THE

VERDIGRIS PROJECT

KBMF & BUTTE-SILVER BOW ARCHIVES

LuWANNA JOHNSON

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

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

www.verdigrisproject.org

Oral History Transcript of LuWanna Johnson

Interviewers: Aubrey Jaap & Clark Grant
Interview Date: September 11th, 2019
Location: Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives
Transcribed: April 2022 by Adrian Kien

[00:02:34]

Jaap: Okay. So it's September 11th, 2019. We're here with LuWanna Marjamaa Johnson. LuWanna I'd like you to start and tell me a little bit about your parents or grandparents, kind of whoever came to Butte first and what you know about how they got here, that sort of thing.

Johnson: Well, my father's name is Jonas Marjamaa. He first came to Butte, he grew up in Minnesota on a homestead, came to Butte when he was about 16 and his brother-in-law was here and his older sister. So he stayed with them and started working in the mines. At the time, from what I understand, you could not work in the mines for the ACM until you were 18, but he worked under his brother-in-law's work card. I forget what they call them.

Jaap: The rustling card?

Johnson: The rustling card, I think that's what they called it, something like that. So he worked then, and then when World War II started, he was drafted or else he signed up, I can't remember which and he was in World War II. After the war, he came back and my mother came back and she was living in Butte at the time, just for a short time for about a month. And then they were married at St. Mark's Lutheran church here in Butte. Then obviously they lived in Finntown. His older sister and her husband ran the Red Front bar which is on the 400 block of east Broadway, just two bars down from the Helsinki. They called it the Broadway bar, but it was prior to that, it was the Red Front. And so that's how we came about to be here. My father was a miner. He was a contract miner. My mother was a housewife and for most of the time, except she worked for the Montana Power and retired from the Montana Power.

Jaap: So your parents knew each other a month before they were married?

Johnson: No, they both are from Minnesota and they knew each other back then because they were on farms, but they knew each other from that time on. So my father was here after the war and my mother came out.

Jaap: She came out to see your father?

Johnson: She came out to see him and stayed with some folks for about a month and they were married.

Jaap: Oh, that's a great story. Yeah. So what was your mother's name?

Johnson: My mother is Myrtle Ekland Marjamaa. And they were both born like I said in Minnesota, but she was in Becker County and he was in Green Valley township, about 20 miles apart, something like that.

Jaap: And what mines did your dad work in? Did he work in just one?

Johnson: No. He worked in many of them. He worked in the Steward and the Mountain Con, I know. Some of the mines were cooler mines and some were really hot. So as a child, I didn't pay attention to which mines he was working at. You don't really notice that as you're growing up. And he just went to work. He came home and you didn't have dirty, old work clothes or anything because you put all your mine gear in the dry and let the mine gear just stay there and you just threw it out and replaced it. As, you know, even as a child, I used to hem his pants, his work pants, many times he wanted him sewed many, many times around the hem so that nothing would be hanging to, you know, be dangerous in the mine. So you would get caught on something or trip or something if they got ragged. I'm trying to think of some of the mines that he did work at.

Jaap: So you mentioned some were cooler and some more hotter. Did he ever talk about, did he work in, did he talk about that?

Johnson: Yeah. Cool mines. They were a little bit cooler and then some were just really hot. He was on, you'll see the pictures at the archives of when they reached a mile down and it was a mile high and a mile down. My dad was on the opposite shift of the day shift. I know the people who are in that picture.

Jaap: He just missed the picture.

Johnson: Maurice Hannon, they are Finns, you know, that are in the picture. And they were on the day shift when they were taking the pictures and my dad was on the night shift. So I think it was the Mountain Con mine.

Jaap: It was.

Johnson: Yeah. Where it was a mile high and a mile deep.

Jaap: Did he talk about that then? I mean, that is a pretty cool accomplishment.

Johnson: Not really. We just saw the picture in the paper the next day. And he didn't really say anything much about it.

Jaap: And then your family owned the Red Front Bar, the Broadway bar. Can you tell me a little bit about what you know about that?

Johnson: Yeah. Well, my family didn't, but my aunt and uncle did. And you always had polka music. My uncle played the accordion and so they had a band playing on the weekends and it was real fun. They later sold the Broadway bar to John and Ivar Kivela. John Kivela is Terry

Kivela's dad, he was there at the meeting and they had a band also and would always play on the weekends. Sometime the Corner Bar, which was later named the Helsinki bar, would have a band playing too on the weekends. So it was always nice, but the bars were different back then. They weren't bad places and kids could go into the bar. But it was more like a visiting place rather than a drinking place. There was drinking too, obviously, but it was more, I guess, it was more of a social place, rather than what you think of as a bar now. In fact, one time, my friend and I, we went to the Montana theater (which is gone) to a show and it was on Sunday. And at the time uptown Butte was dead.

There were no stores open because they weren't open on Sundays. So we went to the movie and it was a little, I can't remember the name of the movie. It was a little bit scary, I guess, because when we got out, it was just starting to get dusk. And we were scared. So whenever we walked up town from Finntown, you'd walk either up Park Street or Broadway or through the alleys. And we started running home. We ran all the way from Montana Street, over Broadway, all the way till we got to the corner where the Corner Bar is, or it's now Helsinki bar. We ran as fast as we could because we were scared. And when we finally got to that corner, oh, we were safe. Yeah. Because we could run into anyone at those bars and we would have been safe, you know, it was just a really nice feeling.

[00:11:51]

Jaap: Yeah. Finntown seems like a lot of the communities, I think Finntown seems like it was very close-knit and very tight community. Do you think?

