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GORDON CRAIN

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Oral History Transcript of Gordon Crain

Interviewers: Ellen Crain and Clark Grant

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Ellen Crain: All right. For the record, what is your name?

Gordon Crain: Gordon Crain

Ellen Crain: And Gordon. I'd like you to tell us whether we have permission to place this oral history in the public domain.

Gordon Crain: Well, I suppose.

Ellen Crain: Thank you. Yeah. You'll have to sign something as well. So, Gordon, would you tell us where you were born?

Gordon Crain: Salmon, Idaho.

Ellen Crain: And when did you come to Butte?

Gordon Crain: 1956, I believe.

Ellen Crain: And why did you come?

Gordon Crain: My father came here to work in the mines.

Ellen Crain: And what was your father's occupation?

Gordon Crain: Contract miner.

Ellen Crain: And when did he start mining?

Gordon Crain: You know, I can't really answer that. It was years before that because he worked in some mines in Idaho.

Ellen Crain: In the Coeur D'Alene mining district?

Gordon Crain: He worked in the Coeur D'Alene and he worked in the Cobalt and the Black Pine, that was south of Mackey, Idaho.

Ellen Crain: So was he a contract miner in Idaho?

Gordon Crain: Yes. It's all he ever done when he was underground, was worked as a contractor, contracted drift and raises.

Ellen Crain: So he came to Butte in the early 50s.

Gordon Crain: He came here in, I believe, 1955. He left, came back to Idaho. And then we came back here with him in, sometime in '56.

Ellen OK. And he went to work for the Anaconda Company.

Gordon Crain: Yep.

Ellen Crain: And do you know what mine he was in?

Gordon Crain: First mine I think he worked in was the Emma.

Ellen Crain: Oh really?

Gordon Crain: Yeah. It was a lead mine, I believe.

Ellen Crain: The Emma?

Gordon Crain: Yeah. Lead and manganese or something like that. I'm not exactly sure what ores they had there, but I believe those are right.

Ellen Crain: And where did you live?

Gordon Crain: We lived down on South Montana for about a week in . . . I don't remember what the name of those apartments were. And then he purchased the house in McGlone Heights. We moved up there and we lived in that house for about two years. No, not even two years. About a year, maybe. And then we moved across the street to 705 7th, then lived there for as long as I can remember. And up until my mother and dad's deaths.

Ellen Crain: And you just sold that house last year.

Gordon Crain: And we just sold the house last year.

Ellen Crain: And he purchased that house from the Anaconda Company. Was he the first owner of that house?

Gordon Crain: No, he was probably the second owner of that house.

Ellen Crain: So can you explain the Ouija board?

Gordon Crain: I can try.

Ellen Crain: OK.

Gordon Crain: The Ouija board was . . . All of the mines had a Ouija board, and what they did on the Ouija board is they put the contracts up on the board and what the value of the contract was. So meaning that as you ran your contract, for instance, a drift miner would get paid for the amount of ore that they removed, the amount of rail that they put in for the muckers and the ore cars. The amount of fan bag that they put in to keep air in the front of the drift. And all rock bolts they got paid for. And they got paid for timbering. So depending on how much timber, how many rock bolts, how much rail and how much ore you removed, you were paid on a contract. And those contracts would show up on what was called the Ouija board. And the contract miners being stopers or drifters or razors, like any, I guess, business or any type of sport, you always wanted to be number one. And so if you were on the top of the Ouija board, you topped the Ouija board. You were the kind of the best that was in the mine at the time.

Ellen Crain: And contract miners always worked in pairs, didn't they?

Gordon Crain: Yes, they did. They had a partner.

Ellen Crain: And your father topped the Ouija board quite a bit.

Gordon Crain: Yes, he did. When he was at the . . . I don't know about the Steward, but I do know that at the Badger, he topped the Ouija board and he topped the Ouija board when he was at the Con.

Ellen Crain: Who was his partner?

Gordon Crain: His name was Joe Romberg.

Ellen Crain: What was your father's name?

Gordon Crain: Harold Crain. They called him Rusty.

Ellen Crain: How long did your father work in underground mining?

Gordon Crain: Well, here in Butte from '56 to 1976. No. Excuse me. That's wrong. Till 1967. And at that time, there was a strike and it was a fairly long one, and he left Butte and went and contract mined back in Idaho with an individual from Butte. They opened the Cobalt, the Blackbird Mine back up and mined copper. And he done that for . . . I believe '67 was a long strike, and when it was over, he came back here and he no longer went underground. He went to work in the Berkeley Pit as a driller, and he'd done that for about a year. And then he went driving truck until he retired. I don't remember when he retired, he retired, I believe, in 1974, '73. Somewhere in there.

Ellen Crain: So tell us about when you were in high school. What did you want to do with your career, your life?

Gordon Crain: You know, I can't answer that. I really didn't have any direction that I wanted to really go. So when I graduated from high school, of course, like every kid in Butte, you know, you got a job on the Hill right away. Your dad went down, talked to the hiring office and they give you a job doing some kind of mediocre job in the summer. And so that fall, I decided to go to the vo-tech and I took up welding and graduated from the welding class and went to work in Anaconda at the smelter for about five months until I could get transferred over to the Butte shops. Then I came back to Butte and worked at the Parrot shops as a boilermaker.

