



VERDIGRIS
PROJECT

KBMF & BUTTE-SILVER BOW ARCHIVES

JIM UGRIN

The Verdigris Project

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Oral History Transcript of Jim Ugrin

Interviewer: Clark Grant & Aubrey Jaap

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Jaap: Alright, Jim, so I'd like you to start off just by talking about your parents and a little bit about your family history growing up.

Ugrin: OK, well, we were raised on Emma Street. And as a matter of fact, I'm still in the same house, down at 833. And my family has lived in this house continuously for 110 years now. My grandfather bought it in 1908. And my grandparents and my dad and his brothers and sisters lived there. The grandparents, they died young, they were both dead by 1920. And my dad and a couple of his brothers stayed there. They were young, 19, 20. My father would have been about 11, 12 years old. And a couple of my grandfather's brothers stayed with them and watched them. The two younger ones, which was my dad and my Uncle John were shanghaied by the uncles. The way my father told it, one Sunday, they borrowed somebody's car and they said, "We're going for a ride."

And my dad and his brother were tickled. And the ride was over to Twin Bridges and they dropped them off at the orphan home without telling them that that's the destination. They stayed there till they graduated from high school and then came back. And in the meantime, the older brothers, Frank and Nick were old enough to stay at home with the uncles. So, that was the continuity of occupation there. And so then my dad and brother, John, came back and they ended up staying there. When my dad got married in 39, he moved my mom down there, you know, and then that was our family home. So we were raised in the same neighborhood where I live in the same house today. And the neighborhood was nice. And for those who are familiar with the area, it's on Emma Street from the corner of Second and Emma, right where the former homeless shelter was down there.

And back when I was growing up, the homeless shelter was Lizen's Grocery. And right there on the corner, there were three mom and pop groceries. One on the southeast corner, one on the northeast corner and one on the southwest corner. And the northeast corner was Johnson's and the southeast corner was Bob Lee. And next to Bob Lee was Dozen's Corner, which was a bar, later to become Wedlake's. Then it was Jim Hill's corner and finally Clapham's Corner up until it closed when Bob Lubick owned it then. Nice neighborhood. Working class people. There were five mines within a block. The Sandwich, the Green Copper, the Alliance, and the one that I cannot remember . . . the Extension Number Two and the one down on the end of Urgo Street . . . Anyway, now they're all gone, but in my youth, they were our sleigh riding hills, just like they were for kids all over from Walkerville on down, you know. And they finally have removed them all and cleaned things up.

And just a nice little neighborhood. Still is pretty nice now that they moved the homeless shelter out of there, which was quite a problem for many years. And we went to the Monroe School, unless you went to the Catholic school and then you went to St. Joe's School, that was St.

Joseph's Parish, which is a church still down there. And Hebgen ballpark, been there forever. I think it's called Koprivica Park now. We spent hours upon hours in that park playing baseball on the old dirt baseball field. It was our playground. Well, one of our playgrounds besides the mine dumps and the railroad yard where we weren't supposed to be and spent all of our time playing on the railroad yard.

Jaap: That's common. You certainly are not the only one.

Ugrin: Yes. And when my grandchildren used to come up to visit, I would sound like my dad and my mother, "Don't be going up there." Even though it isn't near as busy, it is hardly busy at all anymore. I can't think about anything outstanding about the neighborhood that ever happened. The two railroads, one in the south and one on the north, were both functioning for freight and for passenger service, which, you know, has gone away. There's no such thing, I mean, not in Butte anymore, but you used to be able to go up to the Northern Pacific Railroad Depot there and jump on the train and go to Great Falls and you know, Helena.

And you get on the Southern Pacific and I used to take the train out of there going back to Fort Lewis when I was in the Army. That was in the 60s and they were still working. But you could also go from there to Anaconda, Great Falls or Missoula, Bozeman. So it was a common form of transportation. Very handy, very affordable, and we used to spend a lot of time in both of those depots. Especially the one on Front Street where, well, I guess a lot of people don't remember it anymore, but right in the building to the east of that complex was a cafe, we called it the Beanery. It was a thriving business, you know, not just on passengers from the train, but locals. It was a nice little cafe. It was just a big counter, big U shaped or L shaped counter.

But the thing we liked about it is if you behaved yourself, you could go in there and there was a huge magazine rack with all kinds of comics. And they wouldn't mind if you sat down on the floor and read the comic books and we couldn't afford comic books anyway. So that was a great place to go. You know, we liked to hang out in there. And then just hang out in the station for I don't know what reason, but there was a place to go, I guess, you know. Same way with the other one up on Arizona Street, but I don't recall it having any amenities like, you know, a cafe or anything like that. But it was kind of funny because we were always walking uptown because at that time uptown was quite the place, you know, go to meet people and you could spend all day up there, never spend a dime and have a great time just meeting people.

But when we would walk uptown, you never walked around the depot. You went in the back door and out the front door. You had to go through it. It was just as easy to walk around it, but you just had to go in the back door and out the front door and just see what's going on, I guess I don't know, being kids. But uptown was a great place then. It was just a great place, but you had a lot of stuff up there. Well, it was the main shopping area, the main shopping center. And, you know, you had the Woolworths and the Grand Silver stores, which were the equivalent of Kmart, Wal-Mart kind of thing, you know, but cooler.

And they both had lunch counters and toys for kids. You'd like to go in and at least look at them. Yeah, you know, and then all the movie theaters that were uptown. What was there, something like five? The Park over here, then you come over to the American, the Rialto, and the Fox. They

were all on Park Street and then the Montana was just up on Montana there. You know, a couple of them were under a dime when we used to go. For kids. And you'd go to the American every Saturday because they had kids' day and they had serial movies, so you had to get up next week to see the next adventure, you know, along with the main feature.

And then at the intermission, the manager, and I'm sure he just went across the street to the five and dime store and would buy small toys and things, and you'd have your ticket stub and then they'd pull stubs out of a hat. If they called your number, you won a prize. And I was so young at the time, I couldn't read the numbers fast enough because they were about nine numbers long, you know.

But I remember one time going into the movies and there were a couple of stories there. I'm there with my brother and Jimmy Seymour and one of the Noel's, Jimmy Noel, and somebody else. Anyway, the bunch of them. I'm enthralled with the movie, and they're smarting off and being loud and everything, and back then they didn't tolerate all that. And boy, the usher came down, the usherette, kicked them all out. I'm just absorbed in the movie, and I didn't even know they're gone.

Jaap: How old were you?

Ugrin: Oh, seven, eight. My brother came back and started yelling at me, grabbing me, 'Come on!' 'What's wrong? The movie isn't over.' 'We got kicked out.' I said, 'Well, you got kicked out.' But this is my big brother, a year older. He made me leave with them because they got kicked out and I was just absorbed. I had no idea what's going on right next to me. But when my mother let us go to the movies by ourselves the first time, and this is something people today could never understand. But we were probably seven or eight and we get the Oregon Avenue bus down on the corner of Emma and 2nd. Gets off in front of the Rialto Theater.

So then we hotfooted it over to the American that's where the movie was. And this was on a Sunday. Well, this probably was right around noon when we went and come five o'clock at night, no sign of us. So finally, my mother decides to panic a little and she comes up. We didn't have a car. She got the neighbor who had a car and drove uptown to find us. I mean, there's two little boys and there we are right there by the Metals Bank on Main. That's where the Oregon Avenue stopped going south, standing there. And my mother, she pulls up and there's my brother got me by the hand and we're both waiting for the bus. Movie was over because we watched it two or three times. We just stayed there and we watched it and we watched it. But, you know, can you imagine that? I mean, the cops would have come, found us first and they would have got my mother and put her in jail. Then they would have put us in a foster home, you know, because we were seven or eight years old, just down there by ourselves. But it wasn't uncommon at all, you know, not at all. Those were the good old days.

Things in some ways have not improved. But you couldn't do that nowadays, of course. And the same way, when you would get on the bus on Thursdays and go to the kids' day at the Columbia Gardens. We'd get on the bus by Johnson's store there and go uptown, get off the Rialto, then catch the Gardens bus, go up to the Gardens and we'd be gone all day. We'd go eight in the morning, we'd come home for dinner. And nobody worried about you and nothing ever seemed

to happen to you except you had a good time. And the rides were free and just had a great time. The good old days again. So that was kind of what it was like growing up there, things we did, you know. Where we went, what we did to entertain ourselves because, you know, there were no TV, of course, no cell phones, no computers and games. You had to get out there and figure out something to do. And we were never at a loss, you know, for games. And if we didn't have an organized game, we'd made a game, you know. And my neighbor up the street, Dusty Dan Sullivan was great at inventing games, so he invented two games. One was soccer ball and we had never heard of soccer.

