THE

VERDIGRIS PROJECT

KBMF & BUTTE-SILVER BOW ARCHIVES

FRANK PALAKOVICH

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Oral History Transcript of Frank (and Ann) Palakovich

Interviewer: Clark Grant
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Location: Palakovich Residence in Anaconda
Transcribed: May 2020 by Adrian Kien

Grant: All right. Would you mind saying and spelling your name for me?

Frank: Right now? Frank Palakovich. P, A L, A, K, O, V, I, C, H.

Grant: All right, and like I was saying before we started the recording here. Like I was saying before. This will become part of the archives' permanent collection. And portions of this interview may be used on the radio station in Butte KBMF. You're OK with that?

Frank: Yeah.

Grant: So like I said, normally the way these oral histories begin is we start talking about your ancestors. What do you know about your grandparents?

Frank: My grandparents were from Yugoslavia. Never met them. And that's about all I can tell you about them.

Grant: Is that on both sides?

Frank: Yes.

Grant: Any idea how they came to the United States? Or did your parents come here first?

Frank: My dad came here first. My mother was born in this country. And, wait a minute now, my grandparents on my mother's side were both born in the old country, but they both moved over here. Matter of fact, they lived in that house and we lived in this one. That close together.

Grant: Really?

Frank: In Anaconda. Yeah. Yeah.

Grant: That's on your mom's side.

Frank: On my mom's side.

Grant: So do you have memories of them?

Frank: Sure. That's where I learned to talk Croatian. Because they couldn't talk English. And I used to spend a lot of time at my grandmother's house, because we were practically in the same yard. Had chickens in the backyard. Nice garden. Only a block from church. It was real nice.

Grant: And what church did they go to?

Frank: Saint Peter's. It was only a block away. Another thing, I went to school for twelve years at St. Peter's School, lived in the same block, graduated from St. Peter's. Everything was handy.

Grant: What was the population of Anaconda at that time? Do you think?

Frank: I read something in the paper yesterday and that in the 1920s it was 13,000. Now, it's 9,000. Yeah. Passed on. But there are still a few of us here.

Grant: What about the traditions from the old country, the food and like you say, the language? How much of that was a part of your life?

Frank: Oh, that was a part of my life. The food was always good and there was always something to eat at Mama's house. And like I said, I had to learn to talk Croatian. I don't talk it fluently, but I could get by. You didn't have cars in them days either. Well, at least we didn't. A few people did, but any place you went, you walked.

The food? Well, the food was good. Old, old recipes from the old country. You know, and we still use them. We still cook that way. Yeah. Yeah. One of the main things was, maybe you've heard of it, povitica. Yeah, with the walnuts. That was good stuff. Yeah. And you don't make povitica anymore. But my brother does. He still makes it and gives us a little sample every year. Yeah. And sarma. Have you heard of sarma?

Grant: It's like a cabbage roll?

Frank: Yeah. Yeah. Cabbage rolls. There were sarmas in Croatia. Yeah. We rendered our own lard. Well, at that time, why there was eight in my family, and my dad used to buy a whole hog every year and we'd render the lard, smoke the bacons and the hams and then we'd have the fresh pork.

Grant: How do you render lard?

Frank: Well, in the raw form, it's fat, all the fat, and you'd put it in a big pot. Put it on the stove. Eventually, it would melt away. And then you take the liquid and put it in different containers and you'd have that from one year to the next. Or else you put it in a big container and then your mother would send you downstairs with a small container and a big spoon and you'd scoop some lard out for her and she used it for everything. Frying it and bacon and everything else.

Grant: I bet that was good.

Frank: Sure it was good because everything homemade was good. Yeah. Like I said, Dad would cure the bacon. And then in my grandmother's yard, right next door was the smokehouse, smoked the hams and the bacon. It was handy.

There was another povitica which is made with cottage cheese. And she still makes that one. Matter of fact, I'll give you a bite of one. I've still got some, but it was good too. Yeah. And then you also made a povitica out of apples. Well, they call it now strudel, apple strudel. You know what? I'm getting hungry.

Grant: Who knew we'd go right into food. And your grandmother, did she work for a living then, too, or, just do things around the house?

Frank: My grandmother? No, she just did things around the house. Never left the house or the yard. She puttered in the garden. And her chickens. Picked her our own eggs every day, but she never went any place.

Grant: How did they buy the house?

Frank: She stayed home. Like I say, we didn't have a car. They didn't have a car. And my grandfather worked up on the smelter, of course. And he had a limp. He had a bad leg. And he used to limp along, but they gave him a good job. As you went up to the smelter there alongside the road, there was nice trees planted. And that was my grandfather's job. He kept the trees and kept them watered. He had a good job, but Grandma never went any place. She just stayed home. Did the cooking. That's about it for her.

Ann: How did they get money to buy a house?

Frank: Well, jeez, they never mentioned anything like that to me. But. Well, houses were cheap in them days. My brother, my grandfather had two boys that worked and they probably donated toward the cost to the house and everything. Boy, I know one thing, the bathroom was cold. Back end of the house. I never used it much. I used our own at home.

[Interrupted by phone call]

Frank: Two o'clock tomorrow afternoon at the funeral home. These guys, they don't leave me alone. You got to bury the dead, you know?

Grant: What do you do over there?

Frank: Well, the original funeral director I worked for was Tim...anyhow. He had a coach and two cars, two limos. When he sold out to this man's outfit, they got rid of the cars. So when you get a funeral now that has to have a body in the coach, we have to go to Butte and rent one and then drive it over here, use it and drive it back. But when they had the coaches, I used to drive one of them. And, otherwise, now I just wait at the door and hand out the brochures as the people come in. That's about it.

Grant: How many funerals would you say you've done?

Frank: Well, you know, people have been living pretty good this last month. I only had two funerals last month.

Grant: This last month.

Frank: Yeah. Now this is September and the first one. But usually in two months time, I'll have twelve or fourteen funerals.

Grant: Wow.

Frank: And each one of them is worth $10 an hour.

Grant: OK. Not too bad.

Frank: Not too bad. No.

Grant: I mean, the house is probably paid for. Right? So, yeah.

Frank: Oh, you mean this one?

Grant: Right.

Frank: Well, it's been paid for for years.

Grant: Right. And so did you say you grew up in this very house?

Frank: Well, I grew up at 318 Ash. Yeah. That was my neighborhood. Born right down there. And then we've been here 71 years.

Grant: Wow.

Ann: We started to buy it in April of '47.

Frank: To the same woman. 71 years.

Grant: What's your secret?

Frank: I'm not giving that out.

Grant: OK.

Frank: At our 50th wedding anniversary, I told everybody down at the Roadhouse where we had dinner. I do what I'm told and I keep my mouth shut.

Grant: OK. That's simple enough, isn't it? What about your parents, then? We talked a little bit about your mom's parents.

Frank: So like I said, my mom was born in this country. My dad came from the old country, I think in probably around 1915. And he stopped in Pennsylvania, worked there awhile. Somehow he made his way out here and he got a job on the smelter and he worked for 64 years, I think, out there. Yeah.

Grant: Any idea how he made the journey, what his route was?

Frank: No, he never did discuss that with us, but I'm sure he come out here on a train. And how he managed to stop here, I guess, was because mining was busy in Butte and smelting here. Now, I don't know how come he stopped here. I'm glad he did. But if he'd have stopped in Butte, he would have been a miner. But he worked up at the smelter and in the converters where the copper was hot. He got burnt a few times. Splashing, you know. But he never complained. And I used to meet him every day when he worked. Well, they worked three shifts up there: 7:00 to 3:00, 3:00 to 11:00 and 11:00 to 7:00.