Ellen Crain: What's a boilermaker?

Gordon Crain: Well, it's a beer and a shot of whiskey.

Ellen Crain: Yes.

Gordon Crain: No, a boilermaker . . . The true trade is you work with vessels and heating vessels to heat buildings and that, you build boilers. Basically, what you do is build a boiler. With the Anaconda Company, it was a trade that you built almost anything and everything that the Anaconda Company wanted or needed. And from the mouths on the converters in Anaconda at the smelter, that were just huge, huge. They were just monstrous pieces of steel that were three inches thick and 25 feet long and you'd bend them and put them in a press to bend them. We rebuilt all of the shovels in the Berkeley pit. We built mine cars, even though the Anaconda Company got sued for it. We worked underground as car knockers, that's what they called us. And what we did there is kept all of those mine cars on the track.

Because of the copper water, it would eat the bearings out of the wheels - in some places overnight. And that's not an exaggeration. We also took care of the cages underground. We maintained all of the man cages and we maintained all of the ore cars, or the ore hoists. Again, some of those would hold up for a week. Some of them would hold up for two weeks. Some of them would hold up for three days. Again, depending on what mine you are in. And for instance, the East Calusa and Leonard mine, you would put new bolts in the chippy's hoist every three days. The copper water would eat stainless away faster than you could keep up with it. And you never looked up because when it got your eye, it burned.

Ellen Crain: The copper water?

Gordon Crain: Yep. Burned for many hours. It was really toxic.

Ellen Crain: So how old were you when you first went underground?

Gordon Crain: I was 21.

Ellen Crain: And were you afraid?

Gordon Crain: Well, I don't know if I was afraid. I was given some instructions from my father and these were the main two: Never sleep underground. Never sleep underground. And never walk in the dead end drifts. And there was a reason for that. You know, carbon monoxide

mostly. And when you're asleep, you're definitely not going to be able to react. And so those two things were driven into me by my father readily. A lot. I was told that. And so I never did. I never walked into dead-end drifts and I never slept underground. I did lay on a wagon or two waiting for the cages and stuff, but I never slept when I was doing that.

Ellen Crain: So you were 21. And what mines did you work in?

Gordon Crain: Well, in 1970, I worked for the Anaconda Company for about six months. We went on strike. When we went off strike, I went to work at the Steward Mine, car knocking. I couldn't get back in the shop because of seniority. So I went to the Steward mine and I worked with a kid by the name of Butch Church and we car knocked. We car knocked on the 21, we car knocked on the 46.

Ellen Crain: Explain what the 21 is.

Gordon Crain: Oh it's a level. The 2100 level. The 4600 level. We worked on the 1700 level. Never forget it, you couldn't take your coat off on the 17. It was so damn cold.

Ellen Crain: What was the temperature at the 2100?

Gordon Crain: Nice sunny day, 70s.

Ellen Crain: and at the 46.

Gordon Crain: Nice sunny day in the 90s. Probably the 1300 also.

Ellen Crain: Ninetieth?

Gordon Crain: I don't remember, it might have been warm up on the 13. The only one I remember as being cold was the 1700. And I don't know if it was a draft, an air drift or what, but it just sucked the cold in off of the surface and it was cold in the summer also, not just in the winter.

Ellen Crain: Where is the Chinese laundry?

Gordon Crain: In the Steward mine and I don't know which level.

Ellen Crain: Did you ever go to the Chinese laundry?

Gordon Crain: I don't know that I can say I did or I didn't. I'm not sure of that. I do know that I worked on the 4600 of the Stuart and the humidity or the moisture would be so thick. It was like you were in a fog and the water would drop off of the back wall and literally scold you. So whenever you worked down there, you had to keep your slicker on. Plus it was 90 degrees. It was hot, humid. You didn't have good visibility because there was this moisture in the air all the time. And the water was just ridiculously hot when it dripped off of the back wall.

Ellen Crain: So you worked at the Steward.

Gordon Crain: I worked at the Steward. Then I left the Steward and I went back to the shops. I finally got back in, bumped and got back into the shops and worked in the shops till 73, 74. And then I got evicted. Jean Lemon told me one day I was going to the Kelly. So I went to the Kelly mine.

Ellen Crain: Why did you get evicted?

Gordon Crain: I don't know. They would decide that they were going to send somebody to the Kelly. And at that time it was myself and Mark Townsend. And we went up there and we were car knocking. Maintaining the cars. And then him and I became the maintenance men with the safety engineer. And what we did at that point was we traveled all over the Butte Hill and done all of the safety checks on all of the cages. The man cages, the chippies. Made sure that the dogs and everything on the cages worked.

Ellen Crain: What are the dogs?