But the reason we called it soccer ball, we made the ball out of old socks. And you hit it with an open hand like a slap. And the rules were kind of like baseball, except being that the ball was a sock, you could throw it at the runner. And if you hit them before they hit base, the runner was out and the bases were on the corner of Emma and Second again and there were sewer grates on each corner and each one was a base. And, you know, the same rules applied. If you caught the fly, the guy was out. And except for the throwing, you know, you could throw the ball at them, the sock. So we had soccer ball, because we didn't have a lot of equipment. And then we had kick the stick and it was the same game. And on the corner there, there was a stop sign on the pole and you would lean the stick at an angle, like 45 degrees and then from there you'd kick it. And from then on, the rules were the same as baseball or soccer ball, except you couldn't throw the stick at the kid. So you used a stick instead of a baseball because we didn't have a baseball all the time. So we'd invent our own little games like that. Stupid little games and kick the can was the same way, you know.

And then we had another game called 40 miles, which is really stupid. We had so much fun you couldn't believe it. Forty miles meant the limits where you could run - a 40 mile radius from the corner of 2nd and Emma. And we just kind of hide and go seek. And one guy had to be "it". And I mean, you could go anywhere and hide, blocks and blocks and blocks. And then the guy that was it had to come back to like the light pole. That was the jail. And if he caught you, he had to beat you back to the light pole and then you hit the light pole three times and "one, two, three, for Jim." And then you were caught. And then if you could sneak back one of the people that wasn't it and hit the pole three times and release everybody from jail. So the guy that was going to look for you had to keep an eye on the pole, too. So you didn't circle. A really crazy game because it was impossible to do. But we played it for hours. Just play it for hours. And, you know, made up stuff like that all the time. Besides cowboys and Indians and all the standard fare. But Dingy Dan was good at making up games. So we had a lot of fun that way too.

Jaap: So you went to the Monroe School. Then did you go to Butte High School?

Ugrin: No. Then I went to Central. My mother always wanted us to go to Central. She was a good, staunch Catholic. And me and my brother, older brother, went to Monroe and that he went to Butte High and I went to Central. And then younger brothers, two more brothers, they both went to St. Joe's. And my sisters, four sisters were younger yet and they all went to St. Joe's and then they all went to Central. My one brother, the oldest brother was the only one that went to Butte High and he transferred over in his junior year. He was kind of a rebel. Transferred over to Central, and he stayed for one semester and told me I was an idiot because the brothers used to beat the snot out of you every time you turned around. And he said, "What the hell would you

put up with that for?" He went back to Butte High. And it turned out he was right. But it was accepted at the time. But I mean, when I say beat you up, I mean exactly that. It wasn't uncommon to get a punch in the face, not just a little tap, but from some of the meaner ones, you got beat up. I've seen blood on the walls in Central Hall. My brother, Clark thumped [inaudible] Moriarity. There was blood on the walls, literally. Nobody said anything or if they said anything, you said, "What did [inaudible] do to deserve that?" Not, "You shouldn't be hitting." And, you know, growing up shouldn't be hitting a kid like. Which is right. No, no. "What did [inaudible] do to deserve that?"

Jaap: So, you know, the Archives was housed in that. We were at Boys' Central for a couple of years while the building was being renovated. And part of the area where we were in, we were in the handball courts. And lots of people would come in and say, "Oh, we really used to get beaten in these handball courts."

Ugrin: Yep. Take you down to the courts. And sometimes the pretext was, "put on the boxing gloves, you think you're such a tough guy." And you're a kid and there's an adult, big adult. You didn't stand a chance. Kind of kind of rough and tough then, but it was wrong. It should never happen, but it was tolerated. And not only that most of the time, if you went home and said something to your parents and got the standard answer - "What did you do to deserve that?" That kind of treatment, you know, you were in trouble for doing that. But like I say, different times. And maybe that's why there is no such thing as Boys' Central anymore. And that wasn't such a great idea too, because we were all a bunch of social retards. All the boys in one school, all the girls in the other school.

Jaap: Yeah, I never thought of it that way.

Ugrin: There's something to be said. Well, my grandson down in California graduated from a Catholic high school and it was the same way, you know, in this day and age. Except they figured it out that he went to, oh God, I can't remember the name of the school now. It's a big football powerhouse and high school down in California. And across the street was the girls' Catholic school, but so many classes per day were coed. They intermingled boys go over to the girls school, girls go over to the boys school, you know. So they finally kind of got it right. So he had a more normal high school experience than we did being segregated as we were. But, you know, if I did it over again, I'd probably do the same thing, all in all. It was a good education and good experience. Yeah.

Jaap: So then after high school, what do you do, Jim?

Ugrin: After high school, I kind of screwed up. I had a full ride scholarship to the School of Mines, which I blew. I spent about two and a half years up there, then moved on to California, worked construction in San Francisco for about a year. That was in 63. When I was back here . . . well, during and after college, I worked in the mines. And like I said, in 63, the year that Kennedy got killed, I was down in San Francisco and that's the year I got drafted. So then starting in 64, some kind of a cruel joke, on April 1st, April Fool's Day, I was drafted into the Army. And did two years in the army then, pretty uneventful. Just put in my time like the rest of the draftees, we all knew we had to go, so we went or you joined the Reserves or the Guard. But

you didn't complain about it. That's the way it was, you're going to get around 20, 21, you're going to be drafted, 22 right in there for sure. I had a lot of friends that just volunteered to get it over with right out of high school. Volunteer and go do your two years and get it over with. But yeah, that's like I say. Then I started working in the mines about that time. I worked part time when I was going to college, summer jobs.

One year I was down in the Leonard. And I got the job and they put me on the graveyard shift. And I think I had Tuesday and Wednesday off which just broke my heart because everybody is out having a good time on Friday and Saturday and I'm driving the top motor at the Leonard. The top motor you worked above the ore bins. And when they would bring up loads of ore or waste in the cages and the skips, they would signal with the bells. And I can't remember what the code was, but so many bells meant ore, so many bells meant waste. And then you would drive a little motor, which is a train, called a motor in the mines, and have a couple of cars behind it. And you'd dump the skips into your car. And then depending on whether it was ore or waste, you put it in certain bins - ore bins or the waste bins. The Leonard was the first mine you came into when you went into Meaderville. Later they would come by with the big haul trucks and either take the waste out of the waste bins or the ore out of the ore bins and then the ore went to Anaconda to be smelted.

But the bad part about that job, and it was a pretty good job actually, was in between you had a lot of waiting time. And I'd sit there, stand there at the window, which was just an opening, no glass or anything in it. And I looked down at Meaderville every Friday and Saturday night and everybody is just having the time. It was a great place to go. And they're having the time of their life. And here I am, 18, 19 years old, sitting up there and all my buddies are down. It didn't make any difference, by the time you were 19, you were in every bar in town usually. Nobody paid any attention. And they're all out there having a grand old time. And I'm up here driving the top motor.

So I worked there for a while and then I worked in the Kelley for a diamond drilling company. We did exploration. It was Boyles Brothers out of Salt Lake and they had contracted with the Anaconda Company. And we would drill holes, I mean, not holes, but you would drill a horizontal hole, if you want to call it that, but the purpose was to take a core sample. We would go down in the Kelley and then we'd go over on the man train to . . . Well, like the one time we were working out of the Rarus, which was over out in Meaderville. But like I said, you went down the Kelley shaft and then you went down to a certain level, say the 400 or 800, get on the man train and go over there. And then you walk from over there to your drilling station and then you were drilling horizontal holes. Save all the samples and mark on the sample box, how far out you were from the drilling. And we drilled holes that were 1100 - 1200 feet deep, I mean, long because you're not going down, you're drilling horizontal. I think you would pull out an eight foot core, maybe even 10 feet.

But when you're doing that and you're in there, say, nine hundred feet, you drill 10 feet, then have to pull 900 feet of rod out of the hole, take the core out of the bits that contained a nice round core of granite and ore. Put it all back together, put 900 feet of drill pipe back in the hole. All day long, in, out, in, out. And I think we put it back in. I think they were 20 foot sections, I believe that the drill pipes were 10 feet long and you broke every other section, unscrewed them,

and then you stacked them. And pull them up, pull everything out, got your core sample out, reversed the process, put it all back in. Drilled for 10 more feet. I worked with a guy out of Idaho. He went by his initials, I think it was CF, his last name was Rainy, he was the driller. I was the helper. And so while he was drilling, you just sat there. That drill was a long gear and it ran off of compressed air, but they almost sound like a piston engine. They're so loud, noisy. I got so I'd just sit on a bucket of grease there, five gallon bucket and fall asleep while he drilled. And that thing was so loud. And you should have had ear protection, which we didn't. But that was so loud, you couldn't believe it, but I got so I could just fall asleep. And that thing blasting away.

That was a real physical job, you know, lifting all that drill pipe. Plus the fact that when you put the first 10, 20 feet in, you just took this heavy duty axle grease, and you just slather both of those sections. So when you came out every pipe was just grease coated and you ended up being grease coated. We would come up to the dry and I used to shower with liquid dish soap. It was the only way to get the grease off. So I'd bring in a quart of dish soap and shower up in the Kelley, in the dry. So I worked that for a while. And then I got back in again another summer after school, when I was still in school and worked as a day's pay miner. Basically, a laborer in the mine and you clean ditches and track and stuff like that. So those were my stints in the mine. I never was actually a hard rock miner like that. Then later on, after I came back from the army and I got married. I did various other jobs. Well, first of all, I was working construction for Finlen and Sheridan, F&S.

And I worked that until one of the big events in my life, working on the overpass, going into Fairmont when they were building the interstate. And we're putting those bridges in. No, that was that was that other company out of Helena that I was working for. That wasn't when I was working for F&S at that time. What the heck was that company on anyway? I ended up getting hit by lightning out there, knocked off the bridge.

Jaap: Really?

Ugrin: Yeah, and it wasn't a direct hit on my head like, but we were setting forms on the side of the bridge in a lightning storm. The lightning hit just right across the road and I could see it hit. And I had sense enough to get off there and the forms were to pour the deck. These are the wing forms which are on the outside of the last beams. And I was setting out the furthest out from the bank. There were two of us, and one, the carpenter was setting the hooks on the inside to lift these forms in place. I was on the outside. So to get off the beam and onto the bench, I had to walk under the crane. And just as I did, the lightning hit the crane, travelled down the two cables to the bridge, you know, got grounded. And it was like a big gust of wind blew me right off the bridge. So I spent a little time in the hospital after that one, broke my arm. Luckily, I didn't kill myself. But I fell all the way down to . . . well, at the time they didn't have the highway finished, so it wasn't paved, so it was dirt and had been raining. So it was a little muddy, which to an extent broke my fall. But I fell all the way from the bridge to the ground.

Jaap: And what year was that?

Ugrin: That had been about 66, 67, right in there. But yeah, so that's where I was working then. I recovered off of that and what the heck did I do? I went back to work again later for F&S. I wasn't working construction, I worked in the shops. That's when F&S was over there, off of Texas Avenue, where Montana Resources' office and all that are in there now. and then. Then the Anaconda Company bought them out and they moved down to South Montana. When I worked there until. What the heck happened that I got out of there? I got laid off. And then I went to work back for the Anaconda Company as a boilermaker welder, which I figured I'd stay there forever because I really liked the job. And, of course, then ARCO sold the place, you know, and we all got laid off on that one, and that's where I ended up in your story on Union picketing out in front of MRI with a picket sign.

Jaap: A few articles. There's one in 83. "Boilermakers Want Out of Contract."

Ugrin: Yeah, that was us. Let's see, oh, there I am. I was the president of the union then, the Local. Mel Patterson was finance secretary and Ron Garbarino recording secretary. Oh, yeah, this was when the company went behind our back and our own international. They met, I think it was in Missoula because we wouldn't agree. We wouldn't accept the contract. And so they went and got together with the international and the international accepted on our behalf. So we sued. I think they suspended operations about that time. And nothing really ever came of it, because when they suspended operations, it was kind of moot, you know, so. You don't have a job, what do you need a contract for? And then after that one, Denny Washington bought the place. He used that euphemism, "We're not anti-union, but we will be union free." So I was out at the front door when they opened it up with the picket sign.

Jaap: Sounds like there were some understandings that Anaconda employees would have priority to be hired.

Ugrin: Well, yeah, but if you went down there for an interview, which I did, and being at that time was president of the local. Business agent for the local, boilermakers and [looking at photos] I got a sign on my hat, "I'm sticking with the union" and, you know, I've still got that sign. And I was told by the officials of this company that because of my union activities, I was not wanted on the company property. That's right. So, yeah, they did, they kind of ran us out of there.

Jaap: How long did you guys picket for?

Ugrin: Not too long. Everybody in town wanted the mine back open for the jobs. And I remember Don Peoples was the mayor at the time, chief executive, he got us all together in a meeting and threatened us with an inch of our lives if we interfered at all, which was totally illegal to do that. We were just exercising our rights as union people, the right to picket and all of that. Boy, he read us the riot act. But I see Matt Kasich is a retired business agent at this time. He just died here about a month ago. A real strong union man. Yeah, so that was the end of my hopes of ever getting a job back in the mining industry either here or when I went over and applied at the mine in Whitehall. The same thing, I got the same. Of course, I didn't help my cause any. When he said we're going to be union free and all of that.

Jaap: How did you react to that?

Ugrin: How did I react to that? I asked the guy if he'd ever been to Butte. "Well, I'm from Butte." Yeah. And I said, "Did you ever see that big hole in the ground over there and all those head frames." "The hole in the ground?" "Yeah, the pit." And I said, "Do you think salaried employees dug that hole? And put those head frames up. I said every inch of that ground was moved by union men and union labor." "Well, we're not going to do that over here." So I just gave him more crap and of course, my application went into the scrap pile as soon as I left. But I kind of knew that going in because they were also, "union free." Like, that's like saying, you know, I'm cancer free. Which ticks me off to this day.

But, of course, you know, unions have lost a lot of their clout. You know, it used to be in this town. Well, I remember down at the store, on the corner, Bob Lee's Grocery. He would be in there working on the weekends and he'd let you come in and buy stuff. But he'd never open up for business because, well, such a union town, you didn't sell groceries on Sunday. You just didn't do it. And, he wouldn't say it wasn't a union shop because it was just him. He was a one man operation. And in fact, he got blackballed on the hill for his union activities. That's why he opened up a grocery store. But I mean, just to show, you know, there was no commerce on Sundays. That was union power then, and I'm not saying it's good or bad, but I think they made things way better for everybody in this town. And it's just like out there now. They're still union free. But I've talked to guys that I know that I worked with, and they ended up working out there for a career. I asked them, "Well, what changed?"

Because, you know, there's always company propaganda with unions. You send five guys out on a job and four of them stand around and watch the one guy do the work. And when they were giving me that song and dance over at Whitehall, I said, "I've heard that." I worked there for 13 years that time. And I said, "I was always trying to get those jobs. I always want to be one of the four guys that stood around and watched the other guy work." And I said, "I never could find one. Every time I got sent out to weld something, there was just me to weld it." I said, "They never would send those other four guys." That was just propaganda from the other side.

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And you run into random people that didn't work for the company and they tell you because they had heard it, "You guys, . . . yeah, they send ten guys out to a job and there's only two guys working." I say, "I've never found those jobs, I would like that, I think I'd like to be one of the eight, you know." They didn't appreciate sarcasm, but that was how it was. You went out and you did your job. You worked and did good work. And you would always see that one guy. Strike time would come around and guys would leave town, especially if you had a trade - machinist, boilermaker or whatever, and you'd go where there was machine work, boilermaker work, you never had trouble finding a job when you told them you worked in the mines in Butte. "Come on in."

Because they knew you knew your business. But you'd move all over, then you'd come back and go back to work, when they got the strike settled and strikes were just a way of life. You knew it was inevitable that sometime you're going to be on strike. That was just the way it was. That's

how you bargained. And you made do. And a lot of those little grocers around town, my dad always shopped at John Savage's Cottage Market. And come strike time, they just put you on the books and you still shopped like nothing had happened. And when you finally went back to work, you started and paid your bill off, you know, and he carried you. He wasn't the only one. A lot of those little grocery stores carried the miners. Just the way it was, you know, that's the way people expected to do business. And it worked. It's a different ballgame now, but since I don't work anymore, I'm not part of it.

Jaap: So what did you do after you got laid off?

Ugrin: Worked construction mostly. Yeah, and jobs here and jobs there. I ended up working at Montana Tech as a maintenance engineer. Worked there for a while, and then I had to get a maintenance engineer license, boiler license, you want to call it. I went over to Helena and got my license and took the wrong test. I needed to get a third-class license. And got the wrong license for the job that was coming up, so I didn't get on there, but then I used that and got on at the school district and then spent the rest of my working career as a maintenance engineer for the school district and ended up as the engineer down at the football field. That was a good job, took care of the football field down at East. And I was down at Webster, the alternative school. So that was my last work experience. I retired out of the school district.

Jaap: Last week, when you were in, you'd mentioned you helped with some retraining programs.

