



VERDIGRIS PROJECT

KBMF & BUTTE-SILVER BOW ARCHIVES

MARY McMAHON

The Verdigris Project

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Oral History Transcript of Mary McMahon

Interviewers: Clark Grant & Aubrey Jaap

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Aubrey Jaap: So we're here with Mary McMahon today. It's April 27th, 2018. Mary, would you like to tell me a little bit about growing up?

Mary McMahon: Yes. I'm happy to be here. Thank you for the invitation. And I will tell you about growing up. I was born and raised in Deer Lodge, but I wanna spend a little bit of time talking about my Butte roots. They run very deep. My paternal great and great-great grandfathers had immigrated from Scotland to Nova Scotia, and then my grandfather immigrated from Nova Scotia to Butte. John Frazier - and he came to Butte to join his brother William, who was my Uncle Billy, who I never got to know.

And my grandfather was naturalized in Butte on October 12th in 1898, and his brother had been naturalized four years earlier. Grandpa John met my grandmother, Susan Ponoyer, who had come to Butte from Nevada. She was a wonderful ragtime pianist. She played in many of Butte's silent movie theaters and gave private piano lessons. Grandpa John worked in the mines and they had two sons, Elroy in 1903 and my dad Donald in 1905.

Unfortunately, grandpa was severely injured in the Colorado mine when my dad was about a year and a half old, and passed away a couple of days later, so my grandmother was widowed very young.

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She had become ill shortly thereafter and was unable to take care of the boys, so she ended up giving them up for adoption. My dad was adopted by some family friends, the McFarlands, and they took my dad to a small mountain town near San Diego called Julian, California, which is kind of the apple capital of California, a wonderful little town that I visited in 2011. And it's a great little town, but that's where my dad was raised.

Now, there isn't a whole lot that I know about my grandmother's family from Nevada. She came here to join her sister Libby. My grandfather there had - the story is he was killed in a saloon shootout. And it was either during a political campaign or shortly after he'd been elected to public office. Now unfortunately, there was a fire, a terrible fire, in Carson City, Nevada, where all those records were kept. So there's not a lot there. But the house that my grandmother was born in stands today as a museum. And so there's still some history there.

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My dad always knew that he had been adopted and so after his adoptive parents, the McFarlands, Will and Ella, passed away, he decided to come back to Butte to look for his brother, to see if he could find his brother. He not only found his brother, but he found that his mother was still living. And as I told ya, grandma played a lot of ragtime piano in Butte silent movie theaters. We were told more than once that she played for Charlie Chaplin when he was here during one of his visits to Butte. A number of years ago when I was cleaning out my family home in Deer Lodge, I found the vinyl records grandma had recorded in about 1950. And of course, they were vinyl. So the quality of those has deteriorated, but I found a real treasure in those. I listened to one and I realized how fragile they were and so I got a hold of a fellow here in town and I asked him if he could listen to them and if he could digitize them, which he did. And the quality even digitized isn't great, but that's not his fault. But the real treasure with those is not only having grandma's music, but grandma and the only grandpa I knew then, which was grandma's next husband after my grandfather died - the only grandpa I knew growing up - both spoke on them.

And they addressed each one of us, four of the six kids that had been born to that point in time, and spoke to us. So that's really a real treasure. So I had him duplicate 12 CDs and I gave two of them each to my five siblings for Christmas that year as a family treasure. And not many brides can say their 85 year-old grandmother played ragtime piano at their wedding reception. But I can! And she did. So it was a real treat to have her play. I think that was probably the last time she played publicly.

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And my father and his mother remained very close until her passing in 1974, and then my dad passed away just six months later in 1975, which was very hard.

Jaap: Mary, can I go a little bit further into that?

McMahon: Sure.

Jaap: So, your dad's brother - where did he end up?

McMahon: He ended up in Bremerton, Washington. He was here and married a Butte gal - they later divorced - and actually later in life, she and I became friends, his first wife. And then his second wife and I became very close. But Uncle Elroy went to Seattle. My dad had gone to Seattle at one point too, and I'll talk about that in a bit. But Uncle Elroy worked in the shipyards in Seattle and then married a woman out there and they lived in Bremerton and they retired in Oceanside, California.

Jaap: And then, your dad's mother. Did she stay here?

McMahon: Mmm hmm. She stayed here the whole time.

Jaap: Did she ever look for boys, do you know?