Gordon Crain: The dogs is what supposedly are going to save your life if that cable breaks. And when the cable breaks, they have big springs on them that twist these things that they call the dogs, the opposite direction. And what they looked like was a serrated knife, kinda. And what they were supposed to do is dig into the guides, which were wood. And by the way, the guides were all made out of mahogany, black mahogany. Nicest wood you ever wanted to see. And for some reason, the copper water didn't affect the mahogany, the black mahogany. So anyways, the dogs, we would torque the dogs to make sure that they were correct and that they would engage if the cable broke. We also replaced anything that needed replaced on the cages at that time. And we also went with the shaftmen or the men that kept the air passages or the air tunnels or the air shafts on the hill open of any obstruction. So we would always go with them and make sure that their descent down into the air shafts was safe.

Ellen Crain: How would they descend into those air shafts?

Gordon Crain: On a cage. Some cages hung on a single cable and they would go down in a cage and they would use sticks to stop it from turning as it went down and the cable unwound.

Ellen Crain: You mean, like spinning.

Gordon Crain: Yeah, spin. Really spin.

Ellen Crain: How would they use a stick?

Gordon Crain: They would just hold it, pump it against the wall to stop it.

Ellen Crain: How many arms got broken doing that?

Gordon Crain: It was pretty safe. It was a slow drop. It wasn't. It was a whole different game than mining, so to speak, or dropping men to go to work. And then we used to put this thing on called a suicide deck. And what that was, is it hung underneath the chippy, underneath the cage, and the problem on why they called it the suicide deck is if it ever went to the bottom of the mine and that guy that's running the hoist up on the surface stops that chippy where it's supposed to be. There's a good chance that if you were on the suicide deck, you'd be buried in water at the bottom of the shaft. So they nicknamed it the suicide deck and it had no sides to it. That way they could work off of it.

Ellen Crain: And people were just lining up to get on that.

Gordon Crain: The only guys that I ever knew that got on it were the shaftmen.

Ellen Crain: Just the shaftmen.

Gordon Crain: Just the shaftmen. They would go down to work in the shaft and we would come along and we would bolt it on, set it up, make sure that it was safe. And then off they would go and we would wait until they came back and were done with their job for the day. Usually for the day, because we had take it back off, because if they used it on other levels, the cage, they couldn't have the suicide deck on there.

Ellen Crain: What's the hurricane deck?

Gordon Crain: The hurricane deck is on the top of the . . . Trying to think of what they called them. The ore cages. They weren't called cages. But anyways, the hurricane deck was on the top where the cables were connected to the cages or the chippies. They didn't have a hurricane deck on the top of the chippies.

Ellen Crain: Because the chippies were holding the men.

Gordon Crain: The chippies held men. They were usually four decks at the Steward. There was four decks of chippies. They held seven men per deck. The chippie at the Kelly held 21 men and it was only two decks. The cages that the ore car . . . Geez, I wish I could think what I want to call them. Anyways, there was a man deck on all of the ore cars or the ore trams at the Kelly and you could get on them and get off of them or you could get up on what was called the hurricane deck and you could ride it on the top of the deck.

Ellen Crain: But it wasn't enclosed.

Gordon Crain: It wasn't enclosed. You could either stand there, or sit there, there was enough room to sit, enough room to stand. No more than two guys, maybe three, sometimes.

Ellen Crain: How fast would they drop?

Gordon Crain: How fast did they drop? I can't tell you what the speed was, but if you were standing out on the street and the cars were going by and your head's moving and trying to keep

up with them, that's about the speed you're going down and going up. And that's called man speed. Well, when we worked at the Kelly, sometimes we had to ride the hurricane deck and so we'd get on the hurricane deck and they would run at rock speed. Rock speed is a lot different. Rock speed is probably at least one and a half times faster than man speed. I mean, you're just . . . It's hard to explain how fast you're going. Like you're on a motorcycle and if you're looking up, it's like a TV set getting bigger as you're coming to the surface. It's like a sunny looking box up there about the size of a dice. And it just keeps getting bigger as you're coming up. And the Kelly, they really flew because the Kelly was a concrete shaft. They were bigger cages. They had wheels on the guides, not just the guide plates. And they could really cook up and down the shafts, the ore cars.

Ellen Crain: So when did you join the union? What was your union? Tell us about your union.

Gordon Crain: I joined Local 130 about two days after I went on the job in the Parrot shop. It was the first thing that happened. The down side. Here you go.

Ellen Crain: The title of your union.

Gordon Crain: The Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Blacksmiths and Shipbuilders.

Ellen Crain: In Local 130.

Gordon Crain: Local 130.

Ellen Crain: What was your work number?

Gordon Crain: 129405.

Ellen Crain: What was your father's?

Gordon Crain: You know I'm not sure. 20654. Something like that.

Ellen Crain: Tell me how the work number worked.

Gordon Crain: You were assigned a work number. And you carried it all the time you were on the hill.

Ellen Crain: Where did you carry it?

Gordon Crain: It was on your pay stubs. It was how they referred to you.

Ellen Crain: How about your disc?

Gordon Crain: Disc?

Ellen Crain: That little metal disc?

Gordon Crain: No. You didn't carry it on a chip.

Ellen Crain: OK. So tell me to tell me about payday.