Ugrin: Oh yeah. When this stuff was all going in the 80s and we were laid off, of course, and they closed down all the shops up here. And then the Office of Public Instruction started a program in conjunction with the AFL-CIO. Oh, yeah. We talked about that. That's where I worked too. In the late 80s, I worked for them for like three years. We did training programs up at the old Blaine School up there in Walkerville for people who were on welfare, had to go to our school to qualify for welfare. And what we taught them was how to look for jobs. We did kind of look for jobs for them, but we taught them how to do resumes and all that stuff. But prior to that, the Office of Public Instruction set this up through the AFL-CIO. And then we cross-trained people, which was kind of at cross purposes to our union purpose because most of them went back to work for MRI, but we had machinists and boilermakers and we'd take machinists and bring them over to the boiler shop where I taught and teach them how to fabricate and weld and all of that.

And then they took some of the old boilermakers I'd worked with and they'd take them into the machine shop and taught them the rudimentary parts of machinery work, you know. So we did that. I forget that wasn't a job, I don't think it even lasted a year. But it was funny because we were training all of our old union members to go to work for a nonunion company, you know, and a lot of them did get jobs out of it. And because, of course, down there being nonunion, maybe you would be welding one day and cleaning bathrooms the next and driving a truck the next, and you're supposed to be a jack of all trades. Because even the old company gave us that crap, that we weren't really trained. Anybody could do our jobs. And they were always trying to, like, let mechanics weld. Even the mechanics would say, "I don't have any welding experience." And then have us boilermakers work on machinery. And, you know, we didn't know how to overall an engine, you know, something like that. They always used to give us all that. You guys

have just always BS'd everybody by having specific union jobs. Maybe it was just a backhanded compliment. You're just all equally talented and you can all do everything. But you're only going to do, you know, your own little selfishness. You like to weld, so you are going to be a welder, which is not the way it was at all. Like I said, I couldn't run a lathe, you know, but the guy in the lathe couldn't come over to my shop and weld up a shovel bucket either, you know. But yeah, so anyway, we ended up doing that and cross-trained a lot of guys and, you know, they got the rudimentary qualities.

But I talked to a lot of guys that did go to work there after the company closed down. And I said, "Did they straighten everything out? Do they still got the three or four guys waiting around for the job?" And they said, "Yeah, it's exactly the same as it was. You've got some boss that forgot to order all the parts for the job and you get to a certain point, where's the oh, I forgot. And so, yeah, you're waiting around for the parts to get there, just like you did with the old company." They said it's working and that aspect wasn't any different than working anywhere. You know, everything just didn't go perfectly smooth because we got rid of unions and now we don't have any impediments. Yeah, you've still got a lot of the same bosses that used to be bosses and so it ran the same way. But I'm glad I didn't work there. I'm glad I moved on. I wouldn't have been a happy camper down there, even if I did get a job. They'd have thrown me out pretty early for trying to organize the place. So anything else you want to know?

Jaap: I don't know if I have any other specific questions for you, Jim. Clark, do you have any?

Grant: What all is under the purview of the boilermaker? What all jobs would you do?

Ugrin: What did we do? Ok, basically, when you say boilermaker, you mean welders, you know, but that's not it. The shop, the big shop that's up there, still, big gray building up there with what looks like tools on it. That was the boiler shop. And we were also affiliated with the blacksmiths, which is the shop right behind it. And in fact, we merged. It used to be blacksmiths' union and a boilermakers' union. And then sometime in the 70s, we merged because the blacksmiths kept getting smaller. It was a pretty specialized trade.

But we would like to manufacture things. Especially when the underground mines were running and the smelter in Anaconda was running. You know, we'd manufacture things from just a sheet of steel. They'd give you a blueprint or maybe not even a blueprint, they'd say, can you make such and such? And you'd make it, you know, which was the interesting part of it, because, you know, really. It let you use your imagination, your talents and everything like that. I was looking for some pictures that I had and I couldn't find them. I got them somewhere. When I taught up in that same shop, I took my camera up there and decided, take some pictures of the shop. And I wish I could have found them, because I could point out to you the different machines that they had. But they had a lot of equipment to fix like shovels, lots of equipment from the Anaconda company. And it was funny because of the talent that we had.

I remember one time we would make these . . . There's convertors over in the smelter, and they're like a big oven or whatever. They're round. They're made of four-inch steel. They're just huge. And they would pour the ore in them in the molten state. And the converter would, I'm not exactly sure how it worked, but it would boil out impurities. It was part of the system to get

blister copper. And so it was subject to tremendous heat. And they'd bring those over and we'd have to redo them a lot. And I was working on a machine at the time. It was a photo burner and it would burn out . . . You'd have a full-size picture of the part, drawn in ink, you know, like with a felt-tip pen, and then you would have a photocell that would follow it, hooked on to an arm that would run the acetylene torches and cut the part out to exact size. So we had to make this convertor mouth. And so they sent the specs down to the drafting department in the Hennessy building to give it to the engineers, the draftsman.

Well, a little while later it came back and it said, I still laugh about it, they said, "We could draw this for you, but there's nobody up there that would understand it." You know, a bunch of dumb boilermakers. OK, two things were kind of wrong with that. Yes, we could understand it. Number two, I ran the machine. All I had to do was put the drawing down. The machine would follow the drawing and cut the piece out. We didn't have to understand any of that. So we had this guy. He was one of the shop bosses. He had come up through the ranks, Franky Smarkata from Anaconda. And he was sharp. He was good at layout. And he says, come on, we'll do this. So we took one of the work tables up there, which were big 6 by 12 sheets of one inch thick steel. They were the things you would work on, you know, build your stuff on. Well, we turned that into a drawing board. And you had to use these trams, as they called them. And they were like a big compass.

But it was like a ten foot rod with markers on it. And I still remember from the edge of the table out, the work table, we had to put a piece of flat bar and a leg so we could get out to the pivot point. And Frank figured it all out. So we're up in this dirty old shop with this beautiful big piece of white paper. And us in our grubby old clothes and we drew this thing. And it worked right to a T. Right to a T. And the funny thing about it was when we were doing this, they had built this new converter somewhere in Pittsburgh or somewhere. They wouldn't let us build it because we just couldn't get it right. So they got it built, and it came back. It was wrong. It didn't hit specifications, but it's all built. This huge thing is built, so we would make the converter mouth, which was the part that when you tipped the hot molten copper would pour out and eventually eat it up and you keep replacing that. The body lasted quite a while. And I think they lined the body with fire brick when it was over there.

But anyway, so we had the plans for the converter mouths because we made them all the time, but they wouldn't fit. We made a converter mouth for it and it wouldn't fit because they made the barrel wrong. So we had to modify it, take the measurements off of the body and then modify the lip, you know. So we cut it all out, welded it all up. And I mean, this is a big job, costs a lot of money and they brought the body over there and we dropped it on and it fit like a pocket on a shirt. But the engineer guys said, "We could draw it. None of those guys know how."

I love this. We had another good example. We had to make a gear for the shovels down in the pit. And it was the drive gear on the final drive that would, you know, when you move the shovel. And these are heavy duty. I mean, real heavy duty. Well, they broke a gear down there. And when you do that, you have to order one. And they just didn't have them on a shelf somewhere. They had to build it. So they decided we'd build it, which we could. So in order to speed up the process. They took another old shaft that they had. I think it was 36 inches in diameter. And what they wanted to do, it was broken off and all jagged and it was kind of long, I

mean, fairly long, let's say. And we set it up on my machine and then they've got these special torches. And I think it was Long Machinery out of Missoula. Anyway, and they brought over the specialists who were nothing more than salesmen, but they were going to come over and show us all about this. So they set it up and we had to move the burning table out and we put this big shaft, lined it up to be cut. And we had to just slice off the bad part, which would make a nice, smooth face, move back six, eight inches, slice it off. So we just had a round disc about eight inches deep. Turn that over and then cut the gear out of that and then leaving a little extra on the profile of the gear, take it over to the machine shop. And then they learned they didn't have to do all that extra work. I mean, it would go fast and then they cleaned it all up and made the gear. So I come to work that morning, come up in the back, and here's Joe and Don, the two bosses, Don Gates and Joe Donahue, both from Anaconda.

But they both came up through the ranks. They formerly worked the tools. So I come up to work and they're getting all set up. And they said to me, "You just sit there and don't bother. These guys will show you how to cut this." So I sat down. There's a work table right next to me. And I thought this is going to be a good shift. I just have to watch the experts. They worked on it all morning and they just busted their backs and they couldn't even get started on this thing. They'd get started and it would blowout. Because you have to run it exactly the right speed, exactly the right flame and pressures. But when you're cutting a round piece, you're starting at zero thickness. So it goes at a certain speed. And this torch was huge. What they call the blowhole where the oxygen comes out that actually blows the molten metal away. It's, you know, in a normal torch, an eighth inch or so, I could stick my little finger in the hole in this torch, it was so big. So anyway they get going. So you have to go pretty fast to start, but then you have to go slower and slower and slower until you get . . . we're cutting through 36 inches of steel with a torch in one pass. And when you're getting up to there, you have to go very, very slow. So it's changing all the time. The speed is changing. Plus then you have to keep the tip a certain distance away from the surface. And that's changing all the time because as you're coming in, the surface is going up.