McMahon: That I don't know. Yeah. Well I think - she must have because she and Elroy - I think because of the way adoption records were at that time, she wasn't able to legally pursue finding dad. But she did go - she and Elroy had reconnected by the time my dad had come back to Butte.

Jaap: Oh, interesting.

McMahon: And my mother was a Butte girl. Her maiden name was Kujawa. There are a lot of Kuyawas still in Butte today. She was Isabel Helen Kuyawa and she was born on October 30th, 1914. Her parents were Frank Kujawa, who was born on May 4th, 1879 in Germany. He immigrated to the United States from Bremen, Germany in 1906, landing in Baltimore, which surprised me because I always thought everybody landed in New York. But he landed in Baltimore.

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He was naturalized here in Butte on April 11th of 1919. And he met my grandmother Sophie Henzel in Anaconda. Now, how they met and why she was in Anaconda, we've never been able to figure that out. But they met in Anaconda and they got married. She was born in Austria on April 26th of 1885. And they had a family of five. They had two sons and three daughters. Some of my mom's sisters' family, the Earhart family, still live in Butte in Ramsay. The rest of them are deceased and/or living in California or Idaho. So I still stay in touch with one cousin in California.

My dad and both my grandfathers and great uncle all worked in the Butte mines, and as I said, my grandfather actually died in the Colorado mine in 1906. Kind of a fun note about my mom - she was a feisty little Polish lady, no doubt about it. In 1931, mom participated in the Butte Walkathon. And I don't know if you know much about the Butte Walkathon, but many young people were vying for the cash prize. We're talking about the Great Depression. The cash prize in 1931 was \$1000. That's a lot of money. That's a lot of money today, but in 1931, that was a tremendous cash prize.

They started walking on April 24th, 1931, literally marching seven days a week, 24 hours a day, around a small area of a local ballroom. And I think it may have been the Masonic ballroom. And they did that for 1637 hours, with a brief rest area each hour. Now as I said, they did this for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, until it was down to four people that just wouldn't give up, and mom was one of those four people. They finally succumbed to absolute exhaustion and they agreed to split the \$1000.

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So each of the four people received \$250, which when you take that and divide it by the 1600+ hours they walked, it turned out to be 15 cents an hour.

Jaap: Fifteen cents an hour!

McMahon: And I have a copy of the article from the paper that covered that story and it was just - you know can you imagine young people today doing that for 1600 hours?

Jaap: How many days is that?

McMahon: You know, I didn't figure out the number of days, but when you go from April to July! Yeah from April 24th to July 2nd is how long it lasted.

Jaap: That's incredible.

McMahon: It is incredible!

Jaap: And a little insane!

McMahon: A lot insane! They literally got - and I have to stop and think how this worked out - they got two minutes to leave the floor and go to their resting place. They got an 11 minute rest period, and two minutes to get back walking, every hour. So they got like a 15 minute break every hour during that timeline.

Jaap: Even for sleeping, I mean -

McMahon: They didn't really sleep. It was literally a cat nap if it was anything, you know.

Jaap: Who sponsored this, do you know?

McMahon: The article doesn't say who sponsored it and I didn't think to bring a copy of the article, but I do have it. I got it here a number of years ago.

Jaap: Did she ever say if it was worth it?

McMahon: You know, worth it? \$250 to a poor Polish immigrant family was a lot of money, and to her - mom was 17 years old and she almost got disqualified because of her age. And knowing my mother, she probably lied about her age. I don't know! [laughs]

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So then later after that, and after dad had returned from California, mom and dad met. Dad would tell us the story that he would see mother going - he worked down on South Utah Street somewhere and he would see mother going to mass in the mornings at St. Joe's church. So he pursued that little Irish lady and they fell in love. Work was difficult to find, so dad joined his brother in Seattle working in the naval yards. Once he got settled, he sent for mother and they were married in the rectory of the Catholic church in Seattle because dad wasn't Catholic at the time, so that was as close as they could get to being married in the church.

Later on, my folks returned to Butte and dad worked in the mines until they moved to Deer Lodge in 1941, when my dad was hired by the Milwaukee Railroad. My dad worked through different positions at the Milwaukee for 32 years. He retired from there in 1973 as yardmaster. And that's where the last four of us were born. My oldest sister and brother - my brother Don who is now almost 81 now lives in Coeur D'Alene. My sister Denise Frazier-Gransberry was also born in Butte - in fact they lived right across the street from St. Joe's church. There used to be a big fourplex across the street from there and they lived in that fourplex until they moved to Deer Lodge, I believe.