And when he worked day shift, I met him every day on the corner of 3rd and Ash and to see if he had left anything in the pale, the lunch pail, you know. And only had to walk a half a block to catch a street car. It was easy. And, tickets were 5 cents apiece at that time, to ride to the smelter and back. One up and one back. And they finally got rid of the street cars and went to buses. And they were actually two bits apiece. I still got a book of tickets for the buses. I don't have any street car tickets, but I got the bus tickets. And, you know, in the bootleg days, a block from my house, matter of fact, only one block up the alley, a lady had an outlet there for moonshine. And a lot of the guys didn't have the money. They'd trade streetcar tickets for the booze. So that's where my dad bought the streetcar tickets, because she always gave him a few extras.

Grant: Did he also buy booze there?

Frank: Yes. And I won't lie. Yes, once in a while. Matter of fact, he had another outlet, a distant cousin of mine with booze, and he used to send me down there to pick it up for him, because you knew nobody would bother me. The cops wouldn't be suspicious. I was a courier.

Grant: Was it clear or brown or do you remember?

Frank: I didn't get to drink any of it though.

Grant: OK.

Frank: But then everybody made wine in them days, too.

Grant: OK. At home.

Frank: Yeah. When you could afford them. I couldn't tell you how much they were a ton, but people bought it by the ton and they delivered the grapes. And I know I had a job running the grinder while they put the grapes in. Made the wine. Boy, that smelled good while it was fermenting in the basement. And then when it was ready to be put into a barrel, that was the most sweet tasting stuff. That's when I used to get mine, you know, down in the basement.

Oh, you remember your brothers told me that they'd get their parents' attention and one of them would go down to the basement and hand a bottle of wine out through the window to the other guys. Well, we weren't angels. I'll tell you. We did good things and bad things.

Grant: What about holidays? Did you celebrate Croatian holidays?

Frank: Every day was a holiday around here. Well, nothing special. Had their own birthdays, and we had ours. That's what we celebrated. The beginning of Lent. That was a big holiday, not a big holiday. Like Ash Wednesday that's when you laid the law down. You don't eat this for 40 days and you don't drink that for 40 days. It wasn't a holiday. That was punishment.

Grant: Is there a Croatian holiday where they hold a mock trial?

Frank: Messapus. Yes.

Grant: Yeah. Did you ever do that?

Frank: Oh, we attended them doings. Yes.

Grant: What was that like?

Ann: Oh it was funny. And we celebrated with Butte. It was great.

Frank: They burnt the dummy. Yeah. I forgot about that.

Ann: I'm trying to think. Anne Simonitsch from Butte contacted me. And they were having this big dinner. And was that the Messapus too?

Frank: It must have been.

Ann: Had to cook sarmas in these electric roasters. We had to start cooking in the evening and then they would cook on low heat all night for the next day, for the dinner. It wasn't like a nominations dinner.

Frank: Would that have been annual?

Ann: At that time, I think it was just, it just didn't last long.

Grant: And so your dad didn't have any involvement with the war? You said he got here in 1915.

Frank: No, just me.

Grant: With the next war?

Frank: World War Two. Me and both my brothers were involved in that war. And Johnny, the older brother, spent quite a bit of time overseas in North Korea. And my brother, Joe was in the Air Force. He was mostly stationed in South Dakota. And me, I finished my basic training in Camp Roberts, California, stayed there for a while as cadre. That was like teaching the new kids [that would] come in. In other words, these kids from the eastern part of the country, you had to show them your right foot from your left. But. So then I finally got my orders to be at a port of embarkation in New Jersey at such and such a time that gave me two weeks furlough at home. That would have been during the Battle of the Bulge. I'm standing out on the corner waiting for a bus to take me to town. I had everything packed, my orders and everything. A jeep pulls up. "They decided to keep you here." It was a good thing, but I was also disappointed. Otherwise, I might not be here. So I got to stay there. And from there, I went to Camp Wood, Texas, from there to Camp Rollins in Arkansas. From there to Fort Knox, Kentucky, all in a space of about two and a half years and that's all I did was cadre. At least, I came out a staff sergeant. They offered me a wristwatch if I would re-enlist.

Grant: A wristwatch?

Frank: A wristwatch. I told them to stick it. I went home.

Grant: So what year were you born?

Frank: In 1923. March 25th.

Grant: OK. So you'd have been just the right age. Let's talk a little bit about your childhood here. It was in Anaconda. You were born and raised here now. And so you said that you went to the same school your whole life. Were there brothers there at the school?

Frank: Teachers, you mean? Nuns. It was a Catholic school. We had neighborhood gangs. And, of course, I belonged to the Ash Street gang. We conglomerated more up on the north end of Ash Street where we could play baseball in the foundry. Just kick a few boards out of the fence, you know, and go in there. They never bothered us. That's where we played baseball. We used to hike up behind the foundry to up to where we could find a leak in the flume. They carried water from Silver Lake to the smelter. Nice, cold, fresh water. And we'd get a drink and hike back. And we built fires up there. Roasted potatoes. Our mothers never knew we roasted potatoes up there. She would have wondered where we got them. And we raided crab apple trees. But that's about the worst we did. We were pretty good kids.

Grant: Were you the leader of the gang?

Frank: No, I wasn't the leader. But I got picked up once. You know, in the old days, the headlights were about that big around. They just had a glass cover and a bulb inside. I don't know who suggested this, but we got a can of white paint. We went around and painted everybody's headlights white, but we got caught. Yeah. I remember the chief of police brought me home. His name was Mike Mahoney. Great big guy. He wore a peaked hat. I wasn't handed any punishment, just "behave yourself" and stuff. So from then on, we didn't do any more

painting except on the house or something. But outside of that, I was a pretty good guy. I'm bragging.

Grant: And so school. Do you feel you received a good education there?

Frank: I think so, yeah. I think so. The nuns were pretty strict, you know. And I still remember a few things from high school that stayed with me. And I was also an altar boy at St. Peter's Church. And, you know, we go to mass every Sunday now at 8:30. And as I go out, there's usually just one altar boy or sometimes two. I give them each a buck, say, "You did a good job. Oh, thank you." And this one little gal, my wife talked to her. She says, "What do you do with your dollar?" She says, "I give it to my grandmother." So from then on, I give her two bucks, one for her and one for her grandma. Because I tell everybody. I'm sure these kids appreciate it. But like I said, on the smelter 7:00 to 3:00, 3:00 to 11:00, 11:00 to 7:00. The 7:00 shift, in order to make mass on Sunday, they used to have a 5:00 a.m. mass. Well, guess who the altar boy was? Okay. I got up. My mother got me up at 4:30 and I went and served mass. Then I could go back to sleep, where the rest of them had to get up and go to mass. That was a good deal. I didn't mind. But then again, you had to answer the priest in Latin. Now everything is English and I can still rattle off them prayers in Latin.

Grant: Would you care to?

Frank: Pardon?

Grant: Would you care to?

Frank: Sure. You be the priest. My next answer [speaks in Latin] And then from then on the whole rest of them were in Latin too. The whole confiteor I used to say in Latin and that was a long prayer. [speaks in Latin] No, I have forgotten a little bit of that. I won't go into that. Amen.

Grant: So would you say that the church has been a huge part of your life?

Frank: Always has been. Yeah.

Ann: We pray a lot. I don't want this printed. I mean, we have these relatives from Ohio that come and visit us. And they had a little boy. And this one morning, the boy said to his mother, "Are they Catholic?" And she said, "Take a look at their walls." You got a cross in every room. We've got a cross in the garage. A cross in the basement. So much of it is people think we should all have crashes, I guess. But Deagan funeral home would always give a prayer cross into the casket. And then we would take those. That's how come we've accumulated so many crosses. But anyway, we're devout. We don't drink; we don't smoke. We did enjoy a drink or two, you know, but I'm on a lot of medication. He's on some meds. We don't mix them. We attribute our really good luck because our backgrounds are both the same. And our faith is the same. And we're on the same page about everything that makes a good marriage. No problems. We have a very good life on this Earth. And the company's been real good to us, I feel like. The Anaconda Company was just great. And you've got to be sensible about money. You don't have to earn a lot of money to even accumulate, you know?