So they worked on it and they worked on it and they worked on it. And I sat there and I sat there and I had a nice morning. Come lunchtime, they take the two bosses to lunch. So I went and had my lunch. I come back and sit there some more. And here comes the two bosses back and no salesmen. I said, "What happened to the hotshots?" "Well, you know, right in the middle of lunch, they got a call, an emergency, and they had to go back to Missoula." And I said, "Really? How convenient, you know, how convenient." And they're shaking their heads. And Joe goes back to talk to the foreman, Jean. So Don Gates is there and he's a pretty sharp kid and he's looking. And he says, "Boy, I just can't figure it out." "Really?" "You think you can cut that?" I said, "Piece of cake, have it done in a half hour." "What?" "You want to cut it? Let's cut it." And he used to run this machine and he looks at me and he says, "Why didn't you say something?" I said, "Because the first thing you told me this morning was sit over on that bench and keep my mouth shut. And I did exactly that." And he says, "You can cut this? I say, "Yeah, you want it cut. Let's cut it." And what they didn't know was when you get down to the very slowest speeds on that, there's a little speedometer on that thing, measuring in inches per minute. So you can go real slow.

When you got on the slow end, the speedometer didn't work anymore. It worked, but it didn't

give the correct reading. So I said, we'll recalibrate the speedometer because when we go through 36 inches, you've got a chart that tells you how fast you should be going. So we set it on a ruler where you got your photocell light that tells you how fast you're going. If you're supposed to go an inch in a minute and a half or something, you know. So we just let it run an inch and we just kept turning the speed down until it got to where a minute and a half was. That's not what it says on the speedometer. So we just put a little ink mark there and that's the true speed. Well, they'd get up to those lower speeds when they were trying to cut this thing and it would just blow out and blow a big hole and just ruin everything, you know. So I said to Don, "Well, you worked this." I said, "You work the distance." Because it wasn't powered. You had to do it with a hand screw like thing. It was manual to raise it or lower it.

And usually when you're on a flat surface, you put it the distance and you just left it there. One guy could run it. And I said, I'll watch the speeds. And I'll run the speed. And you can tell when you're burning through steel like that, when it blows through the bottom of the steel, the flame should come down and shoot slightly forward. I don't know what the angle is, but I knew it by sight. So I could watch that and I could adjust the speed, make sure that angle, as long as that was blowing through and that angle was right. You were doing. So in the thinner parts, you're going slow. And the thicker parts, you're going faster. So I was the speedometer. I mean, I had my foot on the accelerator. And Don kept the height just right. We sliced the front right off of it, moved back our 8 or 10 inches, sliced the back off, had this perfect disc. Brought the burning table back in which we had to move in order to get this big piece in there, flopped it over and I cut the gear out of it. By the end of the shift we had it all done. And I just gloated like a pig in you know what. I thought, you smart asses that think you know everything. Yeah. I thought that was funnier than hell.

And we had this other boss, John Mike Dennehy, who was one of the dumbest men I've ever met in my life. And he was the big boss. And he was over there raising hell because they couldn't get a cut. But then, true to form, when I did cut it and it didn't take very long, we didn't see hide nor hair of John Mike. He wasn't going to come over and say, "Nice job." But I just got such a kick out of doing it that. I knew I could cut it and cut it out. And in the end, I got little to no credit. I mean, the two bosses that I worked for were really tickled with me, but the bigger bosses were more or less well, "Well, that's your job" kind of attitude, you know.

But, yeah, I had to do it one more time. And I think we were cutting another huge piece. And I figured they'd have a problem with it and by that time we'd moved over into the blacksmith shop, come to think of it, it was just a matter of getting better situated. We had more room over there to work in and they needed the room in the boiler shop. But we were doing it. And this guy that I went to high school with, he was a year ahead of me, two years ahead of me, McCarthy. He ended up being like the head craft boss on the hill. So he was my boss. Denny's boss's boss, and they thought they were gonna have a problem with this thing and I sliced it off because that's my job, that's what I did every day, you know, not bragging on it, but I got good at it.

So they were really worried. And it was another one of these great big pieces. But this one was square and I sliced it off for them real nice. And my regular boss, John Mike, he just had a scowl on his face. He was one of those guys that was just hoping you could fail so he could jump on you, you know, and he was growling about something. And McCarthy, he saw it. He came down.

It was that important. He came down from the sixth floor, wherever his office was. He didn't work up there at all. And he saw it all done. And, boy, he went right down to the pop machine. He bought me a Pepsi, brought it back up. And so he's right in front of John Mike. He's John Mike's boss. Patting me on the back. Gives me a drink. My boss, you could see the steam coming out of his ears, because he's just waiting for me to fail so he could jump all over me. But that was a good job. I enjoyed doing that. That was a good place to work. And if you stayed long enough, you got a decent retirement. And as far as Butte went, they paid top wages in town. So it wasn't that bad at all. It was a great place to work.

Grant: And you were a business agent with the unions, were you in negotiations? What were those like?

Ugrin: Yeah. They're just a dogfight. You went in and asked for certain things. And you had kind of criteria like. The company was really doing good, you know? You would kind of baseball. 'Hey, you guys are making money and it's because of us, you know, and so we want a cut too and a raise.' And you fought it out and then you're always looking at conditions also, you know, it wasn't always money, but you always knew or at least we thought we knew that the day the company went in there, they knew exactly what they were going to settle for and when. And it was just a dog fight and it was more or less, they pretty well held all the cards except for the fact that you closed the place down.

So if the company was doing good, copper was up, it was probably going to be a short strike, you know, and we all knew it. And if things were tough. They could afford to close down, I guess, because they weren't losing that much. Like that one year when they closed down in 59. They closed down for eight months. I wasn't working there. I was still in high school, but my dad was working there and he was out of work for eight months and had eight kids to raise, you know. So negotiations were pretty tough, but I always felt that the company had the upper hand at all times.

Grant: Were things civil or would you cuss and scream?

Ugrin: Oh, sometimes we got into cussing and screaming. Yeah, yeah. Sometimes. Well, you know, and they'd bring out that old silly stuff, you know that because you're union and you guys have the torch was a big thing with us, you know, for cutting things. And when you come down to it, they had a point (we did too) like working in the pit. And if the machinists were taking something apart and things would get dirty and rusty and crusty and they'd have to cut a bolt off. They'd call for a boilermaker because that was our work. And we come down, cut the bolt off. Well, they made the point that that held things up, and to an extent it did. But we made the point is, Ok. You cut the bolt off or we'll let you cut the bolt off and then next thing you want to know, you want to cut the beam off and next thing you want is to do all the cutting.

And we've lost our torch. We've lost our work. So at one time towards the end there, we did settle with them to get back to work, settled with them for incidental cutting. And so it would more or less be what the machinists in the pit, especially, it would more or less be judgmental. That the boss . . . well, you wouldn't leave it up to the boss because they would say, you know, you can cut all day with the torch, it's all incidental. But it was pretty much up to the machinists.

But the machinists knew where we were coming from. And I knew a couple of them. They'd just told the boss, "No, that's not incidental. That's not our work. Call the boilermakers." They stuck with us, you know, but things like that. They were always working to break down the unions, at least to make us one big homogenous union, I guess, and some places have that. Like out at Stauffer Chemical. But that wasn't the way we were structured. We didn't have, like, the steelworkers union running the whole place, which they do in a lot of places. But when we tried to talk to MRI to open up union, we told them we'd be willing when all the unions got together . . . we knew the way the wind was blowing . . . and we told them that we'd be willing to go that way.

And we were thinking steelworkers or operating engineers. And operating engineers, I was in that later. I was a recording secretary for the local 400 out of Helena. That's how they work. They always have. You know, you've got welders and mechanics and you're all in one union. So we told them we would go for that and probably would have had to have like operators and electricians, union, because they have to be licensed and safety matters and all of that, you know. So maybe we end up with two unions. They wouldn't buy that at all. They wouldn't go for that at all. We were willing to compromise and we got together as unions and thought, you know, this is the wave of the future. And probably if we get in at all, this is how it's going to be. But they just said, "No, we're not going to do that." And they knew they had the town by the neck. That everybody would go for it because we needed jobs.

Grant: The pickets, were they exhilarating?

Ugrin: Oh, yeah, well, in that instance, it was. Normally, when you go on strike, you'd get picket duty and you'd go to all the mines and you just go to the front of the mines. And really what you did was . . . All the salaried personnel could go to work and we understood that, and usually you knew who they were like, my dad was the head of the blacksmith shop, you know, and he went to work right through the strikes. After, you know, he used to be a blacksmith and we'd be on strike. And then when they made him the head blacksmith. I forget who retired. It was during a strike. And whoever was the head blacksmith, I'm trying to think of his name, retired, just pull the pin then and take him. I still remember coming down to my dad's. And said they'd promote him to the foreman.