Gordon Crain: You got payday either across the street over here at the pay office on Fridays on Main Street, or you received your check through the mail, or through your bank on Thursdays. When I went to the Hill, you could get them through the mail or through the bank. When my father first came here, you had to go to the pay office to be paid. You didn't get it anywhere, any way other than you had to go to the pay office on Main Street. And if your wife picked up your paycheck, she had to have a signed paper by the employee to receive the paycheck.

Ellen Crain: Really?

Gordon Crain: Yep.

Ellen Crain: Well, isn't that interesting. Was it a paycheck or could you get it in cash?

Gordon Crain: Paycheck. No cash. I still have one of those paychecks, by the way. That I have never cashed because it was only worth 26 cents when they told me that I was no longer an employee. I said, "Thank you very much. I'm going fishing."

Ellen Crain: You want to tell us when? When did you go from underground work to above ground work?

Gordon Crain: I went back in 1977. In 1977 they started closing some of the Butte Hill, the mines, the underground, and so, I stayed at the Kelly. I was the last man standing there because I had seniority over everybody up there. But in '77, I got transferred to the Berkeley Pit and to the garage, what they called the garage, where you worked on the unit rigs.

Ellen Crain: What's a unit rig?

Gordon Crain: They hauled the rock in the pit, the big trucks, the "ukes", the unit rigs. That's what they were. The Wabcoes, the whatever you wanted to call them. They hauled the rock and they were in the shops, you always had to keep them maintained because the Anaconda Company always put more rock in the trucks than they were designed to hold. So, of course, there was lots of damage hauling, you know, 10 mile round trip when you were hauling from the bottom of the Berkeley pit all the way to the ponds or the leach dumps or the waste dumps or whatever.

Ellen Crain: Where would they be?

Gordon Crain: North of the pit, the Berkeley Pit. Some stuff came out of the pit and it would be leach. So they would take that and put it on leach dumps. That way they could leach the copper out of it. Some of it would go to waste because there was actually hardly anything in it that was worth anything. And then there was, of course, the trucks that went to the crusher because they

were carrying the ore. Or the "goodies." So those trucks needed to be maintained all the time. They would be in and out of shops. I worked there. I think I was there six weeks and I bumped another. I had to work shifts, by the way, when I was in the garage. I wasn't accustomed to working shifts because I had worked on the hill. So it was always day shift, which was great and Saturdays and Sundays off.

Ellen Crain: Did that work for all the trades?

Gordon Crain: The Butte Hill, everybody usually worked Monday through Friday. When I worked at the shop, you could work six days, if you wanted to. Because there was always a shovel in there that needed rebuilt. So a lot of money was coming out of the pit, so they could afford to have maintenance done on Saturdays too. So they would always be a crew in there working on a shovel in the garage or in the Parrot shop. So we maintained those, and I transferred to the crusher in that same time in '77, I went over there. I bumped a guy out of there. There was another layoff. And I bumped a guy out of there. And I went to the...

Ellen Crain: Tell us how bumping works.

Gordon Crain: Well, there's a seniority list.

Ellen Crain: And your union there's a seniority list.

Gordon Crain: There's a seniority list in every union. Guy's been there the longest, has the most feathers. So he gets to call the shots with anybody underneath him, as far as where you work, when you work. And that's about how that worked.

Ellen Crain: So if you want to take somebody else's position and you have more feathers, you get to bump them.

Gordon Crain: Or more seniority, the same thing, that's how you would... So you'd bump a guy out of a position. So when I was at the Berkeley garage, that was three shifts. I really didn't care for it at all. And there was an opening at the crusher. And the guy had less seniority than I did. So I bumped him and I went over there and worked day shift at the crusher. And it was Monday through Friday, Saturdays and Sundays off, unless there was some maintenance schedule that had to be done, that you'd get a ton of overtime doing. And I worked at the crusher until I was laid off in June of 1980.

Ellen Crain: Then what did you do?

Gordon Crain: Went on vacation. I had a lot of unemployment time available to me, so I took advantage of about six months of it.

Ellen Crain: And then?

Gordon Crain: And then I went to Colstrip, Montana. Or West Dakota I used to call it. And I worked for Bechtel Corporation for three and a half years as a boilermaker. It was interesting

because everything you worked on was new. You didn't have to clean somebody else's mess up before you fixed it, which was an interesting concept. I worked at Colstrip for about three weeks and one day they came to me and they said, you seem to understand blueprints and how things are put together and why. And I went bossing for Bechtel Corporation in Colstrip and I worked as a boss all the time I was there until the last week when they took my feathers away from me because that job was winding down also. And they laid my apprentice off in Colstrip that had been with me all the time I was down there. And I thought, well, what the hell, time to drag up. So I left Colstrip. Then I came home and I had already married this young lady. And I was kind of looking at some options to work construction. And it just didn't look good in the stars, so I got into the insurance business. Was kind of like a 360 degree turn in my life.

Ellen Crain: And you did that for how long?

Gordon Crain: 19 years.

Ellen Crain: And then you went to work for Butte Silver Bow.

Gordon Crain: Went to work for Butte Silver Bow, doing maintenance for them. And then I worked there, I think it was twelve and a half years. Almost 13. One day I woke up and I said, "Geez, my retirement program looks pretty good." And so I pulled the pin and retired.