Frank: We were both baptized in St. Peter's Church. Confirmed. Married. And we're going to be buried there.

Ann: Just for the record, we prepaid our cremation.

Frank: Yeah, we're ready to go.

Grant: Okay. Yeah. Not in a rush, but ready. When did you first start working then? Did you ever have a paper route or anything like that?

Frank: No, I never had a paper route.

Grant: Just running moonshine is all?

Ann: When you first started to work?

Frank: Yeah. Bulkovat's Grocery. It was the 600 block on East Park Street. I used to go and deliver groceries and stocked the shelves. From there I went across the street and worked at the Anaconda service station for years. I've had two jobs all my life. From there, I went to work on the smelter. And then I worked a week on, week off in the evenings at the Anaconda service station. And then I went to work for Laslovich trucking. Used to haul lime rock from lime quarry up to the smelter and hauled ore from other, private mines. And where else did I work. I must have had a little time off, then I went to work for Riddle. He was the first funeral director. And then this other outfit bought him out. And I'm still with them.

Ann: What year did you start there?

Frank: On the smelter? 1946. That gave me 34 years with the company. Total. That's at the smelter. I worked for a while at the BAP and I worked seven years in the pit. It's all Anaconda Company. And down at the foundry, I worked in the blacksmith shop. There were three classifications in the blacksmith shop. The heavy smith, heavy blacksmith, he made the most money. And then there was the side-fires, the blacksmiths who made things like coal chisels and small stuff. They got a little less money. Then the helpers for the heavy smith, they got the most. Then the side-fire helpers, they got a little less. Well, in 1980, I had worked my way up to the heavy helper, running the steam hammer, the big steam hammer. I got that pay for one day. Then they decided to shut the whole operation down. Man alive, I just got the job, making the big money on one day and that was it. From then on, I was just working little odd jobs.

Ann: [Inaudible]

Frank: Oh, everybody stole things on the hill. You know nails and stuff. If you took all these homes in Anaconda apart, they'd be without lights and they'd fall apart. Because everybody stole.

Ann: Tell them about the light.

Frank: Yeah, well, when I first went to work up in the concentrator, I wanted a light out on the back porch here. On the back of the garage so the kids could play basketball at night. So I had a light put away up there. I was waiting for my chance to get it out. Well, it came because I had a friend up there that drove truck and he would haul stuff out once in a while for me. So I went to get the light. It was gone. I had a fit.

Ann: You should have heard him!

Frank: Some son of a bitch stole my light. Stole my light.

Grant: The light that you were going to steal?

Frank: Yeah. The one I had already stolen.

Ann: That's the best laugh I've had in 71 years. He was so mad.

Frank: And right next door was an electrician. He was gonna hook it up for me and everything. He said, "Don't worry about it. I'll get you one."

Grant: Did you ever find who took it?

Frank: It was probably on one of the other shifts. I had it ditched pretty, well though. Matter of fact, this other one was even better. The one I had ditched was just a round one that hung and had a big globe in it. But the one my friend next door brought home was made on a forty five angle so it showed down on the driveway. But I confessed all that. I've been forgiven. 'Cause I wasn't alone.

Grant: I've heard that a lot of people plumbed their house like in 12 inch pieces of copper that they snuck out in the lunch bucket. Can you describe the, you know, I've never lived in this area when the Anaconda company was going. So growing up, you know, were they just everywhere? Was it everything was Anaconda all the time? Everybody worked there. They just kind of dominated thought.

Frank: Yeah, well, that was the big employer for the town so they could lay the rules down. It went all right. Matter of fact, they used to have, right about where Stokes store is now, was the athletic field where they played baseball and football. And my dad liked baseball. And we used to walk from Ash Street, clear up there and watch the baseball game. And there was one, we called them big shots, you know, he was the superintendent up there. He had a car and he'd give us a ride home, which helped. But then they had the Washoe park where you'd go out and play in the playground. They had a big dam there where you could fish. You had a big, beautiful dance hall. Had deer and elk in a pen right up there about where the Mormon Church is now. And of

course, you had to walk every place. Except if you had relatives like I did in Opportunity, then you'd take the streetcar down to visit them and a streetcar back.

I was never in on this, but some of the bad boys, they know where to get these things. They had a little thing you could lay on the track. And when the train went over it, it would bang. It was a warning. And the guys on the railroad had them in case there was something that they were afraid to run into. Fellows had these warnings. Well, some of the kids got a hold of some of them and they'd put him on the streetcar track. The conductor would go crazy trying to figure out what's wrong, what's wrong. That'd throw him off schedule, too.

Grant: But you never did that?

Frank: Not me. That was dangerous putting them things on there.

Grant: Were the streetcars open air or enclosed?

Frank: They were closed.

Grant: Electric?

Frank: Electric. Yeah, they had a trolley wired down Third Street clear down to Opportunity, passed right down to the golf course. Streetcar would go down there and he'd wait maybe 10 minutes and then he'd start back, had several stops to make. It was a nice ride. But once he got between Opportunity and Anaconda, he could throw that thing into gear and just sit back and let her ramble up the street.

On the East end, down where she lived, they were bad. They were bad boys.

Grant: On the East end?

Frank: Yeah. What did they used to do?

Ann: The wire, the thing that they had for the streetcar. I don't know how they did it, but they would somehow take that down. And they would stop the streetcar. And the police were running around and asking, "Do you know who did this?" And I says, "No, I don't." I wasn't going to turn them in. But after that they didn't do it anymore.

Frank: There was a wire on each end of the streetcar with a cord that went up to the wire there and you'd pull it down, and wind it up and put the other one up if you're going the other direction. And the kids were able to get behind there and just pull that wire and let it go. It would come off the trolley, your streetcar is dead. I don't blame the conductor for getting mad.

Grant: No. It's a pain. And you said your dad was working at the smelter all his life. What did he do up there?

Frank: As a laborer mostly. He wasn't a carpenter or electrician or a welder or anything.

Grant: Taking care of the trees?

Frank: No, that was my grandfather.

Grant: Grandfather. Okay.

Frank: He took care of the trees. But my dad worked on the smelter all the time, down in the reverbs and the converters. He spent all of his time there. Like I say, he got a few scars where that splashed copper had burned him, but he worked his way up to where he got away from the hot copper. And finally as a promotion, he was getting pretty old anyway, they gave him the job in the change house, taking care of that, which was easy for him.

Grant: Can you explain, just kind of walk me through the process. I know it was a whole reduction works here, but everything is gone except the stack now, and so I don't have any sense of what all the process was. So ore was brought from Butte on a train.

Frank: It started in the concentrator where I first went to work up there. That's where they brought the ore in from Butte. And then they'd have to go up through, you know where Mill creek is? Behind the stack. Well, you couldn't. That's quite a ways from the east yards up to the stack. So they had a long train that went up there, finally made their way clear up to the concentrator. And then one by one, each car would be put over a certain hopper. And the guys would knock the things open and let the ore down into the concentrator. Then they'd push another car in. And then they finally got modernized and put in a car dumper where two cars at a time would go in and they just flipped them over and flipped them back. Well, that's where I first went to work and it was dusty. Some of that ore was wet. Some was dry. Dusty.

From there, it was crushed and went into the lower, what they called, the lower mill. It is a ball mill where it went round and round and round. It was still a big steel mill. Big, long steel rods, they were in there. And as they went around in there, that made the ore real fine. And from there it went to the flotation mill. And it was there like in big vats and it went round and around and some of this stuff that rolled off was good and the rest of it went down into the slag pile. That's right as you come into town. So you can imagine how much ore went through that place, just looking at that slag pile.

Grant: What they discarded.

Frank: And what they discarded. And what the copper, that was good stuff. OK, from there, it went down to the reverbs, what they call the reverbs. That was a big, long furnace, oh about from here to that house next door. And that would be poured in there. And heat would be put to it to where it melted. And again, the waste material was taken off there and run into a little flume out to the big slag pile. And the rest went into the converters, where it was reheated. And the additives. I don't know what the additives were, but they were put in there and they would cook for a long time. And then finally they were skimmed again. The top stuff was taken off and thrown away and then molten copper was poured into the anodes. And from the anodes, they

were put into cars, shipped to Great Falls, re-refined and made into wire. That was the end of the copper.

And they also had zinc. They refined zinc up there. And they also had a phosphate plant. And that's what they used for fertilizer. That's about all they made up there.

Grant: So the big ladles that you see in town, where were they in the process?

Frank: What do you mean? Like what were they used for?

Grant: Right.

Frank: OK. After the copper was put into these big converters, the converter would pour the copper into these ladles. And the crane would take it to the waste material, or over to where they poured the anodes. The anodes were made on a big table like this. I forget how many they were on each one, but each one held so much copper. And I think each anode weighed 465 pounds of pure copper. And as they went around, the crane would pick them up and put them on a rack, take them out to the boxcars. They were cold. They were molten hot, but they were cold when they left the smelter.

Grant: And those ladles, when they're moving those with the crane, are there guys on the floor?

Frank: Yeah. That was one of the jobs my dad had up there was what they called "chasing ladles".

Grant: OK.

Frank: When you pick this ladle up with the big hooks. You stood up here. Well, it couldn't pour by itself, so they had a hook down on the bottom of the ladle. And the craneman would drop this hook down. And my dad would have to make sure it got into there. And then they could take it over and use that to raise the ladle and the hot copper would come out. And then when they were done with that, the craneman couldn't unhook that hook. So my dad had a big rod made in the blacksmith shop and he'd have to take that hook out and send it on its way. Set the ladle down.

They were good jobs. You didn't have to work hard up there. It was just time consuming. You had to be there and be ready. Yeah.

Grant: And you'd do that day in and day out.

Frank: Day in and day out. Until you got a better job.

Grant: So that's how he got splashed.

Frank: Yeah, that's how he got splashed.

Ann: Tell them how you climbed the stack.

Frank: Oh I shouldn't.

Ann: Just tell them.

Frank: After I went to work in the boiler shop as a boilermaker helper, and then I worked my way up to a welder. And I can say I worked in every department on the smelter as a welder. Everything was steel up there.. You would have a job in the tank house or up on the stack or down on the reverbs. But I was working up around the stack because the main flue was covered with steel. OK, sometimes these plates would wear out or fall into the main flue. You'd have to replace them. So I was working up there one day and of course you only had a half hour for lunch.

So I'm looking around and I hurry up and ate. And I started to climb the stack. I knew where the ladder was, you know. Well, I can't. I won't move now, but I was going to show you a picture of the stack. It had a little box out on the side, which was a weather station. That was up so far. And a guy climbed up there every day or every other day and got the reports out of there. So I'm climbing up there and I got to the weather station and I got my breath and I went a little farther. And I thought, "I don't have time to go much farther." Because it was during my lunch hour. I had to be back at 12:30. Back on the job. So I just looked around. Boy, talk about a view from up there. You could see everything. And each step was embedded in the bricks. And of course, on the outside, there was another railing in case you fell. You know, you would not fall. You grab one of them. Coming down was just as bad as going up. You had to look down. I had to be back to work. But I didn't tell many people about that.

Grant: But guys climbed it pretty regular for maintenance or for, like you say, the weather.

Frank: No. The local people up on the smelter, that's as far as they ever went, was up to the weather station. But about every two or three years, they brought a guy in here. I forget his name and he would climb to the top and inspect. And they had riggings and a crane, I mean, like a winch to run the cables back and forth and he would inspect it. He'd go from one section of the stack and then he'd go down. He'd go back up and then he'd come down to inspect the brick and patch them.

When they finished building that stack, inside was scaffolding all made out of wood. There was also an elevator in there. When they finished, the elevator was still running, and my mother rode that elevator to the top of the stack. They took several people up at a time. That was one of the things you could, I don't if they had to pay or what, but she got in on that. She didn't get out and walk around or anything, but the top of the stack was wide enough to where you could run a team of horses around it. That wide. And if you think that stack is from 75 feet to straight to 65 feet, you're nuts, because that stack is like this. [Gestures with hand.] It was made like that. Graduations weren't much, but I didn't believe that either until I laid down right alongside that stack and then you look up, you could see the wave. That was for windage and stuff.

Grant: And when it was going, what did it look like, the smoke coming out of it? How high did it go? Was it black? Was it yellow?

Frank: That depended on the weather. Very seldom did it go straight up. It usually come right off the top and go east, west, or that's why these hills over here were so brown. And now they're all turning nice and green.

Grant: You see it coming back?

Frank: Yeah. It's coming back.

Grant: How long has it taken to come back?

Frank: Well, how long has the smelter been down? Since 1980. But little by little, it's more green every year, isn't it? The hills over here.

Grant: Growing up, were you ever concerned about emissions or anything like that?

Frank: You didn't have anything like that. Nobody ever cried about it. Smelter was your life. You grinned and breathed and beared it. Sometimes the damn smoke was pretty thick downtown, and it did kind of take your breath away. You know, when you have a downdraft, but you got used to it up on the smelter. Of course, there were respirators that you wore in different departments. But it was still a good company.

Grant: And how did the fires, how were they fueled?

Frank: Up there on the smelter? Gas. Part of the refining process up at the smelter was you burnt a log in there. They used to bring these fir trees in from the forest and they'd stick one in there in the molten copper and it would burn. Then when it got burned down, the crane would drop it in a little bit more. But they burned a lot of timber up there. It was one of the processes of refining the copper. When it left here, it was 99% pure and they refined it in Great Falls. That was another smelter by itself.

Grant: And they had their own stack, right, but they tore it down?

Frank: Yeah. They had their own stack. I can remember seeing it on TV when they tore it down. Did you know?

Grant: No.

Frank: That had placed the charges in it and they set them off and it didn't work. The whole stack just stood there, so they had to redo it. And then the second time it finally came down.

Grant: Was there ever any talk about doing that here?

Frank: Oh I'm sure there was, but there was talk to keep it. But the keepers won out, I guess.

Grant: Yeah. Why and when did they tear down the rest of the workings up there?

Frank: Well, I'd say between 1980 and the year 2000. Because when they shut the smelter down, then they started to tear it down little by little. I forget the name of the outfit that came in and tore it down, but I hated to see it go. And it looked a mess up there for years, and then they finally started reclaiming the country. And it don't look bad up there now. Compared to what it was, but I still like to look at the old smelter in pictures. And I was just reading somewhere yesterday or today about the first electric train in this country was between Butte and Anaconda. We got rid of the old steamers and they electrified everything.

Oh, they used to go by here every shift-change with the trains. Oh, I got to tell them about my brothers and Carl Bowler. They were both switchmen. And there was no fence out here at the time. So every once in a while, the train would stop out there and my brother and Carl Bowler would come over here and have a beer while the train sat out there waiting. And then they each had to go to work. Do their job. But nobody ever got hurt or anything by it.

Grant: Them having a beer.

Ann: Don't mention the names.

Frank: Well, they're both dead.

Grant: What was the culture like at work? Was it friendly?

Frank: Oh sure it was friendly. Everybody knew everybody. Everybody had a nickname. And they got along good. They used to have a bunch they called the Norky gang. They didn't work; they were lazy. Most of them were Irish and wherever they could bum a drink or a bottle. And they all were overalls. The overall gang and the Norky gang. But still, they didn't hurt anybody. They'd get their bottle and they'd go over and sit by the creek and do their BS'ing and sleeping.

Ann: Different worlds then.

Grant: And is it similar to how it worked in Butte, where you'd be either a contract or a day's pay? Was it a similar kind of arrangement with the company there?

Frank: Gee, I couldn't tell you about that because I only worked for the company over there in the Berkeley Pit. Of course, that was all union.