And then, of course, he went to his union and talked to them and they were all for it. It's a raise. It's a step up the ladder. And they weren't against you doing that. You know, in fact, we liked having former union members get into the bossing jobs. When they would come, people like that would come to . . . your picketing at the Parrot shop. Like we would be up there because that's where we worked. So it was just as easy to assign us when you got picket duty, they'd sign you up there and you sit there with a picket sign and just check who went in. That was about it. Because you would have guys occasionally who would "go behind the fence." And they would be union members who would go to work. And I remember when I was a kid in the old days. Oh, you didn't want to do that. I still remember my dad taking us over on East Park and there was a house that came right out to the street. It was two stories. And there was a big window up there. And there's a couch out in the street. And the miners went in there. The guy went to work behind the fence and they went in there and tore his house up. I mean, totally illegal and wrong, but that's how they did it. They threw that couch right through the window and destroyed the house.

Jaap: We have some photos of that. And I can't remember if it is that same house. But yeah, totally destroyed.

Ugrin: Yeah. And the police showed up later, you know. That's the way it was though. Of course, then the company would take care of those people, you know, because that was a way to break the unions and I'm pretty sure they made up for all their losses and usually got them some kind of a salary job afterwards. But I never forget that going out there, oh, man, was it a mess. It wasn't kind of lawless, it was lawless, but the whole town backed you. That would have been in the early 50s back then. So the strikes were mostly uneventful. I mean, they were just long and you just toughed it out and went into negotiations and finally came up with an acceptable offer. And most of the time you didn't make out. I mean, for what you got, for what you lost while you were on strike, it took you forever to catch up. Especially that eight month strike. You know, no work for eight months. Of course, most everybody with a talent or even no talent left town and went and found some job somewhere, you know?

Jaap: Did they?

Ugrin: Yeah, usually. But you know, those longer strikes, you had to have an income.

Jaap: Did your dad do that?

Ugrin: Most of the times he didn't, strangely, but I think he did a lot of handyman work a lot. And I think he got some odd jobs and somehow he kept us all going. That one year in that long strike, him and my brother went to California and I did remember him going. My older brother was out of high school and they went to California, which we really found strange, because my dad had never done that before. And then some strikes after my brother was a machinist and I remember him going because he was married and he went to Salt Lake that one time. In fact, went to Salt Lake and never came back, found a better job. But all the times I worked there and when we were on strike, I never went anywhere. Sometimes I had little jobs around town, but I never left town and went to work. I know guys that did. They loved it, as a matter of fact, you know, going out and making better wages out of town. But then they had to run like two households in a way. Yeah. I just didn't like the idea of leaving.

Jaap: And how did people feel about that? Did anyone care that they went out of town to find other work? Did everyone do it?

Ugrin: No, no. I'd say maybe the majority. Yeah, but it was understood, you had to make it, you know, and, you knew, when they finally settled everything, they were coming back to work. They weren't going to give this job up. Well, no, I should say you expected that. But then, like I say, some people like my brother, they found a better job in Salt Lake and then didn't come back that year. And then found a better job out in Washington, ended up working in the shipyards. So he just moved around. And a lot of people did that and that was kind of the main reason they left town. It was a strike.

They found a better job and then decided, well, I'll stay here instead, you know, and ended up

probably in a bigger area, better job, same trade. But like I said too, like my brother a machinist, and when he went down to Salt Lake, got a job right now. They knew he was well trained. You come off the hill here, you had a good reputation in your trade and you would never . . . same with guys who welded. And in welding when you went somewhere you always had to certify. And certified meant you had to pass a welding test specific to the job. So if you are certified in this job this week and quit and went to this job next week, you certified all over again because the specs for the welding were different. The methods might be a little bit different. But if you knew how to weld and they told you to do a weave pass or a stringer, you knew what to do, and then you take a test and then they cut what they call a coupon out of the test and they put it in a machine that stretched it and bent it and pulled it. And they had certain parameters and had to pass and sometimes didn't. And that was called breaking out. If you broke out, you didn't get the job.

But guys come off here, the welders were good welders and they could pretty well pass any test, you know. So they didn't have trouble finding jobs like that. You know, but usually when it was all over, they came back. So that had something to say about the job here, too. Well, this was home. And the job was a good job. It wasn't like as soon as I find something better, I'm out of here. That didn't happen a whole lot. It happened, but not all that much. So anyway, strikes were stressful, but we got through.

Grant: I just have one more question. Having never been underground, can you give us a sense of what it was really like, what's it smell like?

Ugrin: It had a real damp, kind of acrid smell. You talked to a lot of people, I have anyway. You're under there down at the twelve hundred foot level. Well, you got 12 hundred feet of rock above your head, you know. It never occurred to me once, I mean, you might think of it. But for me it was never claustrophobic. It was just where you went to work and it was no different than you walking down this hallway with the lights out. That was different, of course. And everybody the first time they went down there, myself included, you had a head lamp and a big battery pack. And that's what you worked by and everybody had one.

And in some certain areas you had lights. And like when I worked on the diamond drills, your drill station was semi-permanent. And as much as you went to that drill station, maybe for weeks, you know, it didn't change, so they would run electricity and you'd have overhead lights. But normally you would work off of your headlight. Well, the first thing you do when you're first in the mines and you got way back in a drift somewhere. And drifts were the tunnels. You'd turn your light off. Well, that's one thing to impress you. You don't know what pitch black is until you're twelve hundred feet underground with no light. It's pitch black. And you can't see. Put your hand on your nose and your fingers up. You can't see your fingers. There's nothing as black as that. But as far as 'oh my God, I better get used to this,' no, I was used to it from the first time I went down. Now, riding the cage down was a little bit different because you went from different cages.

But the Kelley, the cage is about half the size of this room. Then you go over to places like the Leonard or Steward or some of those old cages. And when you ride the man cage, which is opposed to the ore skips, you get like seven men in there and you're squashed in. They're almost

pushing the doors closed, you know, and then on three decks. But the Kelley was a concrete shaft and pretty straight. You get some of those shafts that you would go down and they would just twist and turn and you'd lay over to one side and then turn the other way, because they were wooden and they always moved. I was never, like, scared of them. Some people would just, you know, you're over a hole that is a thousand feet deep. It's like falling off a thousand foot mountain, you know, on a little cable.

Well, the cables are pretty thick, but you're holding a lot of weight also. But it never really bothered me that much even going down there. But if anything would bother you, I think it would be going down in the cages. But then when you got underground, it was wet and it was dirty. Lots of places were real, real hot, you know, and it would be a day like today or day like the other day where it never got above zero and you come out of some of those mines where it never gets below 80, you know, and you're soaking wet from sweat. You always made sure you had ventilation, but then you come up and hit that -10 air, you know, and you run for the dry. When I worked in them, to me, it was just the place you went to work and it was no different going into a building above ground with the windows blacked out. More claustrophobic, because there are no high ceilings. And dirty, like I say, you're in a hole in the ground, noisy. And to a large extent, dangerous, you know, but I was never in on things like blasting, which can be real dangerous. I just didn't have a job where we did that.

But, you worked around shafts where a person could fall, and I knew people that fell in. I had a friend that tripped. They never did know what happened to him. He was my age. Back in the 60s. It was in 63, I was working in California. He was helping extend the Kelley shaft. He worked for a company, they called them the Canadians. They were shaft specialists for sinking shafts. Him and his dad and his two brothers, and he was on the top. Something happened. He was up there all by himself and he tripped, went right down the shaft and they were down there. Boy, I don't know. How deep is that? I have been down to the bottom after it was dug that deep. I don't know how many thousand feet that goes down.

Grant: At least 4500?

Ugrin: I don't know if it's quite that deep, but it might be. I know you're not supposed to do this, but I know when you're at the bottom of the Kelley and you look out from the station there and look up, I had to do that. Like I say the shaft itself was maybe half the size of this room. And when you look up, there's this little square of light like this that looks about 3/8 of an inch across. But you can see all the way up there. It's a good straight shaft. Yeah. But, you know, some people and, you know, they probably took some chances they shouldn't have. And some of those smaller shafts, you might have a drift on this side and a drift on this side come into the, you know, so there would be a station on each side. And they are only maybe six feet across or so, and I knew guys that would just jump it instead of going around.

And I knew this one guy, his kids are still here in town, Reardon's. And he got called out. It was on a holiday, that's when I was working in the boiler shop. And something happened, he was down underground in the Leonard and he fell on the shaft and I had heard that he tried to jump across the shaft instead of going around. But I don't know. But. And he was out there on a call-out, wasn't even his workday. And down the shaft he went. That was it. His son, Pat, works over

in the county. And his brother Jerry was a boilermaker, come to think of it. Jerry is dead now, but he worked with me on the boilermaker. But that would happen. It was usually just dumb things that you shouldn't have been doing that caught up with you. And we all did them, you know. And some of us got away with it. Yeah, so it was a bit dangerous, that's for sure. You had to pay attention.