Ellen Crain: Yes you did. So I want to ask Clark if you have any questions after having listened to this, about things that other people might not understand.

Grant: I think a lot of times, especially when people have never been underground, they assume that it's all very claustrophobic. Were there bigger rooms underground?

Gordon Crain: Yeah, there's some big rooms. I'm trying to think of the level where the pumps were in the Kelly. And I'm not going to exaggerate here at all. But if you could imagine walking into a building as big as the MAC Center underground. That would be comparable. They had twelve pumps down there. Four were always online. Four were always back-up. And four were always being maintained and rebuilt. And they pumped more water than you can ever imagine. And the only way I can explain that to you is... it was the 3800, the pumps were. But the 3750 there was a river and I'm not exaggerating a river that came from the . . . What was the mine up on top of the hill?

Ellen Crain: The Bell Diamond?

Gordon Crain: No, no. Gosh, I was there so many times and I can't remember. Anyways, they pumped the water out of the mines at this mine and it went into literally a concrete river that ran approximately three quarters of a mile and then it dumped into these big slurry bends at the 38. And what they would do there is keep agitating that water to pump it, because they couldn't let that slime and whatever was in the water settle. Because it would clog the system up. And by the way, it wore the system out all the time, anyways. That's why they had four being rebuilt, four on standby and four that we're pumping. It's hard to explain it. I mean, you talk about the seven wonders of the world. The 3800 of the Kelly mine was close to one of the wonders of the world.

All concrete, clean, you could eat off the floor down there. It was always taken. Well, it was the lifeblood of the hill. If the water wasn't being pumped out of the hill, they weren't digging any ore.

Ellen Crain: Where would they send the water?

Gordon Crain: They would send the water to surface. They would send it to a place called the copper tanks. That was just kind of north of the Berkeley pit. And they would add acid to it. Not that it didn't have enough already. And they would dump tin out of mine cars into the copper tanks. And the tin tomorrow would be copper sulfide. And the water would then get treated with lime and take the acidity out of it and it would go on down the creek until things changed. I don't know when that was. I did work at the lime plant down on South Montana. When I was at the shop, once in a while I'd go out on that job and rebuild stuff down there that would wear out. They had augers that pushed the lime into the creek.

Ellen Crain: That would be Silver Bow Creek.

Gordon Crain: Yeah, and that stuff would wear out and you had to go down and replace it or rebuild it. So, you know, there was a lot of things that went on on the Butte Hill for boilermakers to do. I mean, I worked on the slime lines up on the Yankee Doodle ponds, welding slime line together.

Ellen Crain: What is slime? What is slurry?

Gordon Crain: Slime or slurry. When they concentrate ore, it turns into the finest sand that you could ever imagine. Just give you an idea how fine it is, is that the company would pump it underground back into stopes. To fill a stope like this room was a stope. Well, they didn't want these vacant areas underground because they might want a stope right above here, so they couldn't just keep stoping up and leave this room empty. So they would pump this stuff back in. This slurry. And it was just a... You can't imagine. You'd have to see it to see how fine it was. There was an incident up at the Yankee Doodle ponds one time when the guy by the name of Glenn Lewis fell into the slurry and it honestly filled up his ear, his ear channels, in his mouth and his nose. And they got him the hell out of the stuff and got some water and washed it away. But if it would have dried and that's what the company did underground, they would push it in there and let that dry. And it was just like concrete. It was so dense. So dense that it would set up like concrete.

Ellen Crain: So they'd pump that up to the Yankee Doodle?

Gordon Crain: They'd pump it up to the Yankee Doodle pond.

Ellen Crain: Where is the Yankee Doodle?

Gordon Crain: North of the Berkeley Pit. It's still there and they still pump water and stuff from the concentrator. As the concentrator grinds and turns the ore into a slurry, so that they can agitate it and remove the ore from it with chemicals. It leaves this sand. So they keep this sand

moving with the water. They use water to move it wherever they want to take it, as long as there's enough water in this stuff. It moves just like water. But when you move it to where you want it and you remove the water from it, like I said, it sets up like concrete. Unbelievable stuff. They used to use it to backfill drifts underground. They didn't really use it outside of the mines, other than they had too much of it. And then when the hill started to close down, they didn't use it anymore underground. So they didn't have to pump it back down into the mine and fill up stopes and drifts or whatever. Or bulkheads. They'd make bulkheads out of it, too.

Ellen Crain: What's a bulkhead?

Gordon Crain: That's where you completely close off a drift. Now they done it two ways. They use doors. They would build these air doors that would create drafts or create vacuums on opposite sides of the door. And they could use doors and they could close those doors up, so that it was bulkheaded off so that there's no admittance to the other side basically. Or what they would do is they would build a barrier and they would pour that slime into that thing and close it off. And with regards to "we're not going back there at all or until the price copper is really good for that ore body that's back in there that we don't have to mine it at today's prices because it's worth more money sitting in the ground."

Ellen Crain: So tell me, is it noisy underground?

