair of brakes that the last man, the rear rider would operate. These would start at Centerville in the north part of Butte and they would come down Montana Street and they would go all the way down to the Boulevard.

Doc: We were going to talk about the Rocky Mountain Café. Meaderville during the Prohibition time had cafes, and I think one of them was named the Rocky Mountain, not the one we're going to talk about. People from town would go down to Meaderville particularly for the Italian food, and beginning in 1933 when prohibition was repealed my

father, and Louie Beuni, and Teddy Triparish joined together to operate the Rocky Mountain Hotel, Rocky Mountain Restaurant pardon me. The Rocky Mountain was a supper club it had a dance floor in the front, an orchestra, and booths, the standard meal the chicken was a dollar, which included all of the things that you have today at Lydia's, and the steak dinner was a dollar and a quarter. In the back room there was a bar, and intermittently there was gambling in the back room, slot machines, a roulette table, a crap table, and probably a twenty one table. The Rocky Mountain occasionally would get quote raided, and the gambling would be shut down, and would be abated legally for a period of time and open up again some months later. I don't remember the time exactly, but the Rocky Mountain Café burned in the middle 1930's or late 1930's, and the operation was moved down the street block into what was called the Golden Fan Café, and the Golden Fan was purchased, by my father and Teddy Triparish, Louie Beuni had dropped out of the old Rocky Mountain operation some time before, and then from about that time on, Teddy Triparish ran the Rocky Mountain Café, and my father started in the early thirties had acquired the M&M quote cigar store on Main Street and he operated it pretty much until the time that he died in 1959.