Grant: Right. And were you salaried here then?

Frank: No. It was all day's pay. Now, when I worked in the pit, there was a lot of guys from Anaconda that worked there too. And we were in a carpool. You had to drive maybe once, maybe twice a week. It was nice. At that time, boy, I thought them trucks were big. But compared to what they are now. Oh. I haven't been close to one of them, 200 tonners. But when I worked there, it was Macks. I can't remember the name of the other truck, but they were big then,

but they're small now. They're like toys. But I enjoyed working over there. I met a lot of people, made a lot of friends and learned a lot.

Grant: When would that have been that you went to the pit?

Frank: In the 70s, yeah, the late 60s and into the 70s. And the reason, I was working up at the smelter in the blacksmith shop, but they were going to do some remodeling there. And the blacksmith shop had to go. So I never lost a shift. I got over there on a Friday night and made an application and they said, "Yeah, be here Monday morning." So I didn't lose any time and I enjoyed working in the pit.

Grant: What did you enjoy about it?

Frank: Well, having made new friends. And I got to know the boss pretty good. He was another 'Vitch' and he treated me pretty good. And another thing that was nice is they had a recovery tank up there where they reclaimed a lot of copper. And about once a week, I'd have to take a truck with a tank on it. Drive up to the smelter and get it filled with acid and then drive back to Butte. They furnished me with big rubber gloves and coveralls, wool coveralls, and I had to dump that acid. And then that was the end of my day. When I got done with that, I could go home. That was a pretty good job.

Then I got down into the garage, working on the trucks. First greasing, changing oil and stuff. Then I got to looking around at these guys that were boilermakers and they were doing the repair work. They made more money. And I thought, "Hell, I could do that." So I transferred into the boilermakers. From then on, it was all repair work on the trucks. Which I enjoyed.

Grant: Did you re-weld the beds and stuff like that?

Frank: Well, of course, they got these little bigger trucks then. Every time you dumped the load, that stuff was heavy and sharp, it would wear the bottoms of the beds. And they had to be re-lined with three-quarter inch steel. You can imagine how long it would take to weld a piece of that stuff in there, too. But now they got wire welders and it's zip, zip. Well, I'm a stick welder, yet, using the rods. And I'd like to go over there one these days and get in that new garage just to see how much bigger it is than it was when I worked there. I might do that one of these days.

Grant: Yeah. They offer tours. The guy to talk to is named Mike McGivern at Montana Resources. And that concentrator over there sounds similar to the one that was here, you know, with the mill and the flotation units.

Frank: It could be about the same. I've never been in it myself, but I'm sure they've got some new processors too. But they refine ore there and they ship it to Japan to be smelted. They don't smelt it in Butte.

Grant: Now some of it is smelted too in Idaho. And recently they had a truck crash and spill a bunch of moly on the road. And that was on its way to Idaho.

Frank: Oh well I didn't know that.

Grant: I remember that same guy, Mike McGivern in the newspaper, they were asking him how much of a loss MR was going to take on that. And he said, "Well, it was already sold." So it's their problem.

Frank: Oh, that's right. Yeah, I remember reading that in the paper. That truck rolled over on its way. And he went up through the Big Hole. I thought, "Why the hell is he going up in the Big Hole with that kind of stuff?" And then as I read farther it was a shortcut down into Idaho. Yeah.

Grant: And I think that maybe it's in Challis or something. There's a moly smelter there. At the pit, it had been going quite a while by the time you got there, the Berkeley pit, but did anyone ever express any opposition to the pit taking out the neighborhoods like Meaderville.

Frank: I never heard any. Nobody ever complained. Because that was their livelihood like the smelter was here and they just went along with it. Of course, there was a lot of people that lived down in the Meaderville area and down on the flat.

Ann: But didn't the company provide them with new homes?

Frank: Oh, yeah. Wherever they had to.

Grant: So no one was ever up in arms about, you know, having their house destroyed?

Frank: No. They had someplace else to go.

Grant: And you think that was because largely the company treated people well?

Frank: Well, sure they did. You are too young to remember Meaderville. And all the roadhouses down there, eating places. But we did. We went in there several times. It was nice. Serve good food. And I used to like that drive through there into Helena. It's much different than the road now. You can look down, but that's all covered by the waste material now. But that was a nice drive through there. Lots of curves.

Grant: Woodville and that.

Frank: Yeah. Woodville Hill.

Grant: How often would you say you all went to town, went to Butte or Meaderville?

Ann: Not too often.

Frank: [inaudible]

Ann: I think it was almost like every weekend or every two weeks. And we'd have dinner. Oh there were such good eating places over there. Fantastic. People just traipsed over to Butte all the time to have dinner. Evidently, people still do that, I guess. I don't know.

Frank: Well, because what have you got here? One steakhouse.

Grant: That Italian place. Right. Is that any good?

Ann: O'Bella's?

Grant: Right.

Ann: Yeah. We've eaten there twice. Yeah. The steak was good. We had steak there the last time.

Frank: We both had a good steak there the last time. Now what's that new place in Butte?

Ann: Oh the cajun?

Grant: Oh, Cafe Zydeco? I did go to that.

Ann: How was that?

Grant: Oh, it was decent. So much nowadays, I feel, it all comes off the same truck. It's all the Sysco truck. And they just kind of repackage it. It's Cajun or it's a sports bar or it's a cafe, but it's all the same food, you know. But again, that's why I'm interested in the homemade stuff. I mean who renders lard anymore to cook with?

Frank: You can still buy lard. They got it in one pound packages. We don't use lard anymore because you have butter.

Grant: Yeah. Probably better.

Frank: Yeah. Healthier, cheaper.

Grant: Do you feel the work you did was meaningful, more beyond just pay and providing you a living?

Frank: Well I think it was meaningful. It was something that I'm giving to the company and they give back. So I enjoyed it. I wish it were still running.

Grant: Really?

Frank: I'd still be working. I would. I'd be doing something up there, until they kick me out.

Grant: What were all the things that Anaconda would do besides give you a paycheck, like you said, they had sports teams?

Frank: Oh, they had baseball teams. Between Butte and Anaconda. The Anodes, and the Walkerville, and Centerville, Meaderville. They all had a team and it was quite a competition and they put out some good ball players too. And the company. They had the Smelterman's Day Parade. Then when the union was strong, they'd give the kids a treat and a little bit of money. And of course, every kid in town took part in that. You know, for the treat. But that's what I call giving back. The union did that, but the union did a lot for the worker, too. They caused a lot of strikes, but they didn't last. The company finally gave in. Union won out and everybody was happy. And they got drunk.

Grant: How did you deal with strikes?

Frank: We got by. A lot of the times some of the guys left town, went to work, and they also came back with good recommendations because they said, "All the craftsmen that worked for the Anaconda Company that never went any place during a strike, they wanted them back." They were good. Electricians were good. The welders were good. I never did go any place, because they only had a couple of little strikes while I was in the welding department. I never went any place.

Grant: Did you ever picket?

Frank: No. No, never.

Grant: And you didn't get any grief from the union for that?

Frank: No.

Grant: Would you say the union overall was a good thing?

Frank: I think so. Sure. They all got good benefits. And like I say, they protected you. I'll tell you, I've been a member of the Teamsters Union since I was a freshman in high school. Oh, that would have been quite a while ago. I've still got my Teamster's card because when I worked at the Anaconda service station, the Teamsters business agent was the strongest union man you ever met. His name was Johnny Mogus. And I was only working there part time, but still he came down. He says, "You have to join the union." OK. So I had to join the union. Cost 25 bucks to join and the dues was $2.50 a month. So I paid it. But then I still got to work.

I'll tell you one thing I had against the unions here. When I was working in Butte, the welders in the pit belonged to the Teamsters Union. OK, I'm paying dues here in Anaconda. They are for the privilege of working at the Anaconda service station. When I went to work in the pit, I also had to pay union dues over there to the same union. Now I didn't think that was right. So I sat down and I wrote a letter to Jimmy Hoffa. He was still alive then. And not thinking it ever would get answered, but within two weeks, there were two representatives here from Seattle, from the Teamsters Union, and they met with Johnny Mogus, my business agent, and Frank Rooney, my

employer at the Anaconda service station. And they hashed it all out. And to make things better or worse, they decided I had to pay dues in both places.

Grant: After they came all the way out here?

Frank: Yeah, but that was all right. It didn't last. I finally got stationed here and just paid dues in one place, but I'm still getting a little Teamsters' pension out of that.

Grant: Really?

Frank: Yes, I really appreciate that because I was in there for a long time.

Grant: And the service station, what went on there?

Frank: You can't drive into a service station now and have somebody come out and put the gas in your car, check your oil or wash your windshield. But at that time there were attendants. The car would drive in. The attendant would come out and say, "What are you going to have sir?" "Fill her up." Put the hose in, let it run. Wash the windshield. Checked their tires. Grease the cars. Change the oil. Wash them. It was all service station work. That's why I maintain my own car now. I still change my own oil. At my age. I did it the other day, so I'm good for three thousand miles more. She hollers at me, "Why don't you take it downtown and have it done?" It's something I can do and I enjoy doing it.

My daughter just got a different car down in Billings and she says, ``You know, it cost me sixty five bucks to go get my oil changed in this car." It's one of them late model Chevys and they're different. Well, you know what it cost me? Sixteen dollars for the oil and six bucks for the filter. And I do it my own self. I got all the equipment and got the pans. I got a container that I put the oil into. It holds five gallons. And when it's full, I take it up to the county. They take it out of my car and dump it in a big container. And that's what they heat the garage with. And I got nice clean hands.

Grant: You said you had relatives in Opportunity.

Frank: Yeah. My father had a sister that lived down there. She married. They had one, two . . .three boys and a girl. Once in a while, my dad would have to go down. When they'd get ready to dig potatoes, put up the hay and stuff and help them, I'd go down there. I stayed on there for a week at a time. I'd come home on weekends. It was nice. I'd get to go ride an old workhorse from where they lived down around the golf course to what they called the pasture. That's where you went and your cows spent the day down there. You had to know your own cows. You'd get them out of the bunch and herd them home and then milk them. I was a half-ass farmer. That's what they called the kids down there. They were farmers. Yeah. Everybody had about 10 acres. Put up your own hay, big garden, potatoes. You raise your hogs, milk.
Grant: Any of those relatives still live out there?

Frank: They're all gone.

Ann: [inaudible]

Grant: I'm curious what you think of the changes in Opportunity.

Frank: You would look into them yards now and they're loaded with junk. Not many years ago, everybody had a nice garden and they raised their own hay, had a couple of cows, but nobody has cows down there anymore. And like I say, if you look in these yards now, it's all junk. It's a shame.

Grant: And what about how, you know, when they took out the Milltown dam? I guess that would have been 10 years ago and they dredged all the mine waste out of the Clark Fork and they trucked it back up the river and deposited it all in Opportunity.

Frank: They didn't truck it. They put it in railroad cars. It's down there around Warm Springs now. It's all covered. And they have researched enough to where they can raise grass on all that tailings now. You drive out of town and see that grass is that tall. So they've done marvelous things with it.

Grant: Do you think for the most part, the efforts of the EPA and the state government, you know, are they going in the right direction as far as the cleanup?

Frank: I think so. Because there's fish now down in the Clark Fork that were never there before. And the water they can use for irrigating. And it still winds up in the Pacific Ocean. And I'm sure that between here and where it's dumped into the ocean, there's people still taking water out of there for irrigating purposes. So they've purified it a lot, and I was reading in the papers the other day where the different processes they're gonna go through in Butte now to make it even more usable. That's all part of the company. I can't say a bad thing about the Anaconda company, not even after British Petroleum took it over. They still did a lot of good, good things.

Grant: I think people that do criticize the Anaconda Company will say that they treated people well, but they left this legacy of pollution.

Frank: Well, that's true, but they're trying to get rid of it now, like the tailings at the Parrot yards. They're going to dig all of them out and it's costing somebody a lot of money. But they're still doing it. You've read about these mines now that have left that waste and they haven't done a thing about it. And they won't. The mine shut down; they won't do a thing about it. But at least this company is. And it was a larger scale, of course.

Grant: When you were working in the Berkeley, was there water in it?

Frank: In the pit? No. That water was all pumped into the Clark Fork. Because the best door was right down in the bottom. And that was a long drive clear around there, you know, with as slow as them trucks went. I went down there a few times and even when I was working as a welder, you had to go out once in a while, do a little job on a truck, wherever they were hung up or stopped, or you had to do a little job on one of the big shovels. So I was in the pit once in a while, but most of the time I stayed right in the garage.

Grant: Were you ever scared when driving down those roads all the way down there?

Frank: Scared?

Grant: Yeah.

Frank: No.

Grant: It's a long fall.

Frank: No, because you could go down there twice as fast as the trucks. Trucks were real slow going and much slower coming out with the load. Matter of fact, I should have taken a couple of pictures of these guys driving the truck and reading a book at the same time. Coming up with a load of ore. I've seen them.

Grant: Nowadays, they're just on their phones, I guess. Used to be, they'd read a book.

Frank: Yeah. And boy, they're up about two stories too when they're in one of those big trucks.

Frank: I'd just like to go over there and take one trip with one of them guys in that big truck. I'll have to look into that.

Grant: And did you ever see the blasting?

Frank: I worked in the garage when they would blast. And they would blast about the same time every day and you'd know it. It would make everything vibrate. Then you'd see the cloud of dust. Oh, another thing I did when I worked in the pit, once in a while, I'd have to go out to Rocker. You ever been there where they stored the dynamite?

Grant: No.

Frank: I'll tell you now. All right, you're coming from Butte. And after you pass the auction yards on the right-hand side, there's a big field that's being irrigated right now. I noticed them the other day. It's just beyond that, there used to be several magazines, they called them. It's where they stored the dynamite. And you could tell there's several of them out there because you could tell the mound of concrete and brick where they were built, but they were underground. And when I worked for CNF, it later became Gretten Finland Trucking, I worked for them for a while, too, and I used to have to go over to one of these magazines and get several boxes of dynamite and take them to Anaconda where they were reclaiming all the red sands down there. You don't know where that is. It is on the opposite side of the highway. That was something to walk into one of those magazines and see all that dynamite. It was cold in there because it was all underground. And then to think, "Boy, oh, boy, I hope we don't ever have a wreck." But that wouldn't affect that dynamite. You have to have a cap in there.

Yeah, yeah. I lived through all that. I could do it again.

Grant: I was just reading in the paper today that they're offering all this free testing in Anaconda for arsenic and lead if you want it. Do you think you'll go to that?

Frank: No.

Grant: Irrelevant?

Frank: Why? That's crazy. Why? Maybe in this block they might dig up one yard. Over the next block, they might dig up one yard. Well, that stuff is all over town. It's in everybody's yard. And I've lived with it for 70 years here. Why am I going to let them tear it up now? My yard is good this morning and still growing. Jeez, that is crazy I think. It's an added expense. Some of these lazy people that never took care of their yards got a lawn now. And the guy next door still got arsenic in his yard. But he's living. Nuts.

Grant: For people that don't know anything about Anaconda, what things would you like to impart to them about the town and its history or the way it is currently? What would you say to someone who's never been here?

Frank: If they don't like it around here, they can get. I've been here all my life and I'm staying. I'm gonna stay. I haven't got much more to go, but I'm going to enjoy it. I like Anaconda.

Ann: I think the saddest thing, like with us, our kids are scattered. The families were so close knit. And we used to have these wonderful picnics with all the different relatives. And once they started dying off. And so now we're left with, kind of by ourselves and for us it's lonesome. Maybe for somebody else it's great. It's just sad. It's sad after a while.