Johnson: Yeah, we were. Everybody, I think, knew everybody. As kids you don't think about this when you're growing up, but people knew who my father was. And I think my sister and I were only 16 months apart. So we were pretty close in size and I don't think they really knew us apart. So we were always called the [Finnish phrase], meaning the Marjamaa girls, because we were you Jonas Marjamaa's daughters. So that's how everybody kind of knew us, unless it was somebody, you know, who was related to us. Or we really knew them real well. But everybody knew who we were. So, and then I have two brothers, one is six years younger than me and then one is 14 years younger than me. So we're all kind of spread apart.

Jaap: So do your younger brothers then have different memories than you? I mean, is there a sense of Finntown quite as close knit as your memories of Finntown then?

Johnson: Probably not, but the brother that is six years younger than me has, you know, more memories than obviously than my youngest brother, but even he has quite memories of Finntown because he lived there for probably maybe the first seven years. And he can tell you stories that would, you know, what he remembers up to that point. So his name is Dennis Marjamaa, and my other brother is Ronnie Marjamaa. And I don't know if they'd want to give you an oral interview or not.

Jaap: We can give them a call for sure. So is your family pretty musical then?

Johnson: No, not my family, but my uncle's family was, and I don't think anyone in the Marjamaa family was really musical. It was my aunt, my father's sister.

Jaap: Okay. So what's their surname?

Johnson: [Finnish name] And they lived behind the Red Front Bar, the Broadway bar. There was a building that was upstairs and downstairs and they were like two apartments. My uncle and aunt lived upstairs in the top apartment. And when I was really young, we lived in the bottom apartment. We could always see the ladies, the cooks from across the street was at [inaudible] boarding house and they would be looking out the window, out the side window, probably must've been the kitchen and they'd wave to us, my sister and I, you know, as we were quite little at that time. The Corner Bar was owned first by Mr. Driebe [?]. And he sold it in turn to Irvin Naimi [?]. His wife is the one that ran [inaudible] boarding house.

[00:15:55]

And I can't remember being inside the boarding house very much, just on the outside. So I can't tell you anything about that.

Jaap: Were there always lots of activities going on around the boarding house though, and things like that?

Johnson: Well, there was always activities everywhere, you know, in Butte at that time it was a vibrant town and it was really busy uptown. There wasn't a lot on the flats, but uptown, there was, and lots of cars, lots of people walking all the time. Uptown was a really nice place to shop. My friends and I, we always went to the library. We would walk. You didn't have a ride. You know, we walked everywhere. So we'd walk through uptown. It was just fun. It was, I suppose, the mall is kind of that way where you could window shop, but it was more fun going through uptown Butte and looking in all the windows and everything. At Christmas time, the stores always closed at five o'clock, and at Christmas time there were two weekends on Saturday. The stores would be open till nine o'clock and it was fun because it was just before Christmas.

So it was kind of like a little bit of snow coming down usually. And my father would give my sister and I $10 and we could buy Christmas gifts. So we would, you know, just, and you went as a child by yourself. You didn't have to have your parents with you. And we would just go shopping and try to get something, you know, gifts that were some kind of nice gift and spend the $10. And there would be the Lion's Club. They always were selling apples. And the Salvation Army ladies were out ringing the bells. It was usually a lady. And at that time they were dressed in their bonnets and, you know, the Salvation Army uniform that they had. So it was kind of fun shopping because the stores were never open except then late at night.

Jaap: Do you remember any of the gifts you bought? Do you have a gift that sticks in your mind?

Johnson: I remember once we brought, I don't know why we did it, but we bought my brother a little styrofoam Santa Claus boot for a little boy. I don't know. You know, he was really little, so

we must've been like eight or nine years old, but we bought that for him and I still have it because when he grew up, he gave it back to me.

Jaap: Oh really?

Johnson: Yeah. But I can't see why we would have thought that would have been a good gift for a little boy.

Jaap: When were you born, LuWanna?

Johnson: I was born in 1948.

Jaap: Okay. All right. Just trying to get a sense of the time. So did people speak Finish often? You said people called you the Marjamaa girls.

Johnson: Most people spoke Finnish. We didn't speak Finnish at home because my mother is Swedish, so she didn't know Finn, but we always had my aunts and uncles and people who would come and visit, they'd be talking in Finn to my dad. So it's a really nice welcome sound to me. And when I was young, you kind of knew what people were talking about. Because you kind of pick up the language, we didn't speak it or anything, and now I'd have a little hard time doing it. But back then, it was just the way it was. And my mom didn't mind when they were talking Finn. Because I think she understood Finn quite a bit. She just didn't speak Finn. And maybe 10 years ago, my brother gave me a tape from Minnesota about the U.P.'ers, they called them.

[00:20:51]

And it was in Finnish. It was this song that they sang. They sang it in English and then they sang it in Finnish and it just felt so good to hear, you know, the language again, because I don't hear it anymore.

Jaap: Do you speak very much Finnish?

Johnson: I just know words. And I probably could count to a hundred and that's it.

Jaap: Were saunas a part of your life?

Johnson: All the time. And we still have a sauna. When I was real young and we were in Finntown, we used to go to the public sauna, my mother and my sister and I. And because my brothers were not there, you know, they weren't born yet. But the public sauna was really nice. They had a big area on the women's side, big area, huge room. That was the dressing room. And then there was a middle room that was the washroom. And then they had a bigger room that was this steam room. The water came out of a pipe that you would pull a rope, if you were sitting on the benches. You would pull the rope and the water would go on the big stove with the rocks on it because it was a big, you know, it was a big room.

So that was kind of fun. And do you want me to tell you about what happened with my cousin

and I and my sister? Because there were always these little old Finnish ladies in the sauna. And one day no one was in there. And so my sister, myself and my cousin went into the steam room, the sauna room, and nobody was there and they had these beautiful, beautiful benches that were painted light green, just really nice. And we soaked up the benches and were sliding, you know, because you're naked in the sauna. And we were sliding just having the time of our life, sliding on the bench, until my mother came in and she said we couldn't do that. That some little old lady is going to fall. It's too slippery. And she made us wash every bit of the soap off the benches, you know, but we were so young, we didn't understand that it could be dangerous and it could have been dangerous for us too. But we had fun.