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And they moved to Deer Lodge and Don was born in '37, Denise in '38 - my folks got married in '36. So Don was born in '37, Denise in '38, my brother Jack in '46. I was born in '48. My sister Gerry - Gerrydette, but we've always called her Gerry - was born in '51, and the youngest brother Ed was born in '53. So mother used to joke that she raised three different families because of the age span, you know, between some of us.

So I attended schools in Deer Lodge. I went to St. Mary's academy in Deer Lodge and attended Immaculate Conception church there from first through eighth grade. I didn't have to go to kindergarten because it was a very large kindergarten class that year - it must have been a baby-boom year, in '48. And so they didn't have room for all of those that would be entering kindergarten. So they tested us. And when they asked me if I could say my ABCs, I asked them if they wanted them frontwards or backwards. And they said, if you can say them backwards, do it. And I did! So it's been kind of a joke because then I taught my grandkids how to say their ABCs backwards. So I went to first grade a year early. And then I went on to high school at Powell County High School in Deer Lodge and graduated in 1966. And my main activities in high school were music and drama, and I also worked part time in local businesses in Deer Lodge.

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After high school, I moved to Butte to attend Butte Business College, which was a precursor to the Vo-Techs. In the fall of 1967, after I'd finished the course that I was taking, I had talked to a gal that I know here (young woman I knew here in Butte) who had come home on leave from being a Vista volunteer on an Indian reservation in Arizona, and gotten some information from, and I decided I was gonna - I wanted to do that. So I applied to Vista and was accepted. And I was a little nervous because first they told me that my training cycle, my six-week training session, was going to be in Harlem in New York. And then about two weeks later, I got a notification saying it had been changed to Atlanta, Georgia, which I think my parents were a little bit relieved of, at that time.

So I went to Atlanta. The night I got there - I went there with one suitcase and a footlocker trunk because basically they told us [that] was all we could bring. So I had a small suitcase in a footlocker trunk. And when I got to the training center, it was locked

for the night. So I drug my footlocker trunk and suitcase about two blocks because I had seen a motel a couple blocks away. And when I woke up the next morning, I found that I had stayed in an all-black motel, in 1967 in Atlanta.

So I spent two weeks living with an inner-city family in Atlanta and then we were sent to rural Georgia to live with a family. And then we went back to Atlanta for the last two weeks of our training, before we were assigned. I was fortunate in that I was assigned to Columbia, South Carolina, where I spent about a year and a half. I was very fortunate to be assigned to work with the juvenile court. And the judge that was in charge of that court was just a wonderful, wonderful man. And my assignment, via him, was to develop a summer program for inner city youth, at-risk youth. And so I went to my sponsor, the Office of Economic Opportunity sponsor, and asked him if there was any funds available that we could use and coordinate with the juvenile court to develop a program for the kids.

And he suggested I talk to my church. And I had gotten involved with a folks group, singing with a folk group at church there. And I got to talking with our pastor there, who also was a Catholic priest way before his time in dealing with equal rights and civil rights. And when he came up with the idea that – knowing that the Catholic church wasn't gonna use their summer camp that summer because it needed some repairs. And the main thing it needed was a camp stove for the mess camp, the mess hall. So I went back to OEO and I asked them if there's any chance that they would pay for the stove, which probably was not a politically correct thing for the gentleman to do at the time, but he committed to it. So they did. So we were able to use it, and we ran three sessions that summer of different age groups. On was of course all boys, then all girls, and then all boys again, for a week at a time. It was a tremendous experience. I was 19.

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So I grew up in a heck of a hurry in my time down there. When I was singing with this folk group at St. Peter's – it was just a group of really talented group of musicians – and it turned out one of the lead guitarists invited us to come to he and his wife's home on Sunday evening after mass for dessert. So we all went over there and we walked in, and in his kitchen was this huge banner, "Butte's my town and I like it." And I said, 'Jim, where are you from?' He said, 'I'm from Butte, Montana.' I said, 'Jim, I'm from Deer Lodge!'

And we just had a great laugh and we still stay in touch today, you know, fifty years later. [He's] just a great guy. And this guy has a brother that's concert pianist and taught at Julliard and has played at the Mother Lode a number of times. So yeah I still stay in touch with Jim Schumacher.

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But there are a couple of things that stick out in my mind from those fifteen months in the South – keeping in mind that racial tensions in the late 60s were very high. One is the night Martin Luther King was assassinated. I was the only white person in a community

center tutoring inner-city high school kids remedial reading, when one of the kids had a radio or a boom box and it announced that Dr. King had just been killed by a white man. And it was a very tense time. The other was a near tragic encounter with the Ku Klux Klan at our summer camp project.

At night, we would make sure all the kids were in their bunks, and then the counselors would all get together. We had one priest and two pre-seminarians or seminarians - because of us using the Diocesan camp, we had to have some of their people on staff, which worked out perfect. And so we would all get together at night after the kids went to bed. And we were just discussing things for the next day and all of the sudden we heard screaming. And we ran to the kids cabin and what had happened was - one of the kids heard somebody come through the door and they figured it was one of us. And they started bantering, just making comments, you know, 'what are you guys doing here?' And nothing - there was no response. It wasn't like, 'Be quiet, go to sleep, tomorrow's another day' kind of thing.

And one boy reached over by his bunk and flipped the light switch on and there was a KKK member with a big bladed knife just above the chest of one of the kids. And literally the kid rolled over and kicked the knife out of the guy's hand. And to my dying day, I'll never forget the sight of those three KKK guys running across the field away from the cabin.

Jaap: That must have been quite a shock, especially growing up in Montana.

McMahon: It was a hell of a shock. It really was. Because, you know, they warned us about the potential for those kind of things, but you don't expect it. You think, that's not gonna happen to me, you know. But it was a frightening thing to have happen, you know.

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One time I was assaulted in my own house in the community that my two white roommates and I were living in. And this young man from our neighborhood - I recognized him - came to the door - and it was during tension times - and asked if he could use our phone and I said 'sure.' And he went into the kitchen, closed the door. I sat down at the table and was playing my guitar. And he came out. I didn't hear him come back out. And he hit me in the head with a stick that he had in his hand and accused me of hitting his sister. And I said, 'I didn't hit your sister.' He said, 'She came home crying saying that the white girl had hit her.' And it turned out the white girl was a little girl named Angela White. A black girl named Angela White had hit her.

Jaap: Oh no.

McMahon: Yeah and so I had nightmares and headaches for weeks. But yeah, it was a very sad time in our history. It really was. But like I said, I had to grow up. The surprising thing for me was when my supervisor had to call my parents because I was under 21, he had to call my parents and tell them what happened. My dad's response,

which I expected to be ‘get on the next plane and come home.’ He said, ‘I hope this doesn’t deter you from finishing your commitment.’ And it didn’t, so I stayed until the end until we got the summer camp project done and the reporting done and everything else that had to be done to go along with the grant that we received to fund it. So, yeah.

[MICROPHONE MOVEMENT]

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So after completion of my Vista commitment, I returned to Deer Lodge. My plan was to join the Peace Corps. And I decided I’d come home for six months and then go back in and go through the Peace Corps training. But I wasn’t home very long and a friend of my dad’s was in the State Legislature and he asked dad if I’d be interested in a job working as a steno in the Senate. I jumped at it. I was always kind of interested in politics and I thought, you know, that would be a great thing to do for a couple of months time, good experience.

However, as life happens sometimes, on my first weekend in Helena, I met a young handsome Carroll College guy, Pat McMahon, so I never joined the Peace Corps. I never went. And then while I was working at the legislature, the lady that was my supervisor – her husband was one of the supervisors at the Fish and Game Department. It’s now Fish, Wildlife & Parks, I believe, but it used to be Montana Department of Fish and Game. And she told him that I had been doing a really good job and they had a position open in the Parks and Rec division, and he came over and offered me a full time job. So I took it. Because I had met Pat after all, so I wasn’t gonna leave Helena right away.

So I took that job and I loved the job. I had two wonderful bosses that I worked with and an awesome supervisor. And I loved the job and I loved the work. But it came to an end when Pat proposed and announced that he had accepted a teaching job in Ramsay, Montana.

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So we got married in Deer Lodge on August 8th, 1970 and set up housekeeping Butte and he commenced his teaching career at Ramsay for two years and they actually made him teaching principal, so he was – the principal had retired so he was doing both jobs at that time. And I went to work in the office at Butte Central through a connection that I had at Butte Business College – somebody referred me. So I went to work there for one year and during – early in our marriage decided we wanted to have our children young and grow up with them. And so I got pregnant and at the end of the school year – right after the end of the school – our first son Kevin was born. And the family fun began.

And that was in ’71. And then in ’73, our second son Tim joined our family. And so at that point, I decided to be a stay at home mom for a while. Kevin had ben sick as an infant a little bit and so it was just a decision that we made that I would just stay at home for a couple of years. Did you have a question?

Jaap: No, continue Mary. You're doing great.

McMahon: I worked at a local bank for a while until Kevin got real sick and had to be in ICU. And then I worked for a local dentist. And then I was hired away from him by a management consultant of an ENT plastic surgeon that was opening a practice here in Butte. Unfortunately for Butte, he only decided to stay a year and returned to his home town in – I think in Iowa – to take over his father's medical practice. His father would call the office about once a week and ask us, 'When are you gonna send my son home to take over my practice so I can retire?' [laughs]

And that went on for a few years, just working those kind of jobs. And then in '78, I applied for and was hired by Anderson Zuhrmuellen Accounting Firm as their receptionist when they first opened their Butte office. And over the years - I worked for them for fourteen years – and over the years I worked various positions, including the practice manager. And eventually, the firm's state director of marketing, which was a position I loved. But the employment agreement came to an end and I resigned when they offered me a transfer to their Helena office. Leaving Butte was not on my or our agenda, nor was it in my heart to leave Butte at that point in time. I didn't want to do it. And so I ended up leaving the firm. I didn't have an accounting degree, so it was a situation where they wanted me to come to Helena. And it was a tough thing to turn down at that time because of the compensation difference. And they thought maybe I could commute, but that wasn't something I was interested in doing at that time either, so.

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So I contacted an acquaintance at what was then the Butte Vo-Tech. And she said, 'Mary I don't ever get requests for interviews for people with your background and your experience, but I'll keep it in mind.' And lo and behold a couple of days later, she called me and had set up an interview for me with a company called MycoTech Corporation. And I don't know if you're familiar with that, but MycoTech doesn't exist – it still exists in Butte, but it's not MycoTech anymore. The company had been sold a couple of times. And MycoTech was a local fungal biotech company that was developing biological insecticides for use in crops. Our scientists went to – they did testing in Arizona and Mexico and Africa, some really far-off places, to test the efficacy of those products.

But my job was as director of regulatory compliance and I went into this just absolutely blind. It was learn it by doing it. And my responsibility was to learn to work with EPA in Washington, D.C., learning how to submit the studies from the development of those products to the EPA in an acceptable format, to get them legally registered for use in crops in the United States and in other countries, and that's what I did.

The company's scientists conducted the studies and I put them in the appropriate format for EPA's review and approval, which resulted in traveling to Washington, D.C. and Arlington, also known as Crystal City, because of all the glass walls and windows, two to three times a year for a few years. And my first submission to EPA was over 8100 pages,

which as I put it together and started accumulating, I thought, ‘Oh my god, this is crazy.’

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But that’s what it took to get the first product approvals. I was later told by EPA that my submissions were the best organized that they had received at that point in time, so I took that as a real compliment because it was a lot of work, a tremendous amount of work.

But then in 2002 it was obvious MycoTech was being sold to venture capitalists in Washington, D.C. that had invested in the company and the four people from Butte that started out at NCAT that had formed MycoTech basically lost control of the company, which was pretty sad for them and for Butte. The regulatory compliance consultant that I worked with offered me a job – I actually had two options when the company was sold. One was to go with the company to Lansing, Michigan – that wasn’t gonna happen. And the other was to work from home for two years and then move to Connecticut to work with this consultant for five years – I had to make a five-year commitment. But in the meantime – and I decided not to take that. And then 9/11 happened. And so the biotech industry went down the tubes to a great extent and his business just died off.

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So it was in the spring of 2000 that I broke the news to my husband and sons that I was going to run for office in Butte. I decided that I was going to run for Butte-Silver Bow Clerk & Recorder and Election Administrator. And much to all of our surprise, I was successful. You know, I had been involved in organizations and stuff but I had never – I had worked on other people’s campaigns and even in high school, I was always rooting for somebody else. But until that point in time...

Jaap: So did you think you would win?

