THE VERDIGRIS PROJECT

KBMF & BUTTE-SILVER BOW ARCHIVES

SARA SPARKS

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Oral History Transcript of Sara Sparks

Interviewers: Aubrey Jaap & Clark Grant
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Aubrey Jaap: Ok, it's May 15th, 2020. We're here with Sarah Sparks. Sarah, I would like you to start off and just tell me about how your family ended up in Butte? Did your grandparents come here?

Sara Sparks: My mother's a McLaughlin, and both of her parents, Michael McLaughlin and Katherine Lahey, came in the 20s. My father was adopted and he always thought (and his last name was Godbout), and so he married into an Irish family and they always kidded him about not being Irish because he went by his parents' nationality. And we had our DNA tested and he was 85 percent Irish and 15 percent Scottish.

And I wish he would have been alive to know that. We took a trip to Ireland, my mom and myself, and I couldn't figure out why her suitcase was so heavy. And my father had put in 10 pounds of potatoes. So it had a note that said, "I didn't want to get hungry when you got there."

So anyway, my father was adopted out of Deer Lodge. His adopted family came from Helmville to Butte. On the McLