THE VERDIGRIS PROJECT

KBMF & BUTTE-SILVER BOW ARCHIVES

DEBBIE SHEA

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A partnership between KBMF 102.5FM and The Butte-Silver Bow Archives.

With funding from The National Endowment for the Humanities, the Montana History Foundation, members of the Butte America Foundation, and SARTA.

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Oral History Transcript of Debbie Shea

Interviewers: Aubrey Jaap & Clark Grant
Interview Date: September 6th, 2019
Location: Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives
Transcribed: October 2021 by Adrian Kien

[00:03:20]

Aubrey Jaap: Okay. All right. It is September 6th, 2019. We're here with Debbie Bowman-Shea. Debbie, I'd like you to start and tell me a little bit of what you know, maybe about your grandparents or who first came to America, how they got here. I know you've done a lot of research on your family.

Debbie Shea: I have. And I'm grateful to the Archives for all the help that, you know, I received through the years and identifying some issues or some things about my father's family. My mother's family, I know quite a bit about. Her mom and dad came from County Cork, West cork. Her father was in Iriese [sp?] Parish in a town called Ardgroom and her mother was in Allihies parish in a town or a little village called Belnicarta [sp?] which is right on the coast, right off of Dursey Island on the mainland. They were only 40 miles apart but didn't know each other until they came to Butte.

And they came at the early part of the 20th century and they were young. They were in their late teens when they came. And, of course, my grandfather came to work in the mines because, you know, that area has a history of mining. The Allihies mine. And my grandmother came to do domestic work because that's what they did. They met at a Hibernian dance and married in 1911. Yeah. And had four children. They lived up on the Hill. They first lived on Ruby Street and then they moved to 519 North Montana and they raised their four kids there. They had Veronica. She married an O'Brien. And Emmett, he died young. He died in a car wreck when he was 17. Vivian, she married O'Keefe and my mother married Richard Bowman. So they lived there and then my mother was the youngest and when my grandmother died, my mother took care of my grandfather. And then when she got married in 1947, he gave her the house.

So my mom and dad had five children. I was the second of five daughters. And we were raised in that house until 1963. So I was 12 years old, I guess, 12 and a half. And then we moved to the flats, five girls, one bath, six counting my mother that didn't work out. My fondest memories really of my childhood are up on the Hill. We lived right just down, at the end of the block from the Montana Street tunnel. So every night you could hear the trains lulling you to sleep. Really, they didn't keep you awake. They just kind of were comforting to me, I guess. Yeah. We played all around the mines and you think about it now. It's just full of danger and, you know, accidents happening, but that was our playground. It was my mother's when she grew up. And so that was our playground as well.

You know, we'd go in the tunnel and hide behind the slats that were inside there. And then wait for the train to come through. That was the big daring thing. Come through the tunnel. Of course, the whole thing was that it would suck you under. All the stories you hear. But we played around there. Yeah. And there was lots of activity around there. Really wonderful neighbors. Friends that I'm still friends with that I grew up with up there.

Jaap: It seems like a very tight neighborhood. And like you said, it still is.

Shea: It still is. It was St. Mary's neighborhood actually. We all went to St. Mary's school. We attended St. Mary's church. I was baptized there as well. All my sisters made our first communion there. My parents were married in that church. So it really was . . . My mother graduated out of there as well, out of the church. It really was a significant part of my life. And there were several neighborhoods that were involved with St. Mary's parish that kind of were comprised of that area Dublin Gulch and Corktown, Muckerville, and the Anaconda Road. In later years several of us from the neighborhood would get together and have a little reunion. And we ended up writing a book.

And from the profits of that book, we put interpretive signage all over that area. So people have a sense or a taste of what went on back in the day, because right now, most of that has gone as you well know, Dublin Gulch is gone. The Anaconda Road is gone. Sparse houses in Corktown and Muckerville. But so it really needed to capture that, you know, while people were still alive. My mother just died. She was a hundred, but she was a part of that. And so she was in her late nineties when, you know, we got her memories from growing up in that area.

So. But anyway, it was a magnificent place to belong to. And I still have such devotion to that church and to that neighborhood and the friends there. In later years, my family, my mom and dad, we moved to Burke Lane and I attended St Anne's grade school. But my heart was still up on the Hill. And then I went to Girl's Central. I was the last class to graduate, all girls, out of there in 1969. And then they combined the next year. A lot of people think that was a shame that they combined. I always thought it was better off if you have both sexes, you know. It's more well-rounded I think in growing up and just going out into the world.

I remember one time at Central. The boys came in, I think it was our sophomore year and we were having PE and we were in these little uniforms that were ridiculous. But anyway. The boys came in to get some chairs. We all started screaming and running into a corner. Now, you know, come on. But I mean, that's just how it was. You were just so, you know, sheltered, even though you went to grade school with boys, then you became, you know, it just, I don't know. Anyway, I think it's healthier the way it became.

Jaap: So outside of school then did the boys and girls hang out or anything?

Shea: Sure. Yeah. Yeah. We had dances together. But it was very strict, very strict. I can remember our art teacher my senior year sent us outside and said, just go sit on the stairs or do something and draw a sketch. So I went outside and I was drawing the Knights of Columbus. Not well, by the way. I was never much of an artist, but two guys that I know in my class came up and stopped and talked to me and I can remember the nun coming out and calling me back in the school, not the art nun, but another nun, just furious that I was out there talking to boys.

I mean, really this is ridiculous, you know, but that's how it was back in the day. Just had my 50th class reunion. So that was a great class, class of 69. And we ended up graduating off the stage together, the boys and the girls, but normally that wasn't done either. They had separate graduations and so the only thing they really had were dances together.

Jaap: Did they merge your graduation because they knew they were going to be merging.

Shea: I believe so, yeah. It just made sense. So that was the first year they kicked that into . . . graduated out of the Civic Center. So. Anyway.

Jaap: So your grandparents met at a Hibernian hall dance. So do you know much more about that?

Shea: I don't and I wish I did. You know, my mother always said this, and this is a good lesson for all, ask lots of questions. You know, she said, I didn't ask them enough about the old country, how they felt leaving their parents.

Jaap: And they came alone?

Shea: They came alone and after they were married and had their four kids, they brought the oldest two back to Ireland for about three months. And the other two, my mother and her sister stayed here with an aunt, but most people did not go back. They didn't have the means to go back. You know. they sent what little they had, you know, to help out the situation there, but they didn't have . . . So they were fortunate in that they were able to go back. My grandfather was a bootlegger. Maybe that's why he had money. Well, when he first came here, he worked in the mines and then he had a little grocery store. And he had the grocery store when he went to Ireland, actually. And when he came back, three months later, all his money was in the books. So whoever's taking care of it didn't do a very good job, but he also had the bar at the time and he owned the Radio bar, which is just right across the street from here.

And so during prohibition, there were two bars, actually, back to back. There were two bars. And they'd go in and bust them. And then they'd go around the corner and do the other bar. He had three stills. One of the stills was in the basement of their house. My grandfather's house and my mother and her aunt remember waking up in the morning in the winter and the floors were so warm because there was something brewing downstairs, you know? And then he had a couple of other ones that were out in the nine mile, but that wasn't unheard of.

There was a lot of that one that went on here and it wasn't so notorious, I think, it was just, you know, a way of life. And so in later years we used part of his still at our cabin to haul water. And so it was kind of fun. It was copper, beautiful piece of hardware. But anyway, so that's what they did, but they were able to go to Ireland and then they never went back again. You know, and I just can't even imagine, but getting back to my mother saying that, you know, why you would, you know, ask all sorts of questions, which I do, you know, of my parents, because I knew that the time, you know, and of my aunts and uncles, because, you know, that's something you can never get back.

So she wished that had asked them how it felt that morning when they said goodbye to all their cousins and their grandparents, everybody. They left from Queenstown, it was at the time. It's Cove now. But their parents probably never saw them off on the boat. They probably just left the little village and that was it. And it just has to be heartbreaking. I just can't even imagine it. Never to see it again. Those were hard times in Ireland. They were very hard times. A lot of children were lost, babies. I know both of my grandparents' families lost lots of babies. It was hard times, hard times. So Butte was wonderful to them. It was great. My grandfather and my grandmother both loved Butte. And all of my mother's family stayed in Butte, raised their kids in

Butte. And I did the same. I raised my kids here too. And it's such a remarkable town and so full of history and love and warmth. And yeah.

Jaap: Did your mother often talk about growing up? Did you ask lots of questions?

Shea: Oh, she did. She had nothing but wonderful memories about her childhood. Swimming was big in my mother's life. She and her sisters all learned how to swim at the YMCA. Her older sister is in the hall of fame. She is in the Butte hall of fame for diving and swimming. Her name is Veronica Keely O'Brien. But they all swam there and my mother won lots of awards and honors for her swimming and her diving as well at the YMCA. So she thought everybody should swim, but their childhood, there were so many little pools that you could go to. And they went to Helena to a pool there. I can't remember the name of it. And everywhere. Boulder had a beautiful pool. So they swam every weekend.

My grandfather had a car and he took Sunday off and they went for a ride and they swam and then they got an ice cream cone on the way home. This is something that my mother told me about that you'd never do it now. But they went up to Echo Lake. Her mother made a big pot of stew and had lots of food. And they went up and left their four kids up there. And there were other kids that had gone up there for the summer and they just had a ball. And my grandparents would go up on weekends and check on them. And she said they had a Victrola wind-up record player. And they'd play that at night and dance. And then their mom and dad would leave on Sunday and leave them there. And kids everywhere. That's what they did. They pitched tents and kids were there everywhere. I mean, you'd be a little apprehensive about that now.

Jaap: I can't imagine. How old was your mom?

Shea: Well, she was probably, she said probably in seventh grade. Sixth or seventh grade. And then her siblings went as well. But it just kind of blows my mind that they . . . and she said a big hay wagon would come by and take them into Anaconda for a dance and or down to Philipsburg. It was just a different way of life back then wasn't it.

Jaap: And so they'd pitched tents and then stayed at Echo Lake and what would they do for food?

Shea: Well, my grandparents would bring lots of food every week when they'd come up. And they fed everybody. She said, they'd come from all over, all the tents, all around would come in.

Jaap: I've never heard that before. But they weren't worried about them swimming or drowning or anything because they were all very accomplished swimmers. They couldn't get into too much mischief. And my mother still has friends from Anaconda that she met in that time period just going up there. Life was more relaxed back then. Even when I was being raised, it was, you know, post-World War II. And it was different. You were worried about the bomb and you're worried about communists and the Russians, but still, you were just kind of secluded here in Butte and you'd just kind of had lots of confidence.

I can remember once though, when we were going to St. Mary's we had an all city air raid drill. Have you ever heard that story? I think it only happened once. At every school in the city of Butte at, I think it was like, 1:30, the air raid sounds went all over the town and we had practiced it. And you just picked up your books and you walked immediately home. Once you were there,

then you could just go out and play or whatever, but just in case. That was the Cuban missile crisis. It was during all that time period. So you did have a little apprehension about the world and what was going around in the world, but I'll never forget that. Just because it was unnerving, just to think about that that could happen. Those missiles were pointed right at us. Even though we were kind of secluded here, but still. And that was the time too, where people were digging shelters in their backyards and practicing in case something drastic happened. But it's nothing like what we're going through nowadays.

Jaap: How did your mother meet your father?

Shea: They met at the KC, the Knights of Columbus. They both played intramural ball, both were very good athletes. That didn't fall into my lap at all, but anyway They met there and that's where they used to hang out a lot. And this was after they graduated high school. Everybody just hung out at the KC and that's where they met. So she had a real affection for the Knights of Columbus Hall. But they married later in life. They were never in a hurry to get married. My mother said she had too much fun to look forward to, too much to do. So I think they were both 28 when they married, started a family when they were 30, which is kind of how the Irish do it. They're never in a hurry in Ireland. They marry later.

Jaap: Why?

Shea: I don't know. It could be a maturity factor, but I think there's a lot of life to live. And I think they thought that. They like to do stuff, travel with their friends. She was just never in a hurry to get married. But they had a great marriage. My parents had a wonderful marriage. My dad died in 1990, so she was 29 years without him. But anyway, they had a great marriage. I'm kind of babbling here.

Jaap: So tell me more about growing up when you were a girl. You went to school at St. Mary's. You told us about hiding in the train tunnel. What else did the neighbors do?

Shea: Well, everything was, I have to tell you, the people that lived across the street from us went to St. Pat's. So that's where they divided the two parishes. Everything was kind of centered around the church. It was big. If you were a Catholic growing up in Butte, which was the predominant religion here. It centered around the church. So we had a lot of church functions and a lot of things. I'll tell you a funny story about myself. I was in the choir. And so the nun that was head of the choir had these little rings that she would give out and they were just beautiful, just the ones you pinched together, or you can make them bigger or smaller, but anyway, they looked very nice in this little case. And you always wanted to win one.

Well, you had to go to mass and sing in the choir every day, including Saturday and go to communion, holy communion. I was striving for it. It was October and I was striving to do it. And Lee Whitney was the organist. She was vying for it too, but she ended up getting the flu for a few days. So I was thankful for that. No, I'm kidding. Anyway, so the last day, or the second to the last day, I was heading over to mass and I had my little bucket. And I don't know, are you two Catholic? Do you know this? Before you took communion back in that day, you couldn't have anything to eat or drink except for water, hours before you took communion or, you know, you'd go to hell, I think, or something like that. That was the story we heard anyway. So I'm heading over and my lunch bucket was leaking. My mother had put half a grapefruit in there, so I

put it up to my mouth and then I took the grapefruit and then I thought, "Oh my God, I can't go to communion and I won't get the ring." So I went in and I was really nervous about it all. And what am I going to do? What am I going to do? And so it was time for communion and I just stood up to take it. Going to hell and anyway, got the ring. And I think I lost the ring within a month. You know, that was my penance, I guess, my reckoning with . . . But anyways, isn't that funny how those things stay in your mind because you have that drilled into you, you know, don't take anything before you take holy communion. And that was very, very serious.

Jaap: Did Lee ever get a ring then?

Shea: Oh, she probably got one along the way. Yeah. Because she was the organist.

Jaap: I didn't know this.

Shea: That she played the organ up there. She was three years ahead of me. So when she was in eighth grade, when I was in fifth grade, when I won the ring, when she got the flu, when I slipped her that.

[00:23:58]

[inaudible] Oh my gosh. The things that, you know, just go in your head though that you remember. But that's one of them. The church was important though. It was very important in our lives. I can remember too, if you'd want to go to a movie, my mother had always sent us over to church to check the Legion of Decency. And so that was a list that came out periodically with all the current movies on it. And if it was on A list then we could go. A, A2, B, and then C. I think it was. And then B and then C was condemned, you know, that was the ones we would go over there and look and say, "I wonder what those movies are about." But anyway, my mother would always send us over and we'd have to check that out before we could go to the movie.

Jaap: Oh, that's fun.

Shea: Yeah. Yeah. One of the movies I remember we wanted to see was called *Dog Patch*. You guys probably don't remember that cartoon. Anyway, it was in the paper. It was in the funnies in the paper. I can't remember the characters. Anyway, we went over to see if we could see it and it wasn't on the list. So we went up to the rectory desk, the priest, Father McGuirk said, "Nope, can't see it. It's naughty." So in later years, even after I was married, I rented it. And it was so ridiculous. They had little short outfits on, you know, all the characters that lived in this Dogpatch but that was it. But anyway, it was naughty.
So we didn't get to go see it. So we led kind of a sheltered life in many respects, you know, between that and Girls' Central. But anyway, it was a great neighborhood and a great school to belong to.

Also during that time, I think I was in fifth grade when Kennedy died, I was in seventh grade, so fifth or sixth grade, we started PE program in the Catholic schools. We'd never had that. Because that was a big thing that John Kennedy was promoting physical health, physical education throughout schools in the United States and getting kids so they're in better shape physically. And so we would have this Bert Van Meal. Okay. He came from the Netherlands and I think he had tried out for the Olympics. But anyway, he took this on, so he'd go to all the Catholic

schools. And we'd bring our dimes. I think we had it on Tuesday or Wednesday. We'd bring our dimes and then a pair of pants. You know, if you had a dress on and a pair of pants and a shirt to change into, and we'd go march down to the basement of the church and do exercises and then play games.

But it was really fun. I mean, it was something that was different that we had never done before, you know, so we all looked forward to that every week. Every week, he was kind of stern, "move it, move it." There were a couple of girls that were a little heavy in the class and he'd say, "Move it, fatso." It was hurtful, you know, they'd go home crying. And so I guess he didn't understand the language very well. That that was really a derogatory term. But in terms of the idea, you know, the physical, it was great, you know, kids were just having fun and just something new back in the day.

Jaap: So did you grow up right next to the Original Mine then?

Shea: Kitty corner.

Jaap: Was that still rolling when you were growing up?

Shea: They weren't mining out of there and I think they'd quit mining out of there in the thirties or forties. I'm not sure, but they would send men down there and in there and then go into other mines, tunneling, through a tunnel in the other mines. But there was a big purple fence all around it. And there were lots that went on in there. There were a couple of warehouses that were in there that I'm sure they stored stuff in. And then St. Mary's school was in the mine yard, the Steward mine yard. So we left every day to the whistles of the mines when they broke for lunch, that's when we broke for lunch. And you just knew it all. You knew everything about what was going on with the times of the mines. And we never did get the schedule down for when the trains were coming through both of the tunnels.

But you could hear the whistle and that's when you'd run and get in there or go up on one of the shelves that were around the side of the tunnel. There were kind of little shelves you could sit on and just hold hands and wait for it to come out through the tunnel. You know, it was really exciting. It sounds silly now, but it was really fun to be around all that stuff, but dangerous. Some of the kids that lived in the Gulch, and on the Anaconda Road, Andy Antonovich would tell this story that they would have to climb under the train. They'd be parked. And if they were going to wait for the train to move, they'd miss getting back to school in time after lunch. So they'd crawl under there. And that happened in my mother's time and a classmate, well, it wasn't a classmate of hers, he was a couple years younger, but lost both of his legs. So it wasn't without danger.

And I can remember the Burnsies were the security guard that was around that whole area. And they're telling us to come in and to school. And if you ever see any explosives or caps or anything, to make sure that you don't touch them, you go tell. We took all that very seriously, very serious.

Jaap: But then I've heard from some men and they say the exact opposite. They say they showed us these blasting caps. And the first thing we did was basically see who could find the most. So I liked that there was a big difference between the girls and the boys.

Shea: Yeah. I could see them doing that. That's funny. That's funny. And I probably know the characters that did that, too.

Jaap: Yeah, probably some others in the class of 69. So when we talked to Lee, she talked about the mines and the noise all the time. And when it stopped, she said that was what was kind of, kind of scary because there were a couple of times things stopped and she thought, "Well, what's happening? Do you have anything like that that ever happened? That the mine stopped?

Shea: Well, here's one. Do you remember the big earthquake of 1959? So we were living up there. I think it was 59, 58, 59. But the strike was on and so it was just really quiet. And my mom and dad were upstairs. Every night, they had a cookie and a cup of tea before they went to bed. And we were all in bed and three of us stayed downstairs, or two of us, and three of my sisters were upstairs. Well, they heard this rumbling and at first they thought it was just the train going through the tunnel behind us. Because that was a normal sound. And then it dawned on them that the mines were on strike and that it was probably an earthquake and then it really started to move.

And so my mother said they sat there and they thought, "Oh, we got five kids. How do we get them out of here?" And you know, you only have two arms each. And my dad said to my mother, "Well, which one wasn't good today?" And she said, then they started laughing and they never did do anything. They just sat there and rolled with the earthquake. I don't remember so much that night hearing it, but the next day, we all slept upstairs, I mean on the main floor. And a lot of after-quakes, aftershocks that I felt, and then I just remember going up, driving up by Quake Lake and just, it was just so eerie that whole thing. Yeah. So you did notice though, but they were soothing sounds. And then, of course, the nine o'clock sirens all over town, you knew you'd better get home. You miss those kinds of things. Those were just part of every day. And then the bank had chimes that it would do the "Angeles."

And I can remember one day walking home from school and they were on the "Angeles" and this guy had knelt down and was just praying right there in the middle of the sidewalk to the "Angeles." I had never seen him before and I never saw him again, but, of course, I was staring at him. But it was a prayer and it was a powerful moment, but those are just little memories. And every Thursday, of course, going to the Gardens. We'd go down and get the bus and go to the Gardens. You got 15 cents each, you better spend it wisely. You know, you took your lunch and then you got 15, maybe even a quarter. But I think it was just 15 cents that my mother would give us as she shooed us out the door.

Jaap: What'd you like to spend your 15 cents on then?

Shea: Well, I liked the roller coaster, but I think that was a dime, you know? So that was the most fun. They had a lot of arcade games that you could play. I don't ever remember getting food or anything because we already packed our lunch. We didn't need to do that. So just play them on the rides. The merry-go-round and the airplanes, I can't remember what they're called.

Biplanes! They were a nickel. So you could go on those but you had to spend your money wisely. Yeah. But there was a lot of fun out there. Anyway, you could play in the creek and then all the swings and all those things on the upper playground were all for free. So that was fun. Yeah. Yeah. And of course that was a little different than in my mother's day. They had the zoo back then and there was a little lake back at that time.

But we had all of our high school proms in the pavilion there. And I remember seeing Gary Lewis and the Playboys there in the pavilion and I had a lot of fun dances too. Yeah, it was a great place. Lovely. But you know, through the years people quit using it. They really did. They had campers or they were going elsewhere. They were going out on picnics and then when they were going to close it down, then everybody was up in arms. Rightfully so. But it got most of its use in earlier days when people . . . that was all they had.

Jaap: I saw it was in the newspapers around that time one time and yeah, there was like a resurgence when they announced it was going to close. You could see all of the sudden just people kind of like, yeah. You know, hosting a lot of events up there, but yeah, it seemed like it did.

Shea: A group from Butte went to Idaho to talk to a Senator there. And his name was Frank. I can't think of it. Because they thought that he could, I can't remember the name of the committee he was on in Congress, in the Senate to see if they could get some funding to keep it open. But of course, they wanted to mine it, that's all there was to it. But I even have a bumper sticker that says, "Save the Gardens." So that was 1973, I think it closed.

Jaap: Or closed in 72 and then the fire in 73. Yeah.

Shea: Around that time frame. I lived in Anaconda home up there. When they were moving all the people out of the Gardens. In the early years of my marriage, we lived in a house up there just, and then moved it.

Jaap: Did you move the house?

Shea: Moved the house.

Jaap: Where did you move the house to?

Shea: To Utah street. 4646 Utah. It was a big production. Pesanti moved it. Had to take it up over the highway and it was a big deal. Big deal. How we got it out of the gardens . . . because that's out by the airport where we moved it to . . . So that was quite a, yeah.

Jaap: A lot of people moved their houses, but I never thought . . . were there a lot of homes being moved on the street? We have photos of them being moved, but I guess I never thought about . . .

Shea: The Gardens, Meaderville, McQueen all those houses. We lived in a little house when I was first married too, in McQueen that had belonged to a Turk family. And then they got it back for a dollar and they moved it. Their daughter was moving to Livingston and they moved that house to Livingston. Yeah. All over. That was a big . . . there were two or three different companies that moved houses. Try to salvage something. Rather than tearing them all down.

Yeah. Because you displaced a lot of people in those areas - in the Gulch area, Anaconda Road, McQueen, Meadville. You're displacing a lot of people, so that's a lot of homes. Yeah.

Jaap: After high school, what'd you do?

Shea: After high school, I went to college. My first year I went to Eastern Montana College in Billings. And then I decided to transfer to MSU. So I went there for two years and then I dropped out of college. My boyfriend at the time had been killed in a car wreck and I just was kind of trying to find myself, you know? Yeah. So I dropped out and I was a teacher's assistant. That was the first year they had those up at the Sherman school, half day and half day at the Washington school. And then I saved some money and backpacked through Europe. And that was fun. Yeah. I was gone about six weeks. There were three of us, three girls. We were all blond and all kind of chunky. And when we were in Italy, we were very popular. They were pinching us left and right which got annoying, by the way, it was just really annoying. So then we went North and nobody paid any attention to us. We didn't like that either. But anyway, it was a good way to see . . .

Jaap: Could have been a nice middle ground.

Shea: We had Eurail tickets and then we hitchhiked all through England and Wales. And then when we got to Ireland, we rented a car and then I had a lot of family in Ireland, so we just stayed with them and that was great. That was my first taste of Ireland. I've been back eight times since. So I love Ireland.

Jaap: When you first went to Ireland, did you kind of have the same connection? Had you had that connection to Ireland as a sense of that's where my family's from, or were you still young enough that you kind of were?

Shea: No, I knew it. And my mother had corresponded with . . . she had aunts and uncles and first cousins. But I'd never been there and I'd wanted to go there since I was young. I just wanted to go there. And so when I landed, it's almost like a sense, like you belong there. It's just an incredible feeling like, you know, this is where . . . you just immediately feel a sense of, of belonging and your roots. And so I was there for about a week was all, and then came back and then I made many visits after that, but that was a really nice experience for me. It was a real, I think, growing experience.

You had your backpack and you were on your own, and you didn't have cell phones. And I can remember once being in Rome and calling home and having, I knew just a very little French and some guy that was in this bar/tavern that we were at could understand me. And he helped me make the call home. And my parents were so excited to hear from me. And I wrote all the time, I wrote postcards all the time and my dad was so mad when I got home because they didn't get them. And then a week or two after I'd been home, all these postcards started coming. So they were understandably worried, you know? Three girls on their own. Yeah. But it was a growing experience. And then I came back and went back to school and got my teaching degree.

Jaap: Then where'd you go to teach?

Shea: Always in Butte. McKinley is where I started. McKinley on the way to Tech, started there. And then I went out to East, no, actually I started at Greeley. I was at Greeley first and then McKinley. And then I went out to East and that's where I retired from East. I was there for a long

time. I was there when it was a junior high and the middle school. So. Yeah, I loved teaching. It was very good. It was wonderful. I think when you're a mother and I was a single mother at this time, raising two kids, it was a good thing. You don't make a lot of money, but you had your summers with your kids. And it just was a good way. It was a good life for me and I loved teaching. And I left it, I think it was in 2000. I left teaching. It was over an interesting contract that was not good for any of us. And so I worked for AFL-CIO and then I became the executive director for the Montana mining association and ended up retiring from there. The position then was going away.

So, I actually retired too young. I wouldn't recommend that to anybody. You know, I was 62, but I think you're smart if you can stay working and stay active. So I do a lot of subbing now. It's just fun to be around kids. I love being around kids. Yeah. Yeah. But I only did the junior high and the high school. The little ones are just too much work. And their curriculum has changed so much, you know? I mean, just this new way of doing stuff and not that you couldn't catch onto it, but I'm familiar with the junior high. And I taught at the middle school. I taught there for so many years and high school and those are the kids that I kind of related to all along anyway. They're the ones I love teaching.

Jaap: So a lot of differences then from when you first started teaching?

Shea: Oh, sure. And all positive things. I mean, you have to change and you have to understand that. But the sad part, I think, is you can't be really sort of creative. And like when I was teaching at East, I started this women in history month and we just did so much about women in history and learned about all these women and all this, and you can't take that. You can't do that now. You couldn't take that kind of time to do that. It's so structured. Now you have to follow so many guidelines because, you know, you have to pass this test and you have to do this and you have to, so you really don't have that flexibility anymore, which is too bad because I think you miss out on some really fun things to explore and to do.

Jaap: I agree. Yeah. That testing . . .

Shea: It's just really intense now, but it's a competitive world. So what else can you do? You know, and Butte has held its own. I'll tell you. I was on the school board for many years. And Butte, I think, they have an excellent school system. Excellent. And then during that time period, I also was in the legislature. I was in the House for three and a half years. Dave Brown, he left. And so I was appointed to that. Then I ran another term and then I was in the Senate for eight years. And that was fun. That was interesting. You could do a lot of good things. One of the bills I carried, we saved the Whitehall mine.

A lot of the Democrats were not happy with me because that was the time when you were really moving to the environmental side. But you can't forget where you come from and mining is the mainstay here, and it was an important thing. And in Whitehall, a lot of Butte people worked in the Whitehall mine. So we fought really hard for that bill. And in the end we wanted to do something a little more, but in the end we ended up saving that mine and another small little mine. It was a gold mine, so they had heap leach and all that stuff. And so it was controversial, but that would have been devastating for Whitehall, devastating. You know, they're going to have a hard time anyway, now. But that was that many years ago. So, I think we did a lot of good things in the legislature. I learned a lot. It's not an easy job.

So I raised two kids too as a single mother. They're both wonderful people. And my son got a business degree and a culinary degree and he moved to Ireland for a while and worked in the culinary industry there. That was fun for him. And my daughter married a really great guy and they have two children and they own two restaurants in Boise. So I eat well when I go to Boise, that's for sure.

Jaap: Yeah. The food connection. How did that happen?

Shea: It didn't come from me, I can guarantee. My daughter still makes fun of how I used to make their lunches in the morning, always in a hurry, trying to get myself to school and them to school. And she exaggerates this a bit, but you know, she's pretending like I'm putting peanut butter on a piece of bread and slapping it all over and throwing it together and shoving it in a sack. They liked to make fun of me, but I wasn't quite that bad. They ate ok. But no, I'm a fair cook, but both of my kids are into that. And they really know a lot about food and a lot about wine. And so don't get it for me.

Jaap: That works pretty good though. You get to reap all the benefits.

Shea: You know, the Irish aren't known for their [cuisine].

Jaap: I was going to say, what kind of culinary do you do in Ireland?

Shea: Lots of potatoes. Although in Kinsale, Ireland, that's where my son worked and that's known to be kind of the culinary spot to go. They have wonderful restaurants there, lots of seafood.

Jaap: Do they serve traditional foods?

Shea: They do. They have lamb, but they also have some . . . They've expanded and they have a little more creativity. They bring in chefs from, you know, European chefs in there. And so they learned a lot. Yeah. So anyway, that's my life. Oh, and just one other thing I would say about my father. My father was adopted. And so I know very little about his family, very little. We knew that his mother had died in a boating accident and that he was born here in Butte. They thought she was a nurse that lived on the Anaconda Road and her father was a big shot with the Anaconda road. So that's what we had to go on.

And then in later years he got his adoption papers and it showed the woman's name to be Josephine Brown, which that wasn't it, that was a made up name. But I did a ton of research in this building. And there's so many wonderful research opportunities here at the Archives. And I just was blessed to have all your help. And so I did a lot of research later to find more out about this person, but I also did my DNA. And that connected me to a second cousin, it showed. But it actually was a half-first cousin and I asked her one day when I was getting to know her, what she knew about her grandmother. And she said, I don't know much. She died in a boating accident. And so that's kind of what connected us. And so then I met other people and then did a lot of research up here and later wrote a book about it which was fun. So just to kind of connect and my father would have loved that. You know, I always felt bad that he didn't, he always longed to know if he had a family and he loved the people. Of course, the parents that adopted him, they were wonderful to him, but he never had any siblings and nieces and nephews, so he would have loved that.

Jaap: Yeah, you can always have that sense of kind of where . . .

Shea: Just curiosity, of course. So anyway, I was able to do that and this summer two of his nieces and a nephew came up to meet us. Some of them are still in denial. One of them, her husband said, well, that can't be true because women didn't have sex out of wedlock back then. Okay. All right then. Yeah. Can you believe that? And that's a true story. He emailed that to me and I was like, are you kidding me? But anyway, they were lovely. And we were delighted to meet them, just absolutely delighted.

So we'll continue with that relationship, but like I said, there's so many things. I wanted to bring them up here, but they were mostly here on the weekends, so we didn't get that done. But they'll be back and just to see their roots and where their grandmother lived. And their grandparents, their great grandparents. He ran the machine shops, all the machine shops for all the mines. So he was head of machinery for the mines. So there's a good history there. And I've learned a lot about him coming here and doing a lot of research. So it's great. People are so blessed in this town to have this place to come to. To have so many avenues and resources to answer their questions.

Jaap: So kind of a question we ask everyone is, I guess, around this kind of changing the subject, but what do you think of Butte now? Kind of where it's come from and where it's at now and what do you see? Where's it going? Do you think it's going to grow, decline, remain stagnant?

Shea: Well, first of all, so I was around . . . my father never worked at the mines, but I witnessed a lot of strikes and a lot of neighbors and people, how people really had a difficult time. They struggled and I've seen that in this town. And when I was growing up, there were ten Catholic grade schools, 11 Catholic churches, 22 public grade schools, close to that anyway. They were everywhere. And so you can see that decline. So I've seen that happen. I've seen the population drop but I've also seen the resilience of this town and of the people and their determination to reinvent themselves and be diverse in our economy.

And the mine is still so important. Mining is so important to Butte. So I really promote mining here. But we're diversified and there's so many other things that are going on. And it's because, I really believe this, it's young people that are here, that are enthused about being here. Us older generation, we love being here and we'll do anything to help sustain it and keep it going. But to have young people like you guys, and just that are in government that are in all of these programs that are promoting the city. I think that makes a difference. You need young people. You need young people to sustain a community and to make it go. So I have all the faith in the world that Butte will continue to grow. It's kind of a slow growth. You know, you don't see a real immediate, large growth, which I think is good. You grow with it, you know.

But it's just a wonderful place. And my kids both live in Idaho, live in Boise, but they love coming home. My son-in-law loves just seeing the history here and the richness of the community. And when my mother just passed away two months ago, just how the community supported us, all the people that were at her funeral and all the . . . you don't always find that for a hundred year old lady. But this is a unique community. This is a community that just values the people and cherishes the friendships. And I think it's unique. I think Butte is a very unique setting and it's a very unique community. So it's lovely. I'm proud of it. Yeah.

Jaap: So Clark might have a few questions he wants to ask if you don't mind, Deb.

Shea: Okay. I'd put the Jack of hearts on the Queen . . .

Grant: I'm not just playing solitaire. Yeah. I had about a dozen things I just noted while listening to you speak. And so I'll start kind of at the end and we'll go back in time. But along these lines of how Butte is doing now, do you think Butte could exist post Montana resources? Because they are 25% of the tax base.

Shea: Well, I think it can. But you just hope that there'll be more going on here at the time. And there are. There's things coming in all the time and who knows when the mine life has finished, it's still got quite a ways to go. What technology is going to be around? What other things are going to be . . . what innovative thing is going to be around that Butte can be a part of? You just have to market it, you know? And I think we've got some young, energetic people that are doing that. Always bringing things in, but that's always been such a . . . you've relied so much on the mines, you know? And now I remember even during Don Peoples and he was just a great chief executive, but he just knew how important that was. How important it was to diversify as well. And we're lucky to have Northwestern here. That they're headquartered here and yeah, I think they'll be all right. But constantly, you have to work at it.

Grant: Did you ever have much involvement with Superfund?

Shea: You know, I haven't been involved in it. I get all my information from Fritz. I love Fritz. I was in the legislature with him. I count on his information. Of course, I followed it, you know and was involved on different levels. Both when I was executive director for the mining association too, we had some involvement with that.

Grant: How did you come into that position? Seemed like a real shift.

Shea: It was a shift and especially for a Democrat. Well, because of my legislation, when I was in the legislature and I always supported that and there was a Democratic governor coming in, Brian Schweitzer and so I think they wanted somebody that was in that position, they were looking for, you know, an executive director. I think they wanted somebody that was passionate about mining that was familiar with it, but also had some connections with Democrats and also was, you know, I consider myself an environmentalist as well. I lean to a lot of those environmental issues, but I also see that you can't not support mining.

Where would we be if we didn't mine? So maybe those things combined probably led them to hire me. But they had times, I know, that they were frustrated with me because I couldn't go against some things that I just couldn't . . . you can't mine in our parks . . . there's just limitations. And so there were some things that . . . Anyway, my life there, that was fun though. I enjoyed that, but that's how that came about. I'm sure that's why they hired me.

Grant: Sounds like it must've been difficult at times.

Shea: Very. Working with my own party was difficult because people that were not connected to Butte . . . and when I was in the legislature people loved Butte. I can remember one of my dear friends over there said, "Oh, I wish I was from Butte. I just love Butte." But they also saw a lot of the problems that came out of here with the Superfund issues. All of the waste that went down

to Missoula. And even when I had this one bill, this was right after they passed, that prohibited cyanide mining. So that shut down the Whitehall mine completely. So we had a bill that we put together that I sponsored and I can remember people coming from, we had to have special security in there. [Inaudible] and I were carrying the bill and we had to have special security that would come to those meetings. We were threatened by the environmentalists. That's how they worked, a lot of them, back in the day. And have security take us out of the meetings and at night and you were just trying to educate them about you don't shut down a community and this is a resource that you need, you need mining, you work with it and you try to help people.

You don't just completely cut off their livelihood. And so it wasn't easy and it wasn't easy working with my own party on that. A lot of people were mad at me, but they weren't from Butte, so they didn't get it and they weren't from Whitehall and they didn't see that those were important jobs and they weren't looking at the big picture and I think that's true even with on a national level now with the coal mines and they are dangerous and they are you know, and they really are. But you don't shut off people's livelihood. And when Hillary Clinton said that she was gonna shut down all the coal mines. I think that was her demise because, you know, all those people in West Virginia and that always voted Democrat and always supported that all of a sudden thought why am I going to support somebody when I'm going to be out of work?

[00:59:51]

And so you have to work with people. And if you had something to take the place of that industry for those people, but you had nothing. And so I think that's really what you got to think about down the road. And that was the difficulty I had in that job. One of the difficulties. That was also the time of dereg. And that was very controversial. We all suffered the consequences of that. But you went with the information you were given at the times.

Grant: Are you referring to Touch America?

Shea: Yeah. Yeah.

Grant: What was your involvement there?

Shea: Well, we were in the legislature. The legislature had to, you know, pass that . . . there was so much controversy, I guess, over it, but coming out of Butte there wasn't. Butte was pretty solid because Montana Power was here and they told us in order to sustain and keep jobs here, they had to . . . that's where they were going and that's where they were diversifying. And we didn't just go into it blindly. We had meeting after meeting, after meeting and I can remember one time Joe Quincy asked Bob Gannon if his intention was to shut down the generation plants, all the dams and I had been warned about that too.

That's the one thing you don't want to do. And he said, no, no, that wasn't going to happen. Well, immediately after that happened . . . and I'm not blaming Bob, because I really don't think he thought that was going to happen either. It just was so. It was just a sign of the times, but it was hard. It was just so hard. And at first when it happened, they were going to erect a statute to them because they were doing so well. And then that whole Touch America kind of fell through. And so there were a lot of those kinds of times too.

Grant: You're one of the few people who doesn't blame Bob Gannon.

Shea: I probably am. In the end, I have a little problem with how it was handled, but he would never intentionally have done something to hurt Butte. I do believe that. He was a Butte boy and he would never have hurt Butte or done that. But in the end when all the people lost their money, those that were the big shots at the power didn't and that's . . . and I had a little problem with, but I know he didn't do anything intentionally. I know that. And nobody would, I mean, your intention was always just sincere and pure, but . . . Anyway that turned out.

But there were a lot of good things that happened in the legislature and just a lot of good people working together. And yeah, I carried a gun-free school bill that the NRA sent somebody in after me after. And you know, oh my God.

Grant: Was it worth it?

Shea: To be in the legislature? Or carrying the bill?

Grant: Being threatened.

Shea: Well, for something like that. Yeah. I think for all of those things, yeah. You know, you're saving jobs, but it's scary. It's intimidating, you know? That's their point. They're trying to intimidate you. Big guy, big guy from Florida, they sent in. Anyway, that bill passed, not because there was a strong conscience over there about guns, but because there was federal money tied to it for highways. So that ended up passing, but anyway, yeah.

Grant: Could you talk about the Tea Party influence in the state legislature? I know there's a big influx in that period.

Shea: Yeah. There was a big influx and we were just kind of getting to know them. They were a strange lot in my opinion. And the Republican party just kind of lost control. You saw that on a national level and you saw that on the state level. Several of them I knew personally and I thought they were great. I mean if you're out socially with them or if you're talking in the halls and you're not talking about that, but I could not understand. I could not understand their direction at all. And I still can't to this day.

Grant: Is it their motivation to dismantle government from within?

Shea: I think so. I think so. Yeah. And it's calculated. It's just not something that happened that has no thought behind it. It's well thought out. It's well calculated. And I think they're losing. I'm trying to be kind here. Just by the actions of what's going on in the current administration and so many of the philosophies that he's drawing from. I think it's going to get him in the end. I think you always need a little shakeup, you know, just to keep everybody honest and keep it all, but this has been a nightmare and I think it's all started with them and the Koch brothers.

So, you know, they have theirs and then throwing out all that stuff about socialism. That's so misunderstood and people don't understand what socialism is and you know, they're thinking, no. Back in the day and they're throwing in fascism and communism and getting it all mixed up. But you know, I guess I'm just a dyed in the wool Democrat. But Butte Democrats are kind of moderate. I think we are for the most part. So anyway, I'm going on here.

Grant: Another question I had, when people describe it as a citizen legislature, I was curious if you could tell us how that works. You're expected to basically be a volunteer at the legislature and have your career separate from that.

Shea: Yeah. Well, I was teaching at the time and I was able to take a leave of absence and I think they encouraged that because they wanted a voice there for education. So there were several of us actually that were in education from Butte during the years that we were over there. So you didn't make a salary. You just didn't lose your salary. They compensated the district for what . . . so that was about it. You got room and board. It's only three months, every other year. You had assignments that you had during the summer. It was like a meeting for three days, then you got board, but otherwise they just do mileage. I don't think we got compensated for that. I can't remember. Isn't that funny? Not much if we did. Yeah.

You didn't make any. I think back in the day though back in the day, not much before I was there, people got a nice little pension from being in the legislature and had a lot of those nice little benefits, but that was long gone by the time I got there. So you just put in your time and that was it. We had insurance when we were there, but I never took it because I had my school insurance, but then that was gone after. You didn't get it for life or anything. So, is that what you're referring to as the citizen?

Grant: Well, I'm curious. Do you think it functions effectively?

Shea: I do and I don't. I think that citizens, yes, I do. I do that. The way the Montana legislature, I think it'd be more effective if it was every year and they could divide it up. They could do a lot of the budget stuff in one year and then all the other bills that might come down. To me it would be much more effective because as a result, you had a lot of special sessions. You had a lot of committee work in the summers. But I don't know. I think they've tried to do that a couple of times. And then also term limits, I think was a mistake. And they keep saying that now out of Congress - term limits, but you know, you've got that institutional memory. That's so important as well. And so if you don't like what somebody is doing, vote them out.

But if they're really contributing a lot and they really have a clear understanding of government . . . I've noticed since then a lot of them now are switching back from House to Senate, to House, to Senate. But at the beginning, they were repeating a lot of things. You know, they were introducing bills that had no chance of having any life where you would have known that before. Don't put that in there because that's going nowhere, don't waste our time.

And so I've seen a lot of things like that. And I think they worked better together back when I was there, Republicans and Democrats. I had some great role models when I went in there. We had JD Lynch, of course, and Bob Pavlovich who's just a tremendous guy. Joe Quilici, Fritzy Daily, Dan Harrington, those were all people that were seasoned and, you know, were able to show me the ropes. And they did a fine job. And they got along well with the Republicans. They worked well with them. They did a lot of things for Montana Tech because they worked together. You're not going to get anywhere, if you're putting up a wall. So I don't, I see that with, of course, Jim Keenan. I see that with our Butte boys, they've done a good job. And girls, I shouldn't say just, yeah.

Grant: Speaking of the KC and JD Lynch, I have a friend who bartends at the KC and JD would come in and order a beer. And as Daniel was kind of new to bartending, JD would go, "That's not my glass." He had a special glass.

Shea: You got his voice down good. Oh yeah. He was a kick, but I'll tell you what, was he ever effective up there. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. And he lobbied for years after. He was very good at that. I tried that. That was not my deal. I didn't like the lobbying at all, but I think you really appreciate a good lobbyist that's honest with you. They educate you. Otherwise, you can't know about all that stuff. So they're not all a bad group.

Grant: I'm curious too, kind of structurally about the school board in Butte and how that runs. The philosophy there and your involvement.

Shea: Way back when, I think when Ellen Crain's dad, Kevin, was on the school board, I think they had parties then. You belonged to a party. And I don't think it was Democrat and Republican. I think they might have had other names. But anyway now you just run at large. I just wanted to do it. I was done with the legislature and I just needed something to do. And education was something I had a great interest in. And so that's why I ran. And I think when I first got on there, the piece, there were some people on the board that were really wondering why I was doing this.

They really weren't very friendly to me. Why are you in here? You know. Then they realized that I didn't have an agenda. It was just something to do with my time. And give back a little bit. School boards work hard. They work hard. There's no compensation there. It's all volunteer. They work hard. You have to know a lot of issues and you have to work with the superintendent. When I was there, I lost some friends over my position there. And so I was ready to leave because that's hard. When they're asking you to do something and you cannot do it for them, because it's not good for the rest of the kids in the school.

So you have to make some tough decisions. You know, every decision you make has to be with kids in mind and what's best for the kids. But I think it runs pretty smooth and I just admire people. And Patty Hepler has been on there for years and she's given so much of her time to the school board, Ann Brady, and Ann Boston, and just a lot of them. And it's all volunteer, so not easy.

Grant: Are there issues in Butte schools that are unique to Butte?

Shea: I don't know that. I'm trying to think. The funding sources, a lot of it is tied in with mining. I think they have issues that are drug-related, and I might be naive. I don't think you see it as much as you see it in others, and I'm still around, and I know what's out there. But I don't think so. They're pretty standard.

Grant: You had alluded earlier to a contract that precipitated your departure from teaching? I was curious if you'd like to elaborate on that.

Shea: Yeah, that got to be really bad. Well, one of the things that our union, the Butte teacher's union, first of all, we were a part of the Montana Federation of Teachers. And then it combined with the MEA, Montana Education Association. But for most of my tenure we were just unique

to ourselves. So Anaconda and Butte, we had our own union. Then when they started combining, a lot of things that we had that were unique to us, that we're not able to visualize all the schools having. Then they tried to whittle away at those things. And one of them was that we were guaranteed insurance in our retirement. So we could retire . . . let's say if you have 25 years in, you could retire and you would have your insurance, you wouldn't have it paid in full, but you gotta keep it in. I think the time I left, it was like a third of it was paid by the district. So that was one thing. And we forewent a lot of raises in order to keep that particular thing. And there were some things with seniority so when this came in, then they started to whittle away at those things.

So you weren't able to retire when you wanted to. You weren't able to have that insurance option. They were taking away some of the days that you had accrued, that you could get. They were just taking all the way, a lot of those things, because other towns, people would be saying, well, Butte has that, why don't we? So it'd be easier just to take it away. And that's basically what it came down to. The union had changed hands and several of us thought some of these changes that were taking place and there's a lot more history to it . . . I'd have to review it, I'm forgetting over these years, but anyway in the end they let a few of us retire early. That's what drove me out because I was losing all those benefits which is a shame but that's how it was. So yeah, our union was very strong, I think until we combined. Now it's not feisty.

Grant: Our office for our radio station is right across the hallway from the Teachers' Union in the basement over at the Carpenters' Union Hall. And so I can say it's still feisty. I'll tell you what. Mike Kennison will be on the phone.

Shea: Mike's a good one. Yeah. And Mike Kujawa, Karen. Yeah. Yeah. I was the vice president of it for several years and I ran the cope committee. It was a really good union, but anyway, those things happen and you just got to move on.

Grant: I'm curious what subjects you taught and did you have some overarching philosophy when teaching? Something that guided you?

[01:16:58]

Well I taught sixth grade first, and then when I went to East, I taught English and history. And then when it became a middle school, I taught just the history piece of it, the social studies. I loved kids and you gotta have a rapport with kids. And at that age, I think you got to really kind of know what makes them tick. You know, you got all the hormones kicking in at that age and that's not easy. So you know, I won a few awards during the time, so I think I did a good job teaching, but you gotta like it. There's not a lot of money in there. But we're blessed. We've got wonderful teachers in Butte, wonderful teachers. Yeah.

I don't know that I have any particular philosophy, just know your subject and like kids and make it fun for them. You know, that's why it's so structured now. You know like we had that women in history. That was so much fun. And then the last day of it, everybody dressed up as their favorite women in history. And even the boys would too. And I remember Mike Foley, (do you know him, the teacher?) he dressed as the Statue of Liberty. And we had teachers that would tease me. And Dale Bergman was a wonderful teacher, but he'd say, "Come here. I want you to see my tribute to women in history." And he had a jar of ashes and that was Joan of Arc. He was

just giving me a bad time. And I was full of myself. So I didn't think it was too funny at the time. But now looking back on it, I think it's hilarious. But you can have fun. You gotta have fun. Not be so structured.

Grant: Was it exciting to see the kids' curiosity satisfied and they have a revelation?

Shea: Yeah. Yeah. I even saw that in history. You probably see that more in science and math and all of that. But yeah, yeah, it did. And the kids are just . . . it keeps you young, I think, just seeing how they see what's going on in their lives. And yeah, it was just fun. Good part of my life teaching wise.

Grant: So I've just had a couple more here. I'm kind of going backwards. You had used the word earlier "displacement" with regard to McQueen and Meaderville. And I was just wondering if you could speak more about what you observed and that displacement and how you think it affected Butte long-term.

Shea: Yeah, well you had all these individual communities. So where I was raised at the beginning of my childhood was predominantly Irish. And Meaderville, of course, you had the Italians and some Austrians. And McQueen that area down by . . . I'm just saying . . . a lot of times you point out key areas of Butte by churches. So St. Joseph's around that area was all a lot of French. And so people kind of kept their ethnicity alive. And not that they don't today, but to a real extent they did. And they lived within those communities and you had, you know, just that commonality within those communities.

And I know in college or in high school, I hung out with some guys that were from McQueen and Meaderville. And so I learned a lot about their culture down there and about wine making and just how that was an important part of their lives and they had the grappa and their eating and they just had different . . . and so when they started to get displaced and just kind of scattered throughout the city, whether it was Dublin Gulch, or it was Meaderville or whatever . . . you didn't have that sort of ethnic tie in. They still carried that, but they didn't do it as a community so much. You were just everywhere in Butte then.

So you became, I guess that became more of a fruit bowl over you know, yeah. And so you didn't have that specific . . . So I think that's what I saw. And it was hard for these people. It was really hard. I know that Andy Antonivich, I don't know if you've talked to him, but he's always up on the Anaconda Road. He has had just such a terrible time. He said that he went up there all the time. I did too, though. I used to go up and go to novena at St. Mary's and do all sorts of stuff just to kind of keep that . . . but it'll never be the same again. You just can't bring it back. And so it was a unique part of Butte. A unique part that my kids never witnessed growing up here because all that was gone. My parents certainly did.

And I did, to a large extent, you saw that uniqueness. That was I think special, but I mean they brought that out into wherever else they're living and you just didn't have that tight group of people that had that commonality.

Grant: Was it just a matter of mining? They just needed to mine there? Or was there some on the Anaconda's part? Was that a deliberate tactic to break up these neighborhoods?

Shea: Oh no, no, no, no. That was all about mining. It's all about money. Yeah. No I'm sure they'd love the part of those groups because you know, what made it special, but no they even talked about mining up here and there's so much wealth underneath this town, but I know that was going through their head at one time, but you know, that's a . . praise God, that will never happen.

But no, it was just all about money and Dublin Gulch really was very old at that time. You know? There were some houses that were good in there, but a lot of them were boarding houses that were torn down. And so neighborhoods are getting old and you have to . . . but then the mining just moved in on them, you know? And that's what happened with the Gardens. It was all about mining, but kept people employed too. So, but that was heartache. I know that was a heartache for a lot of people.

Jaap: Do you think if even the company hadn't bought up those properties, do you think people would have moved out anyway and dispersed?

Shea: Well, kind of, because it was run down, it was getting run down, you know and people marry. And so then if there were no homes there for them to go into, then they move elsewhere. Like with my mother, when she stayed in her family home, her sisters moved to the flats because not everybody could stay up there and there wasn't and those neighborhoods got run down and the houses got tired and . . . So, yeah, it's a natural progression. I think it really is . . . hard to . . . It just got sped up by the mine. Yeah. Yeah. So yeah.

Grant: You mentioned strikes earlier. What do you recall about strikes in Butte?

Shea: Well I recall one strike that went on and on and on, and I was, Hmm, I'm trying to think, but I was maybe in sixth grade or something and it was never ending. You know, my dad didn't work in the mines, but all my neighbors . . . that really affected them.
And people just came together. I know my mother helped neighbors. And you just did that. You know, people were hungry and it was hard.

And there was a lot of anger at the time. There were several strikes that . . . there was one when I was in high school, that just went on and on and on, and people couldn't . . . parents would have to leave and go find work elsewhere. And the mothers would be staying home and taking care of kids. You know that's, Butte has a history of that. I know that after my grandparents were married, my grandfather had to . . . there was a big strike here and he went to Seattle and worked for a while. You have to do something to keep . . . so people have a hard time. So I didn't experience it myself so much, but I certainly saw it all around me and I saw the heartache of it.

Grant: Did you see pickets?

Shea: Oh yeah. You would drive around, you'd see people picketing. Sure. Yeah. And I was on a few picket lines too, myself for teaching. Yeah. I was on a few picket lines by myself. Unions are

important. I think they're a really important part of Butte history. And I have a real strong belief that they're necessary. You're seeing them go away now and you're gonna see a need for them to come back because people are taking advantage of people and there's no . . . they don't get a full week's wages and they don't have any benefits. And it's all for the company and it's all for the almighty dollar. And I see that with some places around Butte when you're checking out your own groceries and you're doing all this stuff . . . it's just . . . unions are important. And I think that's kind of like a pendulum, I guess, it just swings back and forth. And you'll see that.

Grant: Can you tell us what it's like to be on a picket line? I don't think either of us have ever been.

Shea: Well, we're going to have to do something about it.

Jaap: I've got some picket signs in the vault.

Grant: Go down to Walmart today, if you want to.

Shea: I've done a lot of picketing you know, for not only when we would go out on strike and it's kind of scary not everybody's supporting you.

[01:26:50]

But I think teachers really have to struggle because they don't do that. Well, at least they didn't when I was in school. I mean we didn't make a great salary. And so when you went out, it was for a good reason, you weren't going out just for the hell of it. You know, you had a good cause and it was usually a wage issue or something that was just not healthy.

And that's what happened with the mines, too. I mean if it wasn't for the unions . . . that the unions are what gave them the drive. So many of them were leaving and coming out of the mines and they were wet and they got pneumonia and so the unions demanded that they put a shower or a dry in there where people had a chance to go in and warm up and get dry clothes on.

And that made a big difference. Bringing them up for lunch. So they weren't down underground the whole time. The unions did that. So it wasn't all about wages. It was all about conditions. And I think that's true with anything.

I can remember as a part of the AFL CIO, when I was teaching, we also did a little picketing out in front of Walmart because they were a non-union place. And it came anyway and you can see that's been . . . I think a terrible thing for our country. That's just complete greed when you're making that kind of money and now you're having people check out their own groceries and you don't have benefits in there. They said, "Well, we can't get enough workers." You can't get enough workers because you're not paying them. And you're not providing them with any kind of benefits. So while you're raking in all the dough . . . it's just . . .what's coming. So I think you're going to see a resurgence in a lot of these. You have to, people have to rise up.

Grant: You heard it here. Yeah.

Shea: Let's go tell Ellen that we're organizing.

Grant: No more oral histories until I have a Coca Cola.

Jaap: You really want a Coca-Cola, I'll get you one.

Grant: You know like I said, I just had a couple more, you talked about Kennedy and the Cuban missile crisis and that kind of geopolitical situation when you were graduating high school in 69, how did Vietnam figure in, in Butte? Did you have friends that went?

Shea: Oh yes. Um relatives and friends and it was big. And when it all kind of came about, like in 1969, there was a lot of protesting going on. I can remember my father being really conflicted about that and talking to me about it, because you had such a sense of patriotism during world war two and all of that. You don't go against your country. You don't question what they're doing. And so he, I can remember just having some heated debates with him. I think he started to see at the end that this is not a good thing that we're into. And his nephew was over there.

And I can remember I was a freshman in college when they had the draft and we all watched it on TV and they had a big like, if you're playing bingo, one of those big things and pulling out numbers. And of course I was worried about my boyfriend at the time, when was his, and I think he was the 10th number that came. 10th ball that came out of there. But that was just a hard time and for what? That was just such a controversial war. And when it was over, you know what, what have we gained? Nothing. So that was really hard as opposed to World War Two, where our parents took such pride in it. And your mother was down wrapping bandages and men were out fighting the war. And if they couldn't do that, they were working in an industry that supported it. And you just, it's just all the difference in the world. But the cause was different.

So I remember Bobby Kennedy came into Butte, when I was a sophomore at Central and we walked up and he was on the steps of the courthouse, so exciting to see him and his message and what he was hoping for it to gain all of that. And then he died, I remember where I was when that happened too. So it's interesting. Isn't it? All the things that stick in your mind, but yeah, that was a tough time. And a lot of people, we had Dickie Sathowait died in that war. Well, there were a lot of people from Butte that died in that war. Jan Hoonan, they just found, I can't remember his name, a cousin of a friend of mine . . . I can't think of it. The minute I walk out of here. Hard times, hard times. And then now you still see the aftermath of that with people not just the Iraq war and all those, the Vietnam war had . . . They probably all did.

Grant: You mentioned the YMCA earlier, and I recently had a chance to walk through that building. A friend of mine was looking at it and Matt Boyle was thinking of buying it for a minute and, or trying to . . .

Shea: I love Matt.

Grant: Yeah, he's on our board over there at the radio, but you know, it's just in total disrepair, the entire, all six stories and I was looking at the pool and I was really struck by the pool. And so to hear you talk about all the accomplishments of your family members in that pool, what's it like to have a connection to a place that was so vibrant 50 years later?