Grant: How many children did you have?

Ann: We have four. We lost our oldest boy in a car accident. He was working for the Milwaukee Railroad right after high school. He was just a month short of his 19th birthday. These kids, a caravan of them, were coming home for the weekend. And the kids were towing...they'd changed drivers at Alberton near Missoula. Eddy got behind the wheel and he had insurance. He was insured. And they had this old jalopy hooked on to the back, but it was hooked on improperly. And as they were coming around a curve, that car kind of . . .

Frank: Something locked up in the car that he was towing. And it threw him off the road. The car that Eddy was driving rolled up against a big tree. And, of course, he was on the driver's side.

Ann: Terrible head injury.

Frank: He lasted, what, ten days?

Ann: Yeah, about ten days.

Frank: But we talked to the patrolman that investigated that and what we really liked hearing was absolutely no alcohol involved. He said these kids were doing everything right. And we really enjoyed that from the patrolman.

Ann: He came to the hospital, I don't know how many times, to assure us that Eddy wasn't...This fellow, Felty from Butte, who worked also on the railroad. And he was pretty well drunk in the car. He was a passenger in the front seat. And he was killed immediately.

Frank: He was killed too.

Ann: He was loaded with alcohol. So I don't know how he got drunk, but anyhow, it had nothing to do with any of the rest of the kids that drove in the caravan.

Grant: And what year was that?

Ann: 1966. September of '66.

Frank: Eddy was going to school in Billings at the time. And this was during the summer that they worked for the railroad out in Cle Elum, Washington.

Ann: Yeah. And then the other children are, Tommy works for Coleman cement plant in Three Forks. He's married. Has a family. And then our Joanne, she lives in Billings. She works there. And then our son Frank just retired. He's a barber. And he lives, moved to Tucson. So they're scattered.

Frank: At least Three Forks and Billings, at least they're not out of state.

Ann: Yeah. Tommy is in Whitehall.

Grant: And do they come up much to Anaconda and visit?

Ann: Uh, yeah, we see them quite often. But now they went and bought themselves a trailer house. And so now they're scooting around. And Joanne comes home once a year, spends about a week or so forth with us. Otherwise, she sticks just to staying in Billings. And Frank, the one that's retired, sold his house in Great Falls and then he has a new home in Arizona. He loves Montana because it's not as hot here.

Grant: I don't know how people live down there.

Frank: I don't like it. And he can golf everyday.

Grant: Were any of them in the military? It sounds like maybe they were of age in the Vietnam era.

Ann: No they missed that. Frank's two sons. Mike was in the Navy. And he was not too long. And Eddy is in the Air Guard in Tucson. And now they transported him and he's working at . . .

Frank: He's in the drones. He is a master sergeant. And he can only get one more promotion. But he won't take it because then they could transfer him wherever they want to.

Grant: If he was command master sergeant or something.

Frank: But right now he likes where he is. He's got a home down there.

[Trouble with the awning blowing in the wind.]

Grant: Seems very nice here in the house. Very peaceful. I can see, like you say, a bit of lonesomeness, especially if you had a house full of kids.

Ann: And you lose all your friends. We used to have all these friends. And we'd have dinners. We're the only couple left. One by one by one. We got to thinking. We lost more close friends. We just had some really close friends. A lot of them. And pretty soon one would have cancer. And then the other one would die. I thought we were a jinx. Be careful.

Grant: Anyone you hang out with is . . .

Ann: All the people that we were close with. And it's just . . .

Grant: Are those some of the funerals that you've worked?

Ann: Frank pretty much worked a lot of them, yeah.

Grant: Of your friends that have passed away.

Frank: I don't know whose funerals are going. What time did he say?

Ann: Two o'clock tomorrow.

Frank: I got to write that down.

Ann: I don't know who the heck that would be.

Frank: We used to have the paper delivered every day. And you know there's getting to be less and less in it everyday. And the price was going up and up and up. So she got mad and quit it. OK. The old gal next door still gets the Standard, So, I buy a paper on Sunday morning on our way home from church, so she puts the paper out in the mailbox and I go over and get it. And we read it. Then when I'm through reading it, I give it to the lady next door because she don't get the paper. So we get the Leader and when we get through with the Leader, I go and I put it in her mailbox because she doesn't get the Leader so that we get the paper and the Leader every day.

Grant: Very neighborly.

Frank: Yeah. And it don't cost. I'm cheap aren't I.

Grant: Frugal.

Frank: Frugal. Yeah.

Ann: Watch the dollars one way or another..

Frank: And I bring the paper home. I give it to her and she opens it up to see who died. Fold it up. “I'm through.”

Ann: It's getting so the people who die now, we don't even know them. It used to be that it was all the "ich's". You know. I was Blaskovich before I married Frank. And so this one day at church, father, one of the priests asked me, what our last name names were? So I says, "It was Blaskovich." I says, "I just scratched one "ich" for another."

Grant: That's a good one.

Ann: The priest just laughed his head off. I thought it was pretty good.

Grant: That is a good one. I haven't heard that one.

Ann: He wanted to know what my maiden was and I told him.

Frank: She's pretty sharp.

Grant: I'll say.

Frank: I got a personalized plate on the car. I'm Frank. She's Ann. The personalized plate says, "FRANNK."

Grant: Nice.

Frank: She come up with that too.

Ann: [Inaudible]

Grant: Well, I just have one more question, which is what do you hope for for Anaconda? When we first started talking, you talked about the decline in population and, of course, you've had a lot of friends pass away. What, if anything, do you hope for for future generations of Anaconda?

Frank: Gee, I don't know. I don't look forward to anything ever coming in here to amount to the smelter.

Ann: I'd like to have some decent shopping. We have to go to Butte all the time to shop.

Frank: You can't even buy a pair of shorts in Anaconda.

Ann: Go all the way to Butte, or Missoula, or Great Falls, or Bozeman to shop. And at our age, we don't like being on the highway that much. And I don't mind chairs because I just have the pacemaker put in and I have a-fib. And I thought, well, I'm giving up my keys. I'm just not driving. So he has to drive by himself. He's a good driver too. All that training that he had working for the Anaconda Company driving. He's an excellent driver. Just excellent.

We used to have good stores. That was when the company was booming away and then it seemed like as soon as the company broke down, then people were just leaving. Businesses weren't the same. We're not a hub, you know, where Anaconda is important in any way. It just isn't. So I guess they figure we won't get anything in here. Unless something fantastic opens up. A big business comes in. I don't think that's going to happen. We are situated just right.

Grant: So you pretty much agree, Frank, with that?

Frank: I agree with her.

Grant: That's how you got by all these years.

Ann: He has to. I beat him up after you leave.

Grant: Oh, yeah. Look at that.

Frank: [showing a picture] I went up on the stack about this much higher. I don't know how many steps that was.

Grant: OK, so this box here would be the weather station.

Frank: That's the weather station.

Grant: OK.

Frank: Yeah.

Grant: Just a little above that was enough.

Frank: Yeah.

Ann: This was very interesting. I learned more about you in this last hour or so.

Frank: Don't tell anybody.

Ann: Frank is a guy that just lays back and doesn't say much. He's quiet. You were full of it today. That's wonderful.

Frank: Does it smell?

Grant: Well, I really appreciate your time today.

Ann: Appreciate you doing this.

Grant: Thanks for having me.

Ann: This was neat. This was just great.

Grant: If more things come to mind. I can always come back. I got my mom's car now so I can just zip on over.

[Mic paused]

Frank: The Bake-Rite Bakery was situated between Chestnut and Cedar Street and the address was 313. Guys would come off the smelter at 3 o'clock or. Then you had another shift. 7:30-4:00. That's when most of the craftsmen worked doing repairs. You'd get off downtown. Get your paycheck and go cash it. And then walk home.