And then there were things that you had absolutely no control over, like rock falls or just wrong place, wrong time, you know. In fact, my brother who was working at the High Ore at the time. And he wanted a day off or something. Anyway, he changed shifts with this kid, and he was married to Bonnie Wedlake who was one of our neighbors down on Emma Street. And anyway, he was working as a day's pay miner, a regular miner. I think he was driving drift. But anyway, if you were close enough, you'd come out of your workplace and go over to the station to have lunch because it was drier, air was better, it was lit, you know, and then after lunch, you'd get a laggin, which is a board, you know.

Talk to any miner, they know what a laggin is. Like a two or three inch thick board that you would build a wall with and you take your laggin over and you'd lean it up against one of the walls and you'd take a nap, put your buckets for your pillow and lay back. Being creatures of habit, you were like the Sheldon Leonard of the mining world. 'That's my spot,' you know, and you put your laggin up. Well, this guy took my brother's place on that shift and he took my brother's place on his laggin spot and the damn bulkhead gave way and fell in on him and killed him. And my brother would have been there because that's where he took his little lunchtime nap. Which was, you know, just something you did.

But nobody knew it was going to give way. It's just one of those things you can't predict. And if it had done it 15 minutes earlier when they're all sitting over here eating their lunch, it would have been nothing more than just another mess to clean up. This way this kid was laying there and boom, just crushed him. So some things you had no control over, you know? And that's where they got the term for a big boulder is called a Dugan, because you had Dugan's funeral home here and those things would fall off the overhead and catch you. And they called them a Dugan because you ended up at Dugan's. Yeah, so you always when you went into a new area like that, you always had to bar down. You would take a bar, which is like a big, long steel rod, crowbar like thing. The blacksmiths would put a pry end on it and a sharp point on the other end. You'd have a piece of thick rubber on each end like a circle and what that was for, when you bar down and rocks would come down. If you didn't have that, they could have a tendency to catch the bar and they would ride the bar right down to you.

So that little piece of rubber would deflect them. So you'd go in there, and I got yelled at for this one, I was a greenhorn. I was cleaning up this little side drift, where they would put the cars in there. They called it a motor barn. It was just a place to store cars or a motor. And it would be a little bit longer than this room, maybe. So they had a bunch of stuff on the track. And I was a day's pay guy, a laborer. So I had to go in there and muck it out. This old time miner comes in, sees what I'm doing. "Did you bar down?" "No, what's that?" I was new in the place. "Oh, for Christ's sake, get out of here." And he goes and gets a bar and he comes in. You would tap the ceiling, which was solid rock. But if you had a loose piece up there, you had a definite hollow sound. You know, if it was good, solid granite, it would kind of ding, you know. And if it wasn't,

it would thump and he goes up there. "Holy Christ!" It was thumping, you know, and so he goes over here and there's a little crack and he gets the bar in there and this slab comes down and it must have weighed two tons. And that's where I'm under shoveling dirt. So I got a good chewing out over that.

Jaap: And I bet you barred down every time after that.

Ugrin: Plus the fact that I had to break it all up with a sledgehammer and throw it in the car to get rid of it. Yeah, but you always had to remember to bar down. And then they always had posters. I wish I had a little bit of common sense back then and took all the old posters, safety posters. You've probably got some here. But in every place, in the shops, every place, they had slogans and tips and there was always "Bar Down" and they'd have a guy. It was really original art. I don't think any of it was copies.

Jaap: No, no. A lot of it. I think his name was John Powers and I think he was from here. And he did a lot of it.

Ugrin: And we never thought anything of it, but thinking back on it, they'd be collectibles now. And when they were done with them, I'm sure they sent a new one up like up to the boiler shop. And the boss would go and tear the old one off and throw it in the garbage. Put the new one up.

Jaap: I think we have some. They're a little risqué even. They were very funny.

Ugrin: But some people might have saved some of them. Like I say, I'm sure they were all original art. I don't know of any reproductive machines that would, you know how you can make a thing that big now if you want to, but then you had mimeographs and a few things like that, but no photocopiers. So they had a regular department. The safety department drew them all up. It was probably a good job, if you were an artist. They'd give you an idea and you'd sketch it out for them. They were all colored. And then, of course, a lot of printing and different fonts and all hand-done. They were pretty neat. But you would see those. You'd see. "Bar down." Different ones in the mine. Specific to the mines. And 'Always wear your safety glasses' and a hard hat and just all those reminders like that. Yeah.

But like I said, I didn't find the mines that intimidating. Maybe I should have had more respect for them. I did, but . . . And then when I got to be a boilermaker, you had boilermakers at each mine, but they were like assigned there. That's where they worked. But every once in a while, they get too much work, getting behind or just too much would come up at once, and especially on night shift. You'd work after your own shift at the shop. I think it would come up once a month, I'm not sure, for a week. Everybody hated working that. It threw your sleep patterns off and everything. You didn't get off until midnight.

But anyway, lots of times on afternoon shift, they'd call you out, call for a boilermaker because maybe at certain mines their boilermaker only worked day shift. So anyway, you'd end up down in the mine for a specific job that night. Or if they had a longer job, that was Dennehy's favorite punishment, he'd send you to the mine. Because it was a dirty place to work and as far as welding, doing the job right, things have to be clean and no inclusions in the weld, if you want it

to last and all that stuff. Well, down in the mines, everything was rusted and corroded and it was always "hurry up", you know. And the mining bosses in the mine - to them welding is welding, just put a bead on it and let's get going. From us guys in the shop, welding is a bit of a science. There's a way to do it right and that's how we like to do it. But then, of course, we had cleaner conditions and everything too.

But I'm not saying we liked to take our time, but we did like to take the time to do it correctly. And boy, you'd start doing that in the mine and there'd be some boss, "God damn it. So and So gets it done in five minutes!" Well, he figured it out. He's got to know what he's talking about. Done. Of course, I'll be here tomorrow to redo it, you know, and they'd never figure that out. They figure out that damn thing just keeps breaking, you know? Well, if you let me fix it right, it'll last for maybe a year or two. Take the time. And in that year, you're calling me back every other day to re-fix it. And you can always tell because, if you're fixing a weld like that that's broken, you get a grinder or an air-arc and you cut it all out, down to good metal, you know, and then start and rebuild it. Maybe putting in backing plate. Lots of different ways to do it.

Well, you'd get there and you just see these layers after layers after layers of weld and you could just tell the guys working there, just to shut him up, would put a bead on it. And it would get through the shift, so this guy, it never broke on his shift. So it wasn't downtime and they had that attitude too. Well, if it breaks on the next shift, that's his downtime. Never looked at the overall picture.

They were great for that down in the pit, down in the garage down there. I had to go down there when they were having layoffs. And it was hill seniority. And the layoffs they had come at the boiler shops, they had to get rid of the bottom three guys, but they would get rid of the bottom three guys on the hill, so they might be somewhere else. And that happened to me. And the guy that got laid off was actually in the garage, well they still needed him. So then I would go to the garage. The layoff was actually in the shop. And the first time I went down there. And Mikilich was the boss, the boilermaker boss. He had come up through the ranks as a boilermaker. Well, he had me fixing these cracks on the frames of those trucks, because they took a lot of beating. They did a lot of work.

So I look at all this welding and it's cracked there. It's been cracked before. I go get what they call an air arc and that gouges out the old metal. And then you take a grinder also and you clean it all up. And I'm doing all that. And he comes by, "What the hell are you doing? Why isn't it done yet?" I said, "Look at this thing. It's a mess. Who the hell did it?" "Just put a bead on and get it out the door." And that was the idea. Not bragging, but it was a point of honor. Like you'd always have a load of trucks that maybe needed welding or whatever they did need. They'd be waiting to be repaired and get back out. And the boss on that shift would say, "We got six trucks out. We got eight." So it was always how many trucks can you get out. Not, "Can you fix it?" You know, how many can you get out? And so they wanted you to just get it out and like I said, then it was the next guy's problem.

Never thought, no, it's the company's problem. Do it right and you'll be done. It might not ever break again if you reinforced it and did it right. I had a friend, when this outfit took over and they just let anybody, you know, if you could run a bead, you were a welder and they bought a bunch

of new Haul-Pac trucks. And Butch O'Leary, he was a welding engineer taught up at . . . in fact, come off the hill, went back to school and ended up being a metallurgist welding engineer. And he was a professor up at Tech. Well, he had a nephew, and Butch was one of the best welders I've ever seen. He knew it, I mean scientifically, right down. And there was a right way and a wrong way, and you better not do it the wrong way.