Gordon Crain: If you're in a drift where they're working, yeah, because there's drills going. And the drills are drilling the face and getting ready to blast. The car's going down the tracks. Just like standing by the railroad tracks outside. Same thing - "tching, tching, tching," down the rail. And running drills, noisy. Drills are noisy. Mucking machines are kind of noisy because they are always expelling air. Anaconda Company. Everything that the Anaconda Company did underground ran on air. 100psi air. That's a lot of pressure. So they ran their muckers with it. They ran their drills with it and they could run the whole hill with their plant up on Cora Terrace. Air compressor plant ran the whole hill, really efficient and cost effective.

Ellen Crain: Yes. So I understand that mining is really dangerous. What were the dangerous things you saw? Did you see anyone get hurt? Did you?

Gordon Crain: I never really seen anybody get hurt. Mark Townsend and I went to work one morning at the Kelly and there had been a shaftman. And he had fallen down the shaft.

Ellen Crain: Off that suicide deck?

Gordon Crain: No. He was in a transfer chute. He was transferring ore from the holding pockets in the mine to the mine cars. I can't think of the name of those things...skips. That's what they're called. They're called mine skips. The skips is what holds the ore. So they pour into the skips. What had happened sometimes is that, again, they'd get too much water in the muck or in with the ore so when they would open these transfer doors that also ran on air, they couldn't close because there was too much water behind them, too much pressure and they'd tear the doors out. Well, this individual that night on shift, he opened the door, couldn't get the door closed, pushed

the whole door situation out into the shaft, and he went down the shaft. And so when we got to work the next morning, you can't go underground till they remove the body.

Ellen Crain: Really, why?

Gordon Crain: I think it's got something to do with mining laws. MSA. I think it was called MSA law. So everybody had to wait till they got the body out. They recovered the body and they brought the body to surface. And it wasn't in one piece by any means, because they just . . . Shafts are not straight, by the way. There's not a shaft on the hill that you can drop a penny in the center and it'll go to the bottom. Usually they look like a leg. And then some of them like the Colusa and the Steward, they were like a broken leg. Might be leaning to the left for a while and they are leaning to the right. The Kelly always felt like you were dropping straight because it was the straightest of any of them because they were concrete.

But anyway, so after that happened, Mark and I went down and we had to do something down on the 4550. When we got down there, they found some more of the remains, and it was, so they had to get it out of there. You know, that's how that goes. So that's the only thing that I really witnessed all the time I was underground. I mean, there were injuries. There were injuries everywhere on the hill because of just the nature of the business. I mean, I think there were more guys killed in the Berkeley Pit, when I worked for the Anaconda Company than there ever was underground. I mean, you know, those 9/11 bosses would park behind those big trucks and those big trucks couldn't see them, and then they'd back up over them and . . . To the life of me, I could never figure out after one got it, why anybody else would have got it. So there was danger, lots of big stuff, big things moving constantly, 24/7. And you had to be careful. You had to look out, look out for yourself. And hopefully you had a good partner that looked out for you, too, and vice versa.

Grant: You know, if I were to ask you for directions to Walmart, you could say go down the street, take a left. Could you give us some examples, some directions underground. I know that a lot of the shafts were connected.

Gordon Crain: I could take you down in the Steward on the 1700, the 2100, and get you to the Kelly and walking in 15 minutes. If you were lucky enough to catch a man-car, it would take you five minutes.

Ellen Crain: What's a man-car?

Gordon Crain: They went on the rail and they held maybe six guys. So like if you worked at the Leonard . . . They knocked the Leonard over, the mainframe, the gallows frame in 19 (when?). Anyways, so they moved the hoist down to 13. So they had underground hoists on the hill. So you would get on a man-train on the 1300 at the Kelly and it would take you a half an hour on this train to get to the Leonard mine, and then they would, from the Leonard mine, they had what was called a "deep mine chippy." And the miners would get on the chippy there. And go to their work site. They would also haul the ore up that shaft and then they would pick it up on another level in mine cars and haul it back to the Kelly to get it to surface.

Ellen Crain: So was there a north, south, east and west underground or was there just “take this drift here”? Were the drifts labeled?

Gordon Crain: Oh, yeah. Every time you got off in a station, you knew where you were at. And there were bell signals for the level.

Ellen Crain: So once you got down into a station, which would be a stopping place and you needed to go say from the Steward to the Anselmo.

Gordon Crain: Possibly, yeah. Did I ever take that trip? No.

Ellen Crain: How would you know to get there? How would the station tender tell you to get there?

Gordon Crain: The station tender probably would know, but that would have to be a tram to get you over there, you wouldn't want to have to walk that underground.

Ellen Crain: But they would say get on the man-car.

Gordon Crain: When I worked on the hill, no, you didn't go from the Steward to the Anselmo.

Ellen Crain: You went from the Steward east.

Gordon Crain: You went from the Steward to . . . I believe you could go to the Con from the Steward. You could go from the Con to the Kelly, the Steward to the Kelly, the High Ore that was the name I was trying to think of where the water starts, the High Ore pumps. You could go from the Kelly to the High Ore. You could go to the Leonard, the East Colusa.

Ellen Crain: I want to say, all of these names, the High Ore, the Leonard, the Colusa, they were all mines, but they're all in what is now the Berkeley Pit.