McMahon: [pause] Yes. A lot because of the various experience that I had, but also because of my involvement within the community. And I don’t mean that to sound braggartly, but I did at that point in time. But what I’m most proud of in that employment is having transitioned to an electronic voting system, which was being required. It was a process that in 2000 was literally in its infancy. And so I had to go before the council and beg for money for the equipment to do it – the readers, the tabulators, you know, everything. And I loved working with the public. I loved working with my coworkers and other employees at the courthouse. And I loved working with the election judges because those people that work the elections were so committed. And a lot them had been doing it for years. Some of them are still doing it! One of your volunteers out here at the front desk – she and her husband were judges for me every election.

And another accomplishment was when it became known that our local polling places – and we had them all over town in schools, fire halls, wherever – were not in compliance with ADA, and they were no longer legal. And it was then that I put the plan together to move all of our in-town polling places to the Civic Center. And I know and I respect that

that was a – you know, that I didn't have the blessing of every voter in town. Some people were really unhappy with it because they thought I was taking away their right to vote in their neighborhood precinct. But Montana law has never given us a right to vote in our neighborhood precinct. It gives us a right to vote, period.

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So it was hard. But to this day – and I will always believe – it was a good alternative and it's turned out to be a patriotic, even a positive social event on election days. We would start the day. We'd open the Civic Center polls at 7 o'clock in the morning. People would be lined up. They'd come in but we didn't open any voting until the national anthem had been played – and people sang it. It was just kind of a very patriotic thing to do on election day. So we – it was a humongous effort on a lot of people's part, not just mine. It took a concerted effort of my staff and the crew at the Civic Center to make it all happen, but it was a good one.

I served two terms, the second one of which I was lucky enough to be uncontested. And then in 2008, I realized or decided that I had accomplished what I set out to do as Clerk & Recorder and decided to run for Chief Executive. I ran against four men in the primary and came in second place. However, I finished second in the general election too, losing to the incumbent Chief Executive. But nothing ventured, nothing gained, so no regrets. After I left the courthouse, I commuted to Helena for about a year and a half, working for the Department of Commerce as manager of the Montana Technology and Innovation Partnership.

What it was doing was trying to facilitate and coordinate efforts on technology programs and projects between Montana State University and the University in Missoula, and setting up meetings and setting agendas and working with those folks. But the morning I nearly drove into six cow elk on Boulder hill in a snowstorm, I called my husband and said, 'I hope you're ok with this, but I'm done.' [laughs] And so that's when I resigned and basically retired.

[00:36:15]

But over the years, the things I've enjoyed the most, first and foremost, were watching our two sons grow up, albeit too fast. They were fun, sometimes challenging, as boys will be. I guess girls too, but they did grow up way too fast. Both boys have been in law enforcement for over 20 years. We're very proud of them. They have wonderful wives and we have four grandchildren and feel very lucky that they're all here in Butte.

Our favorite travel was a journey back in '94 to Ireland to my mother-in-law's hometown in Ireland, Carick McCross in County Moneghan. Pat's mother came here – came to New York – as a young 19 year-old to take care of two of her aunts who had left Ireland. And Pat's dad had gone to New York from Anaconda to work during the Depression and they met in New York, got married and ended up in Anaconda. Yeah, so we're very lucky.

Pat retired in 2002 after 32 years in the classroom at Ramsay – what was then West Junior High, Butte High, then East Middle School, and then back at Butte High and he retired out of Butte High School.

[00:37:36]

But I have a lot of other favorite memories of things that I've been involved in in Butte over the years. I served on numerous boards over the years, the United Way. I did score counseling with the SBA with a group of just wonderful gentlemen that had a lot more business experience than I did – just basically coaching young people that were trying to start businesses and keep their businesses afloat. And I don't even know if we still have a score group in Butte today, but they were a wonderful group to work with.

And then I served on the board and as president of Junior Achievement of Butte, which was an organization that worked with high school kids teaching them how to set up their own companies, which they did – they had to manufacture a product. They had to market it; they had to sell it and hopefully at the end of the term had made a profit. So it was a great experience working with those young people. Unfortunately for my kids, they were too young to participate. They were still in grade school. But I still see – in fact, one of the candidates for local district judge was in my JA company, so it's kind of fun to see how far some of them have come.

The silliest thing I probably ever did was serving as president of two boards of directors at the same time, the same year. One was the BLDC board. And that was the year that ASME, or REC now, came into Butte. But it was also the same year that I served as president of Crimestoppers, so it was a crazy, insane year. Great fun, but I was glad to have that year come to an end.

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Other things that I did over the years was participate in community theater. I played the wicked witch of the west in The Wizard of Oz at the Mother Lode Theater in 1998, had more fun than any kid in the theater. There was one little guy that – when I was up in the upper left hand corner of the theater and started to sing – I first let out my cackle that would scare kids, which it did over a lot of years on Halloween – I started singing and this little guy said, 'Mom, get me out of here. She's everywhere!' [laughter]

Also I played – we used to have a community theater group that was led by Bill Smyers, who is a retired tailor here in Butte. And he did some great shows over the years, he really did. We did The Sound of Music as dinner theater at the Country Club. And I played the baroness that got dumped for the nun. I had the lead role in Cactus Flower, which was also dinner theater. And then we did a show called Something for Everyone, and it was a night of Broadway music that we did in the auditorium at Montana Tech. So those were wonderful things to participate in and great fun.

However, my crowning involvement, which is not going to be any surprise to you, is No

Greater Love. Eighteen months ago when eight of us got together and talked about the possibility, just even a vague possibility of putting together a live, on-stage musical production to honor the 168 miners that perished in the Granite Mountain/Speculator Mine fire – it was scarier than hell. We sat there and we kind of tossed it around – as excited as we were, we were also very nervous about it. But we had two critical people at the helm. We had Jerry Sullivan, the president of Granite Mountain Bank. And we had Dr. Gary Funk, who was a music professor in Missoula at the U, but who has also performed and written shows and played all over the world, in Austria, all over the United States, and just is a phenomenal talent.

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And so with those two as our leaders, we decided – we adopted the mantra that failure is not an option, that if we were gonna do it, we were gonna do it and stick to it and make it happen. As the budget grew - Jerry Sullivan and I worked as co-fundraisers – and it got very nerve wracking. Because to raise the kind of money we had to raise for the project was pretty scary. But Butte came through for us.

Jaap: And how much money did you guys have to raise?

McMahon: We initially thought we were going to have to raise \$100,000, but then it grew to \$112 to \$121 to \$135,000. And I had never written a grant, especially an online grant, before that time. So with some help and guidance from a few people, and from Headwaters – and from Barbie Durham, who we just recently lost to cancer – we were able to get those grants done. And we were very fortunate.

What it boiled down to – and we had said from the get-go that is we, by some lark or fluke of the imagination, that if we were able to raise more money than we needed to cover our costs, we would give back to the community.

Jaap: And you guys did.

McMahon: And we did, yes we did. We ultimately raised a little over \$194,000. And we were able to give \$17,000 to the Mining Museum, \$17,000 to the Orphan Girl Children's Theater, and \$17,000 to the Granite Mountain Memorial. And then after our final bills were paid, we had about \$4500 left and we split that among Action, Inc., the Rescue Mission and the Butte Food Bank. So my goal was to – because we had committed to being done by the end of 2017. It was a challenge to get that done, but thanks to Barbie Durham's cooperative effort through her illness – I still don't know how she did it – we were able to close the bank account on December 30th.

Jaap: And then you guys decided – because the play wasn't enough – that you'd make a movie out of it.

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McMahon: We did. And yeah, that was before we had this money leftover. We did. And we had Dick Maney, a local that did the filming of the play – he actually filmed two nights, one dress rehearsal and then opening night. And it was – maybe it was Saturday night. I think it was Saturday night. Dress rehearsal and Saturday night. And then [he] was able to put those films together for a great presentation.

So what we did with that – we ordered 1000 units, packaged them very nicely in a black, nice bubble wrap package – a 2 DVD set of the play and one CD of just the music of the play, with a special booklet just covering all the lyrics of the music and information on the production.

One of the things that we found was people wanted to buy ads in our program for the show at the Mother Lode. And we decided we weren't gonna sell ads. We wanted this to be a commemorative program that people would want to keep, keep it on the coffee table as a discussion point. If someone comes in, 'Oh what's this?' That sort of thing. When it was all over, I had bought one of the prints of the painting that Jerry had commissioned an artist from Ireland to do, the oil painting. And I bought one of the prints. And I took the print, the program from the show, two of the copper coins that we sold, and mine and my husband's tickets from opening night – and I had it all matted and framed in a collage. And it hangs in our living room. And it's a real treasure. That was my treat to me from the effort.

Jaap: That was a really beautiful event. It turned out really lovely.

McMahon: Thank you. Yeah. It did. It did. So you know, I love Butte and its people. I will never regret having returned from South Carolina, or not having joined the Peace Corps. Butte is like no other. And you know we hear that all the time, but it really is.

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Jobs and people come and go, but what we keep in our minds and our hearts is what nobody can erase or take away from us. It's been said – in fact I think it's said up on one of the mines – mile high. We're a mile high and a mile deep and the people are on the level. And I just pray it'll always be that way.

Jaap: Yeah. [pause] So Mary, so in the 70s. I know you didn't leave and didn't wanna leave, but how was that in the early 80s with the mines closing and the economy and the downturn? Was that a struggle for you guys? Did you ever debate – you know, should we stay here?

McMahon: There was no doubt in our mind that we were staying here, no. Absolutely none. Pat's parents were in Anaconda and they were getting older. My mom was still in Deer Lodge and was getting older and was not in good health. But there was no way we were gonna leave Butte. In fact, right after I became the manager of AZ's Butte office was when the announcement was made. And it was scary, you know, because the downturn in the economy and the challenges that laid ahead meant we all had to work not

only harder but smarter. And it was an interesting time. It really was.

But I still see good things on our horizon. And you know our kids have never had any desire to leave. Tim worked in law enforcement in Powell County right out of college just to get some experience, but he couldn't wait to get back to Butte. And I can't imagine either of them working anywhere else. If they decide somewhere down the road in their life that they want to relocate somewhere else, that's their call. It's their life. But the 80s, when that announcement was made, I felt really sorry for Don Peoples because that was a tough time for him to try to turn things around in this community. And Don has always worked very hard for this community.

We'll always have challenges. Butte's a survivor town. It really is. I think we'll continue to see challenges but you know, if this town can continue to pull together and have opportunities for our young people that they'll wanna stay here and that they will stay here, then I think we'll continue to be a survivor town.

Jaap: What do you think about the future? Do you see Butte growing, staying?

McMahon: I think there's – with some of the things that are on the horizon right now with Pat Dudley and Ray Rogers – I always wanna call him Roy Rogers [laughter], a sign of my age – with their project over on East Park Street, I think that is just a phenomenal, phenomenal turn of events that could just be a terrific boost for Butte. As far as population, I don't know. Some of that, we'll just have to wait and see. We're all hopeful for the community and our future and our children's future and our grandchildren's future.

I'm very pleased that one of our granddaughters, when she graduated from Missoula with her teaching degree, came back to Butte to teach. And she's teaching Special Ed here. So you know, to have so many of our young kids want to come back is, I think, is a good sign.

Jaap: Well thank you Mary.

McMahon: Thank you.

Jaap: Clark, do you have anything?

Clark Grant: Yeah I just had a quick question. Talking about youth involvement, or retaining youth in Butte – I'm curious what compelled you to run for office and what would you say to young people to compel them?

McMahon: First of all, I was gonna be faced with unemployment because MycoTech was being sold and I knew I wasn't going to move to Lansing, Michigan or to Connecticut. There had been some issues raised in the community about elections and people were concerned with elections. So I just decided to throw my hat in the ring and see what happened. I really didn't know what would happen. It's an interesting process to

go through. It's not for the faint of heart. I can tell you that.

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But it's – I would encourage every young person that has any interest at all in politics, or in your community, don't be afraid to get involved, whether it's on a local committee [or] whether it's running for the Council of Commissioners. The district that I live in right now – the commissioner Dan Foley is not running this year, and so we will have a new commissioner come next year. And there are, I believe, three people running for that seat right now.

But I think people should not be afraid to do that. And it's not for everybody. It isn't. You have to have an open mind. You have to be a team player. But I would encourage people to give it due consideration.

Grant: If you had won Chief Executive, what plans did you have in mind? Anything in particular?

McMahon: That was ten years ago and you expect me to remember! [laughter] One of the things that I was concerned about at that time was the amount of money that was being spent. I'm proud to say that in the eight years that I was in office, I had underspent my budgets by half a million dollars.

Jaap: Wow.

McMahon: And I wasn't – it wasn't a thing to me to be sure that I spent every dime of my budget by the end of the fiscal year. It wasn't how I functioned. But that was one of the things that concerned me was the money that was being spent. I still have some of those concerns. Would I do it again? Absolutely not. [laughter]

Grant: That's hilarious. [laughter] Well those are my questions.

Jaap: Thank you Mary.

McMahon: Thank you for asking me.

Jaap: Of course.

[END OF RECORDING]