Jaap: Where was the public sauna?

Johnson: There were two. And Mary McLaughlin, she has a history book. And in there there's a picture of a sauna, but she's got the wrong address to it. She's got the address to the one on this.

Jaap: Mary Murphy's book.

Johnson: Mary Murphy. She was there. Yeah. Mary Murphy's book. She has a picture of the sauna that was on the 500 block, but she gives it the address of the 700. So there was one public sauna there and we didn't go to the one on the 700 block. We went to the one on that 500 block. And the lady there was really, really nice. She just really liked kids, I think. And especially my sister and I. She'd give us a pop, you know, sometimes.

Jaap: How often would you go?

Johnson: Normally, probably once every two weeks, when we were young. And then after the sauna burned. And so we went down to Vernon and Sophie Mackey sauna with the lady, her name is Amanda Hill, a little Finnish lady. That was kind of like our grandmother. We didn't have a grandmother growing up. but if I think of a grandmother, I think about her. And she used to come to sauna with us. Vernon and Sophie Mackie had kind of like a little farm out on the flats and it's off Dewey Boulevard. It's on Evans street now.

And in fact, my brother, after they passed away, bought the place from their daughter. I think it was like 23 city lots actually, when he purchased it. So he lives there still. But they had a little sauna, a public sauna kind of, because it was a sauna and at both ends of the building was a dressing room. And so people would come and you visit and wait and you'd go into one dressing room. And they'd take sauna, you'd lock this door. And then when they were done in the sauna, they would ring a little bell into the house. And so Vernon Mackie would know that, oh, they're done. So somebody else would go on the next side and you know, you'd unlock the door.
So it was a little bit faster that way, because they had lots of people that wanted to take sauna over there. It was a wood fired sauna and they put the wood in from the outside.

So you didn't have to go in and stoke the fire or anything. They had great big round, galvanized laundry tubs that held cold water. And they had another big tank that was hooked to the stove that heated the water for hot water. And so it was, it was just a fun place. The sauna is always fun.

A Finnish sauna is a little bit different. It's not like going to the YMCAs and going into their sauna or something, and you might put a little bit of water on the rocks. It's different and I'm not sure how it's different, but my brother has a wonderful sauna. It's wood fired. And he also puts the wood in from the outside. The other thing, putting the wood in from the outside keeps all the wood, you know, all the dirt that comes in with wood keeps it out of the sauna and he's got just a really nice beautiful dressing room and a wonderful sauna. He's a carpenter by trade, but he got hurt and he can't work anymore, but he did make this sauna.

We had a visitor one time staying at my mother's from Finland. And he does research about repatriated Finns that moved to the United States and they have a big museum in Finland. When he comes here, he tries to contact as many ex Finnish people that are now United States citizens. And just find out how they're doing and everything like that. Well, he was staying at my mother's, but he took sauna at my brother's. And on his Christmas letter that he wrote that winter, he was saying what he did that summer. And he came to Minnesota and he'd come to Montana. And he said, I had a sauna at Dennis Marjamaa's, and he has a sauna fit for the king of Finland. He was so impressed with it. So if you ever want to see a real good Finnish sauna, go there.

The other place that used to have sauna was the Helsinki bar. Irvin Neimi and his dad used to have two saunas there. And after I was a little bit grown, probably like late junior high, high school, I would just call them. I'd call Irvin and ask him to let me know when one of the sauna rooms was free. And so he'd give me a call and I'd go take sauna. You just go in the bar and pay. And it was a really fun time because if you went on the weekend, you could hear the band playing both upstairs at the Helsinki and at the Broadway bar. And usually they were playing polka music, you know, something like that. Schottische that kind of music. And the buildings would just kind of like vibrate. It was real fun just to sit there and relax and get all nice and clean.

[00:31:34]

Jaap: That's great. So the public saunas, generally, at least the ones in Finntown, was it mostly Fins that went there? Did other people come?

Johnson: I don't know so much about other people, but the Finns would always come. If somebody else came, it was because they knew something about sauna. Normally other ethnic groups don't really know about sauna, unless maybe they're Russian. They don't call it sauna. They call it something else, but they have something similar. And if you had friends, or had some kind of association with it, then maybe they'd take sauna. I don't know. I don't know the answer to that. Yeah.

Jaap: How about food? Can you tell me a little bit about Finnish food?

Johnson: Well, I can tell you, we didn't have a lot of Finnish foods or traditional stuff because my mom was Swedish, but so it's kind of a mix of Swedish and Finnish, but they have the viili. Viili, where it's kind of like yogurt. And all of their breads. You have Finn bread, which is baked flat. Most of them were about this big and probably this tall. You'd punch it after it rose the second time. Making it, you flip it over on a wooden breadboard and punch it with your fork and

then put it into the oven, bake it halfway through, you would turn it over, bake the rest of it. And that's your bread. It's really good. You know, it's just regular bread really, but it's really good. And my mom always baked bread. And sometimes if you didn't have enough time for the regular bread to rise, you'd take a bit of dough, roll it really, really flat and just bake that and it's called rieska. So that was also really good in my mind. There's nothing better than warm Finn bread with butter. Or rieska with butter and coffee with cream and sugar.

Jaap: Sounds right up my alley. I'll agree with that probably.

Johnson: That's one of the best tastes in my book. Not in everybody's.

Jaap: Coffee. When we spoke to you guys, coffee was a big deal.

Johnson: Coffee is a big deal. And I don't know if it's so much a big deal anymore, but it always was in, you always had coffee, but you always had something with coffee. If you had somebody visit, and I'm not sure if it's so much Finnish as more being from farm homesteads, if somebody visited, you always try to have a little bit of something else. Like maybe bread and lunch meat, or have a little bit at dinner, always give your guests something else, even if they just stopped by.

Jaap: And how about, was there some sort of fish stew?

Johnson: Yeah, kalamojakka. And it's just a fish stew. It's made with milk and it's really good. Lots of people don't like it. Then they have lefse. Lefse is more a Swedish/Norwegian, flat potato bread, but some Finns had lefse too. And then always cinnamon rolls and you make it with lots of cardamom and they're really good.

I'm trying to think. At Christmas time, there's always all kinds of different cookies. And pula, it's called. It's like a braided coffee cake in a way, but it's a yeast. It's not coffee cake in a loaf pan or anything. It's not a quick bread. It's a yeast bread. Let's see, what else? Nothing that I can really think of right now.

[00:36:51]

Lutefisk, not everybody likes lutefisk. I do. And if you cook it right, it doesn't take much cooking at all. It's pretty good if it's not cooked, right. It tastes a little rubbery. And most kids used to not like it because it smelled bad. But nowadays where you can order lutefisk, it's from Minnesota and it doesn't smell bad when you cook it. So they must do something different to it.

Jaap: Do you still cook any of these foods?

Johnson: Yeah. Not as much anymore. My family's not here, but we always have a traditional, and it's kind of Norwegian, Finnish Christmas Eve and Christmas day dinner. Like on birthdays, if somebody has a special food, you'll fix that. Otherwise it's just normal, normal food.

Jaap: And you're viili has been living for how long?

Johnson: Oh, I bet it was probably 80 years, if not more because I got the starter from my aunt probably 45 years ago and it was old then. And so she probably got it from her mother or her mother-in-law, I don't know which, and at that time she had been married probably 40 years. So it just can keep going.

Jaap: I think that's pretty neat. So where did you go to school?

Johnson: I went to Grant grade school up until sixth grade because they built the East Junior High, I think it opened in 1957. And that's when they moved the seventh and eighth graders from the elementary schools. So I went to Grant through sixth grade and then East Junior High through ninth grade. Butte High had so many children going to school there that they split up and put the ninth grade to junior high. And then when I started in high school, they had two sessions for school. An early session and a late session. And I was in the early session. You started at 7:30 in the morning, and the late session started at 9:30. So that extended the day. And they could accommodate that many more classes.

Then we walked to school, you know, from Finntown. It wasn't that hard. When we went to junior high, junior high was like three miles away. We had to take the city bus and it was 15 cents a ride. So that was the only bus riding that we took was going to junior high and back. In elementary school, we all went home for lunch. So, and you could buy, which they still do in school, I think, now, you could buy milk. It was like a nickel a week to buy milk. And in the second grade, I was in the basement at Grant grade school. That was Ms. Whitney's class. And milk came in these little bottles. She put it up in the window. It was kind of high up because it was the basement to keep it cold. And then after we had milk time, they'd bring the jars back, the bottles upstairs so that they could be picked up from whichever dairy was supplying the milk. And sometimes it would freeze.

So the milk, the little bottle of milk with that cardboard tab on it, would have this little bit of frozen cream on top, and there would be the hat tab, just like a little hat on top of the bottle. Those were cute. And it almost tasted like popsicles, you know?

Jaap: So, when did you graduate high school?

Johnson: I graduated in 1966 and I think we got a pretty good education back then. Later on, I was going to go for my Masters at Whitworth college in Spokane, you know, and I was already grown and my kids were pretty big already by that time. And when they looked at the transcripts, the counselor who I was talking to said, "My gosh, these are back when grades meant grades." Those were my college transcripts. And I kind of thought it strange that he'd say that, but I guess in the interim where I hadn't gone to school, they kind of dumbed down the grades. And you could work for extra credit and do all kinds of stuff to bring your grades up. But this was an older transcript and I thought it was strange that he said that. Then I did read later that the last grades, graduating classes in the United States that had a really good thorough education was like 1968 and 1969, which is pretty sad. So I just kind of made it.

Jaap: What'd you do after high school? So did you go to college right after high school?

Johnson: I did. I went to Montana Tech, because I didn't have a whole lot of money. I'd been saving my money for quite a while. But I went to Montana Tech, just to do the basics. And I was really lucky because when I went to school, they didn't have student loans or anything like that. There were student loans, but it wasn't in our family to have loans or anything. That was just something that was really foreign. So we would have never even thought about taking out a loan for school, but I could afford to go to Montana Tech because I could stay home with my folks. And I had applied for a scholarship in high school, as a senior. And it was for the secretarial, a $300 scholarship for a secretarial something.

Well, I didn't get the scholarship because I wasn't going to a secretarial school. But one of the ladies that were on the interview team was the office manager at the Montana Bureau of Mines. And so that summer she called me and she said, "Would I like to work?" Because she saw my name on the list. And she said, "Would I like to work for the Bureau while I was going to school?" And I said, "Yes, I'd love it." So that was just a chance thing that happened. And it was really good. Uno Sahenan was the director of the Bureau at the time. And he was a Finn. So he was always really nice to me. And he knew my dad somehow from working or small miners or something like that. So it turned out to be just a real nice work experience. In high school, the counselor said you could take two different tracks. You took a track for going into college, or you took a track toward vocational and that included secretarial stuff. But I took both and I was lucky enough to be able to do that because I thought, well, I'll go to college, but at least if I go through secretarial school, I will have a job, you know, and I can work my way through. So it worked out really well.

[00:46:50]

Jaap: So I found this, this is in 68. Isn't that fun? It's a pageant or something. It talks about you working for the bureau and I thought that was cute.

Johnson: Well, thank you. Working at the bureau was really nice.

Jaap: What did you do for the bureau? Secretarial work?

Johnson: Secretarial work. And a lot of it was working with Dr. King. He was the editor. Because the bureau published their own books. They had them published right there at the college. And I learned an extreme amount of publishing technical bulletins and just general proofreading and stuff. So one good thing is I liked that kind of work and it's kind of followed me throughout my life. The other good thing is, or I guess it's a bad thing in a way, because when I read newspapers and when I read anything I'm picking out all of these errors that they leave in the misspellings and punctuation and stuff like that.

Jaap: You carry your red pen with you?

Johnson: Almost. I restrain myself.

Jaap: That's good. So then you said you had kids before you pursued your master's. So did you get married then afterwards?

Johnson: I met my husband at Montana Tech. It was during Vietnam. So he went through and graduated and then went into the service. And he was a Naval aviator. You have to call them aviators, if you're in the Navy. If you're in the air force, you're pilots, there's a big difference. And so after he went through training and everything, Vietnam was winding down at the time, and he was stationed at Corpus Christi, Texas. And that's where we got married. And I moved to Texas which was a culture shock. Going from cool, dry, cold Montana to hot, humid Texas on the border there. That was a little bit strange, but it was nice.

[00:49:29]

And then we came back to Butte after he was out of the service and Andy went on for his masters and then I went on to work more for the Bureau of Mines.

So then our son was born while we were there and then we went on and moved to Wyoming. I had a daughter and we were in Utah. Then we moved to Spokane and we stayed in Spokane. By that time it was 1980 and mining in the United States was just totally down. But Andy kept busy. He was always a contract miner. He worked independently and he worked contracts for mining companies. So he did that for many years. And then we moved from Spokane. We were there for about 20 some years and we moved back because he took a job with MSC. And then he went back to contract mining. He didn't really care for MSC, but we've been back here for about 20 years.

Jaap: Okay. So you guys weren't here then when Finntown was kind of being . . .

Johnson: Oh, I was.

Jaap: Oh, you were here.

Johnson: Yeah. All the time because . . .

Jaap: So it would have kind of started when . . .

Johnson: It started in McQueen and Meaderville and it just gradually came this way. So my father's first house was at 628 East Broadway. And he sold that when he had to sell. He always kind of waited because we didn't really want to move. Yeah. But anyway, he sold that house and then he purchased the house on Granite Street, 419 East Granite Street which is just above, just a little bit north of the Helsinki Bar. And we lived there for quite a few years, and as the houses were being sold, they were vacated and people could buy the house back from the ACM for a dollar and do whatever they wanted to the house, move it or take whatever they wanted and people would just take what they wanted and leave everything that was there.

And so as kids you could go in and just snoop around and see if there was anything there, and it's amazing that people would leave furniture and everything. Just, just go. We didn't ever take anything because you wouldn't dare do that. As kids, we wouldn't have even thought about it, but it was just kind of fun to go and see what was in the houses. And in fact before I got married, my dad's home, where we lived, a lot of the houses were vacant by that time, because a lot were

apartment buildings and they sold them real quick, real fast, almost before when the ACM was still dealing with people and McQueen and Meaderville. And so there were lots of vacant houses through the years. And anyway my husband, we weren't married at the time, but it was on New Year's Eve and we . . . Let's see how was it?

My brothers were home and that was the first time they were going to be home without a babysitter. They were older yet, but my husband to be at night, Andy and I went to the show. My folks had gone down to places like the Corner Bar and the Broadway Bar and stuff, because they always had huge goings on for New Year's Eve. And my auntie and I took a drive out to Harding Way, and we were just, you know, parked at one of the turns. They have these turn-offs on Harding Way. And we were just looking at the city. At that pit where it was kind of starting and expanding. And I looked and I said, it looks like there's a fire. And we looked and I thought it was my house. So Andy drove as fast as he could there. I was panicked because my brothers were alone and it turned out to be the house, the apartment building right across the street. So the homes would burn. I suppose they could start by themselves or maybe kids would be playing in them and start fires.

Sometime the ACM, they were accused of starting fires. But that happened on a real regular basis. My brothers were fine. It was New Year's Eve. There was lots of snow. And for that whole rest of the winter, there was just this ice like this on Granite Street because of the water, you know, they had put out the fire, the fire station, the fire trucks, and then they developed just these huge ruts that the cars could hardly drive through from where we lived, because it was the very end of Granite where we lived, because at the end of the block was the Moonlight Mine. So Granite didn't extend too much farther than our house.

Jaap: So the house at 419 East Granite, did that also end up being bought up by the Company?

Johnson: Yeah. My dad sold that to the ACM too and moved out onto the flats then at that time. And when my father sold it, I had already been married. So I wasn't home at that time. It was like a year after I left home.

Jaap: Was that hard, even though you weren't living at home at the time, but to know that your family home was gone?

Johnson: I don't think you really think too much about it, you know, back then. The hard thing about it is not going back. Lots of times you can go back and look at your neighborhood, you know, once you've left home and if everybody's moved away and you think, oh, gee, it looked so little or it looked so nice or it looks so derelict, but you can't go back and do that when everything's gone. Because it's all gone. Looking in the old pictures and stuff, you can't even imagine that they're in the picture. It was a whole little city. So that's different.

Jaap: So LuWanna when you were here last, you had mentioned that story. Would you tell that story?

Johnson: Yeah. Well, I don't want to get the Company in trouble or anything like that. I've been thinking about that a lot. Because that was my father's first house, 628 East Broadway. And I

think Annie lived at 609 East Broadway. Anyway, it was across the street and there were three homes. Her place, it was kind of like in a little apartment building. I got the information from the clerk of court on her guardianship, but Annie was this little old lady that if you, she always reminded me of the Wicked Witch of the West in looks because that's how she looked. And she wore these black coats and black hat and stuff like that. She was tall and thin. Everybody thought she was a witch and everybody thought she was really mean. And so as a kid, we were kind of afraid of her, but she was not mean.

Because first of all, once the buildings started being sold and everything, she was strange. Because she didn't really associate with anybody in the neighborhood and she'd go to the store or do whatever she had to do. And she mostly stayed at home and I'd watch her, because we could see her out of the front window. When it snowed, she came out from the bottom of her house and she'd sweep the stairs to the second floor. And as she swept, she just swept this snow down onto the bottom step and I'd watch her and wonder why she did that? Then she'd sweep the porch and then go into the house. And then later on the day she'd come and she'd sweep it, sweep it all off. It was so strange the way she did it. But anyway, that's just an aside.

First where there was trouble, well, she came over to my house and I think she trusted my dad or something. She came to get my dad and she was just, all her clothes were kind of all tussled up out. And her hair was funny and she didn't have a shoe. And she said, there's a man that's after me. So my dad went with her and he went all around the house and looking, and they couldn't find a man and she was fine. And he came home and said that he couldn't find anything. And she said that she was fine. Well, and I don't know how much time elapsed, but the day that I was home by myself and this happened was two men drove up and they had the camel color overcoats on. They were businessmen and they went in and they went up to the second floor, knocked on her door. And she opened the door. She kind of peeked out. And I was watching because I saw them drive up and it would be strange to see somebody drive up in front of her house. And anyway, she started to shut the door really quick and the guy stuck his foot in the door. And they opened the door, pulled her out, dragged her down the stairs, out into the car and they drove away and it couldn't have happened in more than two minutes.

[01:01:54]

So when my dad came home and I just felt like, "Oh, what do I do?" You know? And I think I was probably about 15 at the time, but I didn't know what to do. And it happened so quick. And so I told my father and he put on his hat and went out to find out what happened. And he was gone for a long time. Finally, when he came back, he said that they took her to Warm Springs, the mental hospital. And my sister and I were really concerned because by that time, we had kind of made friends with her. And we were just worried. And my father says that, "Well, you know, it's probably the best thing because they'll take care of her there." And that kind of was the end of it. And then not too long after that, I can't remember when exactly, but the house burned.
So now when I came to see Nichole, I came here because I thought, well, maybe I could find something on Annie.

Her name's Annie Odila. And we were looking and it said there was a Montana Standard article about guardianship. So I did get the paperwork and Emmett Kelly, who was an attorney at that

time applied for guardianship for her because she was named an incompetent. And he sold her home to the ACM. He did whatever he did there and took care of all of the business. And the strange thing is about a year . . . It took quite a while to do that. And then he filed to dissolve the guardianship and it looks like she didn't stay at Warm Springs. I think she was in Butte someplace and we maybe could find it if I researched it a little bit, because it kind of says she was in Butte. And I haven't finished reading all of the paperwork, but it feels bad to me that somebody would take her to Warm Springs, say she's incompetent, sell her house and then dissolve the guardianship. Have no more to do with her, not make sure she's doing well and move her to Butte. And she's no longer incompetent.

That does not sit very good with me, but that's way back, you know, that's lots and lots of years ago. But in the meantime, between the time when she came to get my father to find this man that was trying to get her, somebody shut the water off in her house and she didn't have water anymore. So she came to our house and she'd bring a bucket and get water. The very first time she came and this is where I just fell in love with her. I was home and my brother was a little boy, little baby, you know, in the walker, down below here. And she walked in the door to get the water and he started crying. He was scared to death of her. And she said in this nicest voice, "Oh don't cry. This is Nanna." And he stopped crying and you know, it was just, the voice did not fit her at all. She's just a really nice lady. And so then she'd come like every other day with a bucket to get water and she'd always pay a dime.

[01:06:41]

And my sister and I didn't want to take the dime, but my mother told us we had to, because she says maybe she won't come and get water. And now I'm suspecting that maybe the city shut her water off. Somebody had to shut her water off. And then it was not too much longer . . . she came over quite often . . . it was quite some time where she was getting water, but then it happened that they took her away.

So that's kind of a sad story, but also what Nicole and I were looking at, there was one other story in the newspaper about her being in the hospital. And the address was someplace here in Butte. Somebody else's like, maybe she was staying with somebody or, you know, we were thinking maybe a group home or something. And that was back in 1974. But this selling of the house was way back in '64. So she lived for quite a few years and we didn't see an obituary, but maybe I could find one if I just really looked for it.

Jaap: That's a very powerful story.

Johnson: Yeah, it is. If it's something that they did to somebody just to get the house. She probably would have never sold, but that's kind of a rotten way to do it.

Jaap: Clark, do you have some questions? Have you been typing?

Grant: Could anyone refuse to sell?

Johnson: Yeah. There's some houses left that . . . well, I don't know, eventually if they would have, you'd have to talk to people from Meaderville or McQueen because that's where they would have refused to sell. And they did take all of those neighborhoods. The few houses that are left by Finntown, they just didn't sell their house because they didn't want to sell. And then the pit, they didn't keep expanding the pit. So I don't know what they would've done, but the people from McQueen or Meaderville could tell you that.

Grant: The company didn't stop short of arson but . . .

Johnson: Well, you know, I suppose you could do eminent domain that you have to sell because this is for the good of something else. I don't know.

Grant: To get into Finntown, it would just be Broadway Street or how far north and south did it go?

Johnson: Well, actual Finntown starts at like Granite and where, I think, it's like Arizona, that north, south street and Granite, and it went down to Park Street and you could say Galena, and then it went all the way out until, you know, there's like the 900 block of East Park. If you went out East Park, see Granite stopped at the 400 block and then Broadway, I can't remember where that stopped at. And then Park, Broadway and Park were really busy streets way back then. And you could go to Park, you'd go through Meaderville and by McQueen there and out Woodville Hill. And you could go to the Gardens, you know, that way too, the Columbia Gardens. But after Park and maybe Galena, I would say then it turned to more like east Butte.

When I was growing up, I didn't know there was a difference between east Butte and Finntown. I didn't know that the East Butte people were a little bit different, I think, ethnically than where the Finns were. But there were Finns, you know, and there were other people that were not Finnish that did live in Finntown. So it was kind of a small neighborhood. If you think about it, kind of long and narrow, east Butte. When they had their reunion, you know, and I called about it because I considered Finntown as east Butte, too. But the gal says, "No, nobody from Finntown is really invited." And I felt slighted. I thought, well, we're all from East Butte.

Grant: Why there, do you think? Why did all the Finnish people end up there?

Johnson: I don't know. You know? Why would all the Chinese be in Chinatown? You know, somebody starts and they're living there. And then all of a sudden, other people come from the same area and from the same country. And there, you just naturally go to where the language is, I guess.

Grant: And what about grocery stores?

Johnson: Grocery stores were mainly way back. They were just neighborhood stores, which were neighborhood stores all over town. And then Safeway came in and they had many stores in town. They were all brick and they all looked the same. There was one in Finntown. I think it's the archery store now that is there. And in fact, one time we were at the Safeway parking lot with my dad. We were going to go to the grocery store, I guess. My sister and I were pretty little.

My dad just parked and he jumped out of the car and he left. And we were looking and there was a car on the side of the street, just slowly going down the street, no driver, nothing in it. And so my dad just jumped in the car, drove it back and parked it. So it must've come out of park or the brakes weren't on or something like that. And nobody even knew what he did.

Grant: Do you think the Finnish miners were different than other miners?

Johnson: I don't know. You know, I think they were real hard-working miners. You know, a lot of them I think were contract miners, but I don't know how to answer that very well.
Grant: I have read and heard from oral histories done in the 1980s. A lot of Finnish miners would sink the shafts. And more often than not Finns did that work. I was wondering if they differed in other ways, you know?

Johnson: Yeah. I don't know.

Grant: Did your dad talk about work much?

Johnson: No, not really, but my dad was a miner at heart and he always had mining leases on the side. So during the summers and on his days off and stuff, we'd always be going to stay at wherever you had a mine that they were working at, him and my uncle. They even had a lease at Cable Mine, between Silver Lake and Georgetown Lake, the old Cable Mine. And we spent like most of two summers there. And whenever there was a strike, he would go to Nevada or someplace to work. Because you had to earn money. One time when I was a little bit older, he went to Jeffrey City, Wyoming, that's a uranium mine. And he worked there and we went to visit and I learned never to say, "I never want to be here." I never want to live here because later on, after my husband was through school, the first place we went was Jeffrey City, Wyoming. And it wasn't as bad as I thought, but the wind.

Grant: Did you ever say, I never want to live in Corpus Christi?

Johnson: I never did say that. I never did say that, but I hadn't been to Corpus Christi before, and I wouldn't want to go back, but it was okay at the time. Hot and humid though.

Grant: What was it you think your dad enjoyed about mining?

Johnson: I think he enjoyed everything about it. If people would ask him, he'd just say, "I love it."

Grant: Yeah. When you'd go out on the leases, would you camp?

Johnson: Well, usually there was a cabin. And if there wasn't, my dad and my uncle would build a little cabin. They built one by Vipond Park. But when we were at Cable Mine, they had nice cabins. There were like three cabins there. My dad had one and my uncle and aunt had one and the engineer had one, you know, and it was kind of established already, really, really nice. That was just a fun time for kids. At the Cable Mine, they were mainly bringing out quartz crystals. Their dump was just beautiful quartz crystals. And so my cousin and my sister and I at lunchtime

we would hike over, we could only go there between 10 or at noon or at three, if we wanted to go, because those were the times they took their break. And that same as the mines here, you would go and do all your drilling and put in the dynamite and stuff. And then you come out and you set everything off, you take your break and you stay out of there for a while till all the dust settles and everything, same as they did here, you know, in the mines. But we'd sometimes take my dad and my uncle lunch. And just before lunch, they'd set off their dynamite, then they'd sit, but they'd make us girls, they had this huge . . . What are they called with the big buckets? A tractor with the big buckets. Like a loader, but huge. You can sit in the buckets. So whenever they put off the dynamite, they made us sit in that bucket just in case something happened, rocks would fly or something like that.

So that was kind of fun. And chipmunks they'd let my dad and my uncle feed them. They were just as tame as ever.

Grant: Were they looking for gold?

Johnson: Probably at the Cable Mine.

Grant: Quartz and that.

Johnson: Yeah. And the others were gold, even at Vipond Park. He always had some place where he was working at a lease. But he never became rich and he never found the motherlode of anything, but he loved it.

Grant: As a child, did you have games in the neighborhood?

Johnson: Yeah. All the time, because all the kids played together. And the standard games that you do play, softball or baseball, just getting together games and hide and seek and you know, like kick the can and just all of those kinds of games that kids play in the summertime. Winter time. No, not so much. You'd go ice skating. And they had an ice skating rink that the firemen would come and they put the water out. And I think it's the city that maintained it. There were always brooms laying around and stuff, and the big boys would sweep off the snow. And it was always kind of nice too. The ice was always kind of nice. I don't know why it was. Somebody maintained it. So we'd go ice skating and be frozen.

Grant: How do you think the Berkeley pit has affected Butte long-term?