Gordon Crain: Yeah. And all the headframes over time were removed because of the Berkeley Pit. So they still worked those mines from underground with a central location, as was the Kelly mine.

Ellen Crain: OK. So even though there were no headframes, and you couldn't stand down on the street and see the Colusa headframe. It was still an operational mining space.

Gordon Crain: Underground, yeah. The deep levels. Yes, it was.

Ellen Crain: And everything was connected to the Kelly when you went to work.

Gordon Crain: You could walk from the East Colusa to the Leonard mine in five minutes. You could get on the tram at the Leonard and come back to the Kelly. You didn't have to walk it. I walked it before, but you didn't have to walk it.

Ellen Crain: So were there levels where there would be a man train and another level would be an ore train?

Gordon Crain: Yeah, pretty much.

Ellen Crain: So that you didn't have them. . . Were there two sets of tracks?

Gordon Crain: No. One. But where they move the ore on, they would put these transfer chutes to run ore say from the Leonard. The Leonard would haul. Let's say you went over on the 1300 to the Leonard, but maybe on the 1700, they hauled all of the rock up from the Leonard and the East Colusa and put it in this transfer chute on the 1700 and then those mine cars would pull under the transfer chutes, load all the ore and they would haul it all the way back to the Kelly. And dump it into another transfer chute.

Ellen Crain: How many tons would a transfer chute hold?

Gordon Crain: I can't answer that for you.

Ellen Crain: But it would be tons. It wouldn't be pounds.

Gordon Crain: Tons, definitely tons.

Ellen Crain: So you're talking about large industrial holding bins, underground.

Gordon Crain: Caves.

Ellen Crain: Caves underground.

Gordon Crain: Caves underground that are vertical. They dumped the rock into them at the top there. They have a railroad car, rails of railroad setup so that the ore falls through it and they can pick the wood and crap out of it. And then at the bottom of the cave or the tunnel or whatever, that they built the trench, there were those air doors and they would open the air doors and dump them into the skips. Then the skips would go to surface.

Ellen Crain: So this is a huge industrial complex.

Gordon Crain: It's a human anthill under there. It's the most amazing thing. You know, sitting here and talking to you and bringing back some of the things that I now remember. And no, I don't think of a lot. You know, I could go on and on about a lot of it. I mean. That goes on under there that, you know, most people just can't even envision. It was an incredible working. I mean, it was incredible to watch how it all came together.

Grant: Did it sadden you when it turned the pumps off?

Gordon Crain: Well, yeah, it did, because I knew that the Butte Hill was going to...The underground wasn't going to survive. I was once told that the Butte Hill would totally close

down. And I remember telling an individual that there is no way in the world that the Butte Hill would totally ever close down because there's too many goodies in there that they want. And it's the truth. I mean, I've been told that they only tapped the surface of the hourglass at one time, that the Butte Hill geologists knew that it was shaped like an hourglass and that the underground part of it. Only the top of the hourglass in the Berkeley Pit only went after the top of the hourglass. Now, whether that's a true statement, I can't tell you, but I did hear it from a geologist when I was on the Butte Hill so...

Ellen Crain: I think they would know that.

Gordon Crain: Yeah, they knew what was going on. I mean, there was days at the Leonard that we would go to work and go over there and work on the cages and they would hit covellite veins and the next day it would be bulkheaded off. Because the price of that covellite, the price of copper wasn't high enough to mine that high grade. They could mine stuff that was less copper content and make all the money they needed. And degenite, those two kinds of coppers were over there on that east side of the Butte Hill was loaded with it. Just loaded with it. And it's interesting that covellite is the prettiest stuff in the world when you first see it broken. It's just as blue as blue can be and then it turns purple when it oxidizes. But they didn't mine it much. There was a lot of guys that carried a lot of it out underground in their buckets and things before they bulkheaded it off, but.

Ellen Crain: I don't believe that.

Gordon Crain: No, I don't either. It was just hearsay.

Ellen Crain: Clark, do you have anything else?

Clark Grant: How much time do you have?

Ellen Crain: I can step out, but you guys could talk for a few more minutes and then.

Gordon Crain: OK, Clark, so ask away. I'll try to tell you what I do know.

Grant: Thank you so much. It's been really educational for me. I guess I'd like to hear more about how you feel. This was an entire city underground and it is submerged forever. It's gone.

Gordon Crain: Yeah. You know, I. I don't know. See when I went to work on the Butte Hill in 1970, the underground was really starting to cut back. It had seen its glory days. Now, how many men worked underground when my father was a contract miner down there? I know there's records and I know there's somewhere here in this archives that we could get those numbers per year. But the glory days underground were coming to a halt. When I got transferred off the Hill, and again I think it was 1977, they booted me out of the Kelly. The only mines that were really working were the Steward, the Mountain Con, the Leonard, probably the East Colusa because they pretty much used the same transfer chutes. And then the Kelly, I mean that was it. It was part of the greater, they had a lot of names for them. It was part of the Greater Butte project. But when it started closing down at one time, there was the Greater Butte project that they talked

about how everything was going to come out of the Ryan mine northwest of here. Up above or west of Walkerville, that never materialized. They never used the Greater Butte Project.