So I got off this one day, cashed the check and I went into the Bake-Rite. Because every time I walked by there, all these nice cookies were in there, you know. And so on payday, I went in and bought a few. The guy put them in the bag. His name was Basil Quirk. The old fart never had a tooth in his head. And after I was just gonna get my money out and he says, (I had my bucket under my arm) and he says, "I see you're still carrying the emblem of ignorance." I thought, "You old bastard." I shoved the cookies back, I put the money back in my pocket and I never went in there again. I thought, "He depended on the working man. And then to say something like that."

Ann: It was the smeltermen and the miners that kept the company going. Any of them quit, you wouldn't have the company. If any of the men refused to work. I mean this is what kept everything going.

Grant: If you don't have a company, you don't have a town.

Frank: Like I say, that was at 313 East Park Street. And 313 1/2 was the second-story, and that's where the girls were.

Ann: Tell him how you went up there. Someone took you up there.

Grant: The girls?

Frank: Not to see the girls. This is also prohibition days. This second cousin of mine was a mechanic and he had a car, which we didn't. And once in a while he'd take me for a ride. He drove like hell. All these dirt streets, you know, you'd go around a corner. He scared me, but he had me out for a ride one day and he says, "Come on in here." He says, "You know Billy

Matlich?" He was a boxer and he fought a lot. So he says, "I'm gonna introduce you to him." So we went up to 313 1/2, and that's where the girls were. But also, you had to knock on this one door and the guy would open the peephole and look out to see who it was. And if he knew you got in and it was the bar where they serve whiskey and beer and wine and stuff. And so I got to meet Billy Matlich. He had a nice white jacket on. I don't know, maybe I had a glass of pop or something.

Grant: Did prohibition work?

Frank: Well, yes and no. Guys still got their booze, but when it came in in 1932 when Roosevelt was first elected. Then things brightened up. You know, the breweries started up. They started to make whiskey all over the country. So it was good and bad. But as far as I'm concerned, I was concerned I was too young to appreciate either one of them. When you look back, there were good days and bad days.
Ann: Butte and Anaconda were big drinking towns.

Grant: Absolutely.

Frank: They still are. I go to the vet twice a year for a checkup. And matter of fact, I had one yesterday and I told the girl or the girl says to me, "You know, you're wasting my time." She's a big movement. I mean, she weighs about 300 pounds, this doctor. And her and I get along good. And she kept looking at me. She said it three times. I can't believe you're ninety five. "Well, do you want to see my driver's license?" But anyhow, I got off track. Now I forgot what I was going to say.

Grant: You went to the V.A.

Frank: Oh yeah, they give you blood samples and everything. And this one time the doctor called me from Fort Harrison and he says, "You get your butt over here tomorrow right away. You only have half your blood." Hmmmm. Where did the other half go? So he told me that I had an ulcer that ate half my blood. I didn't know, never had pain, was never sick until they checked me. So I says, "Yeah. I'll see about it." "Let me talk to your wife." So he talked to her. He told her about it. She says, "Yeah, I guess we better go." Well, that was twenty years ago, the first of last June. And we haven't had a beer or a shot or a glass of wine since. Aren't we pure? I've got all kinds of hooch, booze up there, and I got beer in the basement, but neither one of us have had a drink since then.

Grant: Yeah. Do you feel you're better off?

Ann: Oh, yeah.

Frank: Oh, yeah. I had to build my blood up. I thought they'd have to give me a few transfusions or something. I took iron pills for about four months. Got checked. They says, "You don't have to take any more pills. Your blood is back up again." Good enough.

Ann: His Dr. Webster here in Anaconda said to him, "You're my favorite patient." That's because checking his blood pressure and everything else. It's just excellent.

Grant: Did you ever think you would make it to ninety five?

Frank: No.

Ann: I started to downsize our house. When I moved, I was seventy-five. I'm 92 and I thought, well, my mother and father both died. Papa was 85. Momma was 84. And I just really believed. I believed that we would be gone. See? And then honest to God. Every time we go to the doctor, they want to know why we're not aging. And we are certainly aging some, I guess, but anyhow, they just wondered what our secret was. I said, "Well, Gee. Just a good marriage. And we're sensible about everything."

Frank: My dad died in his 60s. He had cancer of the bladder. And that's what took him but my mother lived to be 96.

Grant: Is bladder cancer common here?

Frank: Boy, I don't know.

Ann: I don't know.

Frank: Not especially.

Ann: I suppose, you know, a lot, they say that what is it Anaconda and Butte are both prominent about having a lot of cancer.

Grant: Yeah. Good friend of Butte, Mary Kay Craig who has bladder cancer? Her mom died of bladder cancer. They say that it's connected to arsenic exposure.

Frank: Yeah, it could be. How many years ago? I'll say, six years ago, I go to Dr. Scott. And he told me at that time that I had a malignant tumor in my bladder. "OK. What can I do?" So, I didn't take any extra medication for it. And every once in a while I would have blood in the urine. And I didn't pay much attention to that. He told me it would happen. And here a year ago next month, no it'll be a year ago this month, I was in the bathroom and I was urinating and the stream was steady red. And then the next time I went, there was pieces about that long in with the urine. And you know what it was? That tumor had dissolved. And I got rid of it by urinating.

Grant: Wow.

Frank: And when he checked me a year ago, he says, "I don't want to see you for another year." Well, I got to make an appointment with him when we go to see Dr. Rogers.

Ann: And he told Frank, "You'll never die from that."

Frank: And I've never had a bit of urine that was red at all since then. He must have thought, "Well, he must have got rid of that tumor."

Ann: Meantime, you know, it's just crazy the way this.

Frank: I used to get up twice every night and go to the bathroom, now I get up once. Sometimes twice. It all depends on what I drink before I go to bed. If I have my usual glass of water or a glass of milk, I just have to get up once.

Grant: What role do you think your faith plays in this longevity?

Ann: It is big, big time. You know if everybody turned to God instead of thinking they can make this living, that you can live without God in your life. Forget it. You can't. We pray a lot. We do pray an awful lot. Our faith is very strong. Big, big part of our lives.

Grant: Talk often about how much just the will to live and to be healthy plays into your health.

Ann: Absolutely. And by praying, it brings calmness into your life. And we wouldn't push. I feel this way. You don't have to be a Catholic to be a good person, but whatever your faith is, embrace it. And we have this one. Marlene. But anyway, Ronnie's first wife died, she was Catholic. And then he married this other gal and she's Serbian. I think it's really nice. One Sunday or so they'll go to the Serbian church for services. Next time they'll go to the Catholic church. And I thought, that's the way to live. And it's wonderful. A lot of times a person will turn Catholic or so forth. I don't think you have to leave your faith for anybody. You've still got the same God. And if you go to all the churches and pick any church you want, pretty much they're all the same. They're all good. Good stuff. But it's a big factor. Such a big factor.

Grant: I'll close up shop here.

[Mic off]

Frank: Employee of the Anaconda Company right now, in Anaconda.

Ann: Unless, there's somebody else, but I doubt it.

Frank: Not living. There's a guy who graduated with her. He's 92 years old. He even had his picture in the paper. He was the oldest living man that worked for the Anaconda Company. Well, he must like the publicity, because I didn't say anything. Right now he's off so bad, I don't think he'd know me. But I got to thinking about it. And then when our friends we're here from Washington, they said, "Geez, you're three years older than Joel Balkovich, why can't you put it in the paper that you are the oldest member of this company?"

Ann: There's no sense saying that because somebody is going to come and be older than you.

Grant: Yeah, they'll be coming out of the woodwork.

Frank: Well, I'd like to meet him.

Grant: Why wouldn't you want to just say, "Oh, I'd like to note a correction here that in fact..." That's not in your nature?

Frank: No. Don't bother me. I still get my pension every month. Teamster's, my little teamster's pension. We get by.

Ann: As long as everybody else is working and paying into it. We're safe.

Grant: That's an interesting fact, though.

Frank: Crazy Frank that tried to climb the stack.

[END OF RECORDING]