Shea: Yeah, boy, I remember walking down from our house. We'd walk down Washington street, go to our swimming lessons and the buzz, I just remember going up there and you'd show

your card and then they'd buzz you in and then you got to go through the door. I can still hear all of that and the smell of the pool and . . . But I hate to, if that building is, I hate to see it stay, if there's no hope for it . . . It seems so structurally sound, but I mean that's a big building and there's no place to park.

So you know, I know that one time they were looking about renovating it for rooms for Tech kids, and where do they park? You know that's an issue too. It's a pretty huge building. You hate to see it go, but I'm connected more with St. Mary's church. That's another thing. I'm so upset about the doors being taken from St. Mary's church.

Jaap: Do you have anything you'd like to say on the record?

Shea: Yes, I do. You know, sitting here is a beautiful church that had these brass and copper doors that all of a sudden went missing and they ended up in the hands of the historic preservation officer. And I just can't even get over that. He still has them, Jarvis Rabis, and it just blows my mind. How does the preservation officer end up with stuff like that? That should go back to where it belongs or to a place like this, someplace where . . .

Jaap: They were stored here for about a year. And there were a bunch of caveats about, they could go back on the building if you meet this criteria.

Shea: Oh, yeah. He had to give them. Yeah.

Jaap: And my joke was he practically wants a fountain of himself out there.

Shea: Exactly. There were some pretty intense . . . get over yourself . . . a plaque and yeah. Yeah. But he took the doors and nobody . . . so the St Mary's or the Lady of the Rockies didn't know they were missing. They thought they were stored somewhere. And until we brought it to their attention and what happened is I was over in his store that he had on Park and Montana street. And I said, what is this? Because the cash register was on top of this door. And he said, that's from St. Mary's church. And I said, I thought it was . . . what are you doing with it? "

And he said, "Well, I've got them both." And then he changed his story three times. So I heard three different stories through the course of trying to get them back, how he got them, but it's not right. You know, and they're still in his possession. And I don't know if he's sold them, who knows what he's done with them by now. I went to the attorney, we tried to get a restraining order. So he couldn't take them, but it was long gone before that happened.

Jaap: And you guys had the money to put them on too.

Shea: Oh yeah. We had the money . . . we raised the money to put them back on their doors and they were just significant to that church and that church is so beautiful to me. I would work really hard to keep that and that can be such a good part of our community because it's right across from the . . . you know, and we use it. They use it during Anri Ra, the kids go in there, they practice dancing. It could be used for so many things. But anyway, those doors are significant to that, you know?

Jaap: Hmm. Hmm. That is really hard.

Shea: Oh, I have more. I have a lot of bitterness about that. But back to the Y, I hate . . . but if it's not viable, I'm not one of these people that just, if there's no hope for a building, you just leave it there. You know, you gotta have new stuff, too. You can't all be . . . you got to have some growth.

Grant: I think they had said it would be a $6 million project to bring it all back.

Shea: But then where would people park?

Grant: We've got to go beyond cars I think. I don't know. Yeah.

Shea: Parachute in, or I dunno, I would love to see it restored. I would love to see that. And that would be nice for . . . that's not far from Tech. That would work really good there. But there's so many other things around here that . . . I don't know.

Grant: Well, are there other buildings that are sore spots for you?

Shea: Well, no I love what they're doing with the KC. They're so committed to that. So many people, Bernie Boyle and all, so many people are committed to that and keeping that going. And so I know our class just had our class reunion there, and then we had a big . . . we have a lot of talented people in our class, so they brought their art and their jewelry and everything else. And we had a big auction and gave all the money to the KC, just for our part.

Because they've done so much just to preserve our history there. You know, when you look at all the pictures from when you were in grade school and playing volleyball and all that's all down there, it's just amazing. My parents' pictures are down there. It's just, he's done an incredible job. Keep that going. That's for sure. But it's nice to see that new Montana Power Company building, isn't it? Northwest Energy. That's exciting to see a new building uptown too.

Grant: $21 million there, I think.

Shea: Yeah, really see. So see the difference. Sometimes you gotta use your head but then look what they're doing over here with the O'Rourke building. Yeah. Yeah. That's great. Look what they did with this building. So if there's hope. Yeah.

Grant: I just have one more question. You had mentioned earlier the Radio Bar. Can you tell us more about that? It was right here?

Shea: Yep. It was right there. So right across the street, let's see on the corner was actually . . . So there was a gas station, you can still see that. So it would be in a building right next to that. And I think it was 219 and 219 1/2. I don't know what year . . . he bought the Radio Bar, but it was around prohibition, around that time. They always called it their cigar and candy store. Yeah. During that time. But I think it was a good living for my grandfather, the bar, he owned a couple other bars too. One in Dillon and one in Sheridan or Twin Bridges. And my mother told me that he, during the depression, he really helped a lot of people.

So that's what Butte people do, you know, if you've got something, somebody doesn't and you know? I know that my mother doesn't remember falling on hard times during the depression, but my dad sure did. So everybody has a different outlook. I was little, you know, but my uncle ran

it, after my grandfather did. And so then he sold it when I was in high school. I think he sold it in my freshman year. And then my junior year he had sold it to somebody else and then it burned to the ground and I think that was a little questionable, but don't know much about that. We didn't have it then.

[01:40:13]

So yeah, but it was an old building. They had rooms upstairs. I don't think my grandpa had ever used it as a boarding house, but when it was originally built here, it was a boarding house upstairs and a tavern downstairs and they cashed checks during pay . . . when the miners came off work, they cashed their checks. That was a big thing. That was a draw to get them in there to have a beer or two and cash checks. I don't know how it got its name. I think originally it wasn't the Radio Bar. Excuse me. I think that my grandfather named it that, and that was probably the time the radio was coming around.

Grant: My final question, this really is my final one - How much is left of the Butte that you knew growing up?

Shea: Oh yeah, that's hard to, because it's happening in pieces. You know where you can get the best perspective of how Butte was is, if you go to the Mountain Con mine and you go out on that little peak, you know, you take the walk and go out on that jetty or whatever it is, you really get a good glimpse of how the city was. And then just nothing was beyond that because people just weren't down in the flats, but then through the years it all, it all just changed. And you forget about different things. Like when we had our class reunion, people were talking about all the different drive-ins that we went to.

And of course all the houses of prostitution was still around when I was in high school, you know? And so all that was that whole Mercury Street was all alive then. All of these neighborhoods that are now kind of just piecemeal, they were all pretty vibrant and then they started to dissipate. It kind of happens over a slow period of time and you don't think about it. And then you think, Oh, I remember that building. Remember that, remember what used to be there? Or I remember that drive in and you know, Leon and Eddie's was next to the civic center. Now that's long gone. So I think it happens so gradually that you don't, but I think the biggest thing is the schools. You see the population dwindled so much and that's noted by the schools that are no longer here. You've got a lot of vacant school buildings. So is that your question?

Grant: Yes. Friends of mine come to visit Butte. They're like, "Ah, it's so amazing." Of all the things I've learned working here at the Archives with these folks. And I say, "Well, what's left . . ." It is amazing.

Shea: I think it's so great that we're honoring all these buildings and hoping that we, we keep them and the St Lawrence, that church is so beautiful and we kept that and you know, it's not functioning as it did one time. And that's how I feel about St. Mary's. You want that to still be around.

So people have a real sense of pride about their buildings and stuff and about preserving that, but sometimes it can't be done. I understand that too. You want to keep the old, but you also want to see the new, you want people to see some progress here, so they want to come in. Now you're in

a beautiful building, the Carpenters' Union Hall, it's really a historic building. Have they done much with the two stories above that?

Grant: I wanted to show you some pictures, actually, when we're done here.

Shea: I'd love to see that. They were starting to clear that out, the last time I was active there, you know? Yeah. And Paddy, do you know Paddy?

Grant: Paddy Dennehy.

Shea: He did so much for that building?

Grant: Yeah. We need to get him in here.

Shea: Oh my gosh.

Jaap: Oh, I see him every week. I can ask him. Oh, he volunteers here. Yeah.

Shea: Patty would be incredible.

Grant: I've got some questions for that gentleman.

Shea: My cousin can tell you a lot too, but he's kind of shy. He comes in here. Do you know Jack O'Brien?

Jaap: Yes. He is so quiet. And I do, but I really don't know Jack other than every once in a while.

Grant: He's your cousin?

Shea: Yeah, our mothers were sisters. Yeah. And he's very dear to me, but he's kind of quiet, but oh my God, he could give you a history of this town like you wouldn't believe. And it was his dad who later owned the radio bar.

Grant: That's it for my questions. Okay. I appreciate your time.

[END OF RECORDING]