They ran a load haul dump on the west wall of the Berkeley Pit from about 1973 till about 1975. It just didn't work well, they tried it down on the 3600 of the Kelly. It's called a load haul dump situation where you don't have miners in there knocking out walls, you have machinery. I was down there a few times and enough to know that I didn't want anything to do with it and I didn't want to be around because nobody could see nobody. It was a bad situation, I thought. So over the years, they tried. They tried a number of projects underground. I worked on a project at the Steward with a guy by the name of Sam Ash. He was the project engineer. We were trying to put a monorail underground because again, their thinking was that if they could get those mine cars up out of that water, they could save themselves a lot of money on wheel bearings. So there was all kinds of things like that always going on on the Hill. Projects that were, I guess, they were theory. Some of them worked out. Some of them didn't.

The Anaconda Company had the Butte shops up here, the Parrot shop. They had a machine shop, an electrical shop and a boiler shop and a blacksmith shop. And then they had a foundry in Anaconda. And I tell you that they could build anything they ever wanted and they had the best shops west of the Missouri or the Mississippi River in Butte, Montana. It was incredible what they could build. And I was talking earlier, I said that they tried to build. There was mine cars, two types of mine cars on the Hill, there was Lake Shores. That was a company and there was a company called Granby or Gamby. Well, the Anaconda Company one night must have been awake in bed thinking, "Why can't we make these cars ourselves?" So they did. They built, I think it was the Lake Shore. And they got sued over it because they had stolen a patent and built the Lake Shore. And the Lake Shore didn't like it.

I could go on and on. What I seen. I worked there eleven years. Eleven and half years. I was a boilermaker all the time I was on the Hill. I seen a lot of things. Worked around, no exaggeration, the best craftsmen I ever seen. I worked with a guy from Anaconda and I swear to God he could build anything. He could lay it out and build it. And I'd go, "Keep your mouth shut. Listen and watch." And I learned a lot from him. When I went to work construction in Colstrip. That's where, you know, I could read a blueprint as well as any engineer that anybody had. So. I learned a lot. I worked around great, great craftsmen, just incredible craftsmen.

Grant: Do you feel like today the open pit mining doesn't really require that? How is it different?

Gordon Crain: Well, I don't think it requires...it does to a point because you're never going to do away with the ability for the human to maintain something correctly, I would say. But, unfortunately, a lot of it has evolved to everything in the United States is disposable anymore and we'll put a new one on it. And I can attest to that because when I worked at the crusher, I used to build up the mantles that went in the crusher. They would wear down. We would hard surface it back to its specified circumference and we would grind it back down with the rock and then we'd build it back up. Well, when the Anaconda Company finally closed down, they were closed for two years, I guess, before MRI opened up. Now, MRI, they replace those shields. They don't rebuild those shields. They take them apart. They get the lead out from underneath

them. They melt the lead out of them, take the shields off, put brand new shields on there. And then fill them back up with lead and throw it in the haul. When it's wore out, go through that again. Whereas when I was there, we built those mantles up. We had two of them. One was always in service and one was always being built up. They don't do that anywhere. I don't know how much maintenance they do on those trucks. They have to do some maintenance on those trucks because from the weight of that ore in them all of time and the beating they take, they crack. Crack terrible. Especially in the winter, man, that iron gets so cold. It's amazing when you see a piece of T-1 steel and you hit it with a sledgehammer and it literally cracks. And you go, "Wow."

Grant: So you think mining really will never end here.

Gordon Crain: Well, no. So long as they can get it out of the ground and they can get it out at a cost, that is economically efficient, I don't ever see it ending. I mean. I wouldn't. I'll never see it. You'll never see it, but there will be a day maybe that they do go back underground because as we evolve, we always find better and simpler ways to do everything we seem to do. Humans are pretty, you know, a lot of ingenuity. It never ends. Will they ever mine underground again? I would say I can't say that they won't. I mean, if the price of copper were right, I'm sure that they could start pumping that water right out of there as fast as they could. They'd start digging down there again if they wanted to. But I don't see that happening in the near future at all.

Grant: Well, my final question, if they are going to be mining here, from here on out pretty much, what about these efforts like restoring the creek? Are these people ignoring the fact that this is a mining camp and it always has been and always will be.

Gordon Crain: It's always going to be a mining camp. Restore the creek? I have some views on that and I'm not going to talk about them on the...Do I think that this town could be a cleaner town? I do. One of my favorite songs is "It's a dirty old town." I don't know if you've ever heard that song. You know, it's a song from Ireland, but it depicts my community pretty well too. Do I think it has to be like that? No, but to a certain extent, those mine dumps are never going to look pretty. They are what they are. I played on them when I was a little kid. They've hid them. They've removed some of them and covered some of them up. But they're still there. And these new mine dumps that they've built with the trucks and shovels. Maybe someday they'll grade them sideways and plant foliage on them. I'd love to see it because it'd make it a much prettier place. But it's a dirty old town and I don't see that changing. The water, creek and that idea, as long as they're mining, the mines have all the water rights and they ain't giving them to nobody. You can't mine without water.

Grant: Thank you for your time today.

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