Johnson: Well, you know, the mining, I forget how many trillion dollars, Andy told me, that Butte has produced and it's enabled scores and scores of families to be provided for throughout the years. The pit, I think, if they would have kept the pumps going and just not let everything flood, that it would have been just so much better and they wouldn't have this problem that's in perpetuity. They'd have another problem, you know, keeping the pumps going and stuff, but it would have been a little bit better for Butte. That's just me looking in, and it's not, I don't have any scientific basis that says it would be. I think if they would've been able to keep going underground, it would have been much better for Butte.

But they probably didn't have enough high ore to keep going underground so you can make a profit. A few years ago they were talking about starting underground on the East Ridge across the highway, but they'd have to go underground. I don't know if they will or not. And that was just one of the fellows I was talking to who was telling us. I think it provided a good living for lots of people. The clean up maybe is something that is just more sad, but they have to work at that too. I wish the pit wasn't there.

Grant: Because then all that would be there.

Johnson: Well, it would be, you know, but also maybe not, if there was not enough of a producing mine, the mine has kept Butte together all these years, you know, and Butte was one of the first towns in the nation, in the west that was just a huge, huge town compared to other places, even like San Francisco. But it was only because of mining. And so now if they didn't have the mine, I don't know what they'd do. They kind of turned into tourism, you know, that's something, but those are things that don't produce anything. And if you don't have something that actually produces something, you can't really keep surviving, I don't think as a town. Maybe with the tourism now.

Grant: What in your mind is sad about the cleanup?

Johnson: I think the cleanup is really good. You know, it's, it's expensive. I just keep thinking if they could have done something better in 1980, instead of shutting off those pumps, if something had been done, then. Things might be a little bit different. There's still going to be cleanup, just like from the smelter. You know, that had to all be cleaned up, but not necessarily the way they had done it.

[01:25:53]

Lots and lots of money has been spent and I'm no expert on it. So I can't really comment, I guess.

Grant: We're not experts either.

Johnson: I'm just surmising. I do know that they've spent a lot of money that probably didn't have to be spent cleaning up like all of the Mill Creek dam and stuff. That part could have been a little bit different, the whole Clark Fork, but it'll be nice once it is cleaned up. I keep thinking, you know, as a kid, we played on the mine dumps, we all found the iron pyrite gold, you know, as a kid, you think it's gold and it doesn't seem to have hurt a lot of the people that grew up. I know that some statistics say that cancer is a little bit more prevalent and stuff, certain types of cancer, but I haven't really seen it in the statistics. When you look at them throughout the whole nation, you know, throughout the whole country. So I don't know if they're playing with statistics or not.

Grant: I think the big one is lead in children. I'm curious to see where the cleanup goes.

Johnson: Well, it's all nice. You know, looking up at the Alice pit and all of that area, when we were growing up, it was just raw mine dumps. And you didn't think anything of it because that's

how it was. And now it's a little bit different. I'd like to see more trees planted, but I guess they can't, they put some kind of cap on it that you don't want the tree roots going down. And that's just somebody telling me that too. So I don't know if that's true.

Grant: I call it the EPA rug. They just kind of pull it over the mound. I just have one more question. I was curious about the connection with Minnesota and Scandinavian people in general.

Johnson: Yeah, well, lots of the Scandinavian people settled, a lot of them in Minnesota, because it was the same kind of climate and countryside as like Finland, Sweden, and Norway. Once they came there, except for the darkness that you have in the Scandinavian countries, it was flat and it was good soil. They had farms and then they had the iron range by Hibbing where there was mining and stuff like that. So they first kind of settled there and then they kind of came over to Butte because there was mining here too. And so both my folks' families were in Minnesota. And that's where they homesteaded. And my mom was in more of a Swedish community because that's where her background is. And my father was in the Finnish community. So you settled where you felt comfortable.

Grant: When do you think he first mined?

Johnson: When he was 16. He came here and . . .

Grant: Oh, he used his brother-in-law's.

Johnson: And that's what he did.

Grant: And he was young.

Johnson: Yeah, just 16. But back then, people were like more mature. I mean, even if you look at pictures of people back then, they're mature looking. If you really look at them and you think, oh, he really is a young person, they still have an air of maturity about them. Whereas now if you look at people 27 years old even, they look like they're really young. And that might be my age showing where they don't really seem like they're mature. I don't know. Yeah. You know, that's kind of a sad thing that I think happened as a nation.

Jaap: Yeah, get a little too cozy and then you can be kind of, you know, I think your dad had to be mature, you know, to work.

Johnson: Yeah. And they went through eighth grade. [Takes phone call.] Sorry. I'm sorry to keep you.

Jaap: No, you're perfectly fine.

Johnson: Anything else?

Jaap: I don't have any more questions. I kind of touched base with everything I wanted to. And I think Clark got through his, so, okay.

Johnson: Sorry. I ran on.

Grant: Oh, that's what we like actually.

Jaap: That's the perfect person.

Johnson: It was just way different, you know, and kids could go in the bar and they used to have these little punch boards where you could punch and the thing would come out the back, a little piece of paper, and it would tell you what you won, if you won something.

Jaap: We had a great story. I think it was Petritz telling us. He saw a woman one time, she was punching and then she went to the restroom and he kind of was headed that direction anyway. And he asked her a question and when she talked, she'd been putting the punches in her mouth, so she didn't have to pay for them. She was hoping she'd win. She had all these little punches just tumbling out her mouth. And then someone else was telling a story. They had an apron and they'd be doing the, like, you know, putting them in their aprons. They just wanted to cash in the winner. They didn't want to have to deal with all this.

Johnson: Yeah. Well, and people would be so nice to you, you know? Everybody was nice. It was a different age, I guess.

Grant: Different world.

Johnson: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Jaap: People aren't as nice now. I don't think people are a little more self [absorbed]. People don't take time to look around and just see what's going on next to them or in front of them.

Grant: Insular.

Johnson: It was different than it is today. So, but thank you.

[END OF RECORDING]