So he taught his nephew how to weld and his nephew wound up working for MRI. Well, they got these new Haul-Pacs and they kept breaking. Well, they were new. So Webco had to pay for them to be fixed. Well, then they come down to see why they keep breaking and they saw the way they were doing the work. And they checked into it and the people who were doing the welding, and Butch's nephew, his stuff would never come back. They'd sign off. You had a check sheet there and you'd sign off when you did it. And they noticed that his stuff never, hardly ever came back. They finally went to the powers that be, Butch was telling me. And they said, the warranty no longer covers anything repaired unless this guy repairs it.

Jaap: Really?

Ugrin: Yeah, because, you know, they'd just get it out. Not looking at the overall picture. And then Butch, I remember one time, another story. They hired them down there. They were putting together a brand new shovel, but their crane had cracks in the boom and it has to be inspected, state inspected. The specifics are there are so many cracks of so many inches per crack. So like in the frame you can have like maybe four cracks and no longer than an inch and a half or so. And then you can't use that crane. It's unsafe. So the crane they needed was cracked, wouldn't pass.

So they knew they weren't going to weld it because it had to be inspected by a welding inspector, which Butch was also but he also had a business on the side where he did that work. So they hired him to do the work and the inspection. And you do a [die-pan] test or an X-ray machine, but that's one other way. But you can do with a penetrating dye. I think it's ultraviolet light. And it'll show you if your weld is not solid. If it's kind of undercut or cracked. So he would do that kind of stuff and then he would certify it fixed. So he needed a helper to prep all the welds and he would weld. Because I could never weld as good as he could, but he was certified on this and I wasn't, which you also had to have.

So anyhow, he hires me. So a lot of the bosses that were down there were bosses when I worked. And this was a few years later and I was banned from the property altogether for my picket activities. So all of a sudden, here comes the boss to see how the job is. And I forget who it was. It wasn't Frank Gardner because he was the big shot. It was another boss that I knew. Might have been that guy out of Whitehall. Can't even think of his name. Anyway, he shows up and he looks up and I'm up there prepping the welds and his eyes got like this. You know, we got one of the banned guys. He's blackballed from this place. Boy, they went right after Butch, you know, and he told them to stick it. He said, "That guy doesn't work for you. He works for me. And he's going to be here or I'm not going to be here. You get somebody else to do this." Which they couldn't.

There was nobody else. He stuck up for me and he was a good union guy anyhow. And we got

the job done and everything. But it was really funny because they might have had (I would just take a number) 10 cracks. And if you had like four. That was the max. Well, they watched you fix them until we got down to four, whatever the number was, then they shut the job down. Now I just thought, what are you thinking? Get the whole damn thing fixed, you know, because those pieces have weakened. Well, that makes the other pieces more stressed. But just the whole idea is to fix it and fix it right. But to save a couple hundred dollars as soon as we got down to the minimum amount, they shut the job down and it passed, of course, and they put the shovel together.

But, you know, if the inspector came back a week later and they're still putting a shovel together and something else cracks, then you shut down again, you know? So they just didn't believe in that. That there's a specific way [to do it] right. I don't know why, because a lot of them were engineers. They should know that. That there's a specific way to do something, a correct way to do it. Sometimes it takes time and money. But they just had that, I guess, it was a carryover from the Anaconda Company. Because most of the bosses down there were carried over from the Anaconda Company. You know, just get it done. Get out. Get out the door. It was an interesting place.

Jaap: Well, Jim, thanks for your time today.

Ugrin: Yeah, I enjoyed it. It was good to look at this again, too.

Jaap: Yeah, take these.

Grant: Evidence that you're a badass.

Ugrin: Yeah.

Jaap: 1986. A good year.

Grant: I was born in 86.

Ugrin: Oh Christ. Don't tell me those things. I was a young man. I was only 45 years old. I am older than your dad. Yeah, that's amazing. Well, like I was saying, my family's home has been home for 110 years.

Jaap: I think that's amazing. It made it really easy to see what newspaper articles are about you. Because everything said, "James Ugrin, Emma Street." Yeah. Easy peasy.

Ugrin: Yeah. Well, if you look . . . what year was that? Look up my name in 69, pretty sure that was the year when I fell off the bridge. Was I married then? Of course, if you look in about 1960, that was the year I got run over in Missoula and ended up in the hospital that time, too. Broke my jaw, knocked my front teeth out. Yeah, I made the paper that time, too. We were being stupid and I paid the price. Well, so did my buddy, though. What the heck were we doing over there? We were over there for the state track meet. We were just out of high school the year before. Or maybe it was two years before. I remember, I was up at Tech, the School of Mines. So we

decided to go over there because it was a big party and chased girls and everything, you know. So we're staying at this hotel and for some reason . . . It was night and I was in there and I forget why I was out in the courtyard. My two buddies, John Gillespie and Gus Hernandez, they were in the room. They were two tough guys, not me. So who starts a fight? Me. These kids from Missoula come in. Oh, I remember, they pulled the car in and they were looking for somebody. I think there were some girls staying there, too. We were going to go over to their place for a party. And the guy pulls up and he says, "Hey, punk, where's so and so?" I said, "What did you call me?" The guy says, "Punk." I said, "Get out." He comes out and we start going at it. He's pretty well beaten me up, you know. I call time. I say, "You wait right here." Ok. So I said to John and Gus, I said, "I need a hand out here."

Well, there were four of these guys I should've known better. And John said later, "You were all dirty. I thought you were fixing a flat tire on the car." I came out and the kids from Missoula said, "Good. There's more of them." Well, that was the worst thing he could have said, because to these two clowns, it was "Ah, a fight! Good deal! Fun time! This is what we came for." They took off after these four guys. They beat them like a redheaded stepchild. And John grabbed the guy that was after me and he just beat the snot out of him. And Gus chased this other guy across the parking lot and just, oh, man, beat him mercilessly. He comes back over there and John got through with his guy. This guy is crawling to his car. Gus comes all the way across the courtyard and drop kicked him right square in the chest. And just put the guy on his back. So they threw him in the car and they all took off.

Well, then these two guys are all really stoked now. They're going to go look for them. So we go downtown in Missoula and there was a dance, as we used to call them "a mixer" at the Palace. So we thought that's pretty good. That's probably where they're at. So we parked kitty corner across the street. I crossed this way, then had to go this way. So I got there and we'd been drinking and that, but we weren't in bad shape. Well, not to that extent, to tell you the truth. But I got to this place here and I'm going this way and I look up at the light and I waited for the light and the light changed, and I started. I looked to my left. Cars were stopping. Well, in the meantime, these kids from Great Falls were there doing the same thing we were doing. I still remember the kid had a Studebaker. And he went through the light just at the right time. Well, he had these girls with him from Missoula and he was supposed to turn left and they started yelling at him, "You missed the turn. You missed the turn." He's all the way through the intersection. I stepped off the curb, started across. And these other guys from Butte were down there and they were coming this way. I stepped across the street. This guy slams on the brakes and being a smart ass, just throws it in reverse and jumps on the gas to make it back up, to make a left turn. I don't know what the hell he was thinking. I'm looking this way and he hits me right here. I whipped around and I hit on the trunk. I still have the scar. Knocked my teeth out. Broke my jaw. I'm laying in the middle of the street.

Like I say, the Denny brothers, they came right over. They knew me, but they didn't recognize me coming across the street. But they ran over because of the accident. Coney says they picked me up and said, "I didn't know who the hell you were." My face just blew up. So down comes the cops and everything. And Gus comes running across the street, pulls the kid out of the car, beats the shit out of him. And these weren't the same kids. So the cops come down to break it up and Gus is screaming, "He just ran over my buddy. He just ran over my buddy." And the cops

say, "I understand. But you can't be doing this. You go over there. You can't be doing this." He came to help me. Gus jumped the guy, beat the shit out of him again. And the cop says, "I told you to get over there. You're going to jail, if you keep this up." Goes back at it again. So the next thing I know, Gus is beating the cop up. So Gus ended up in jail. So anyway, we were staying at John Gillespie's aunt's house, and she thought we were nuts anyway. And we had left earlier. We had dinner there. We had left. We came back. John comes back alone. "Where's the rest of them?" "Well, Jim's in the hospital and Gus is in jail." And she's like, "Oh, my God, his parents are going to kill me." Oh, Jesus. So I spent a couple of days in the hospital over there. Oh, that was fun. Gus spent the night in jail.

Grant: Just the night. I think if you beat up a cop nowadays . . .

Ugrin: Yeah, you'd be in a lot more trouble.

Grant: That's hysterical.

Ugrin: Fun days. I wonder how I ever got to be 76. I worked against it for a long time.

[END OF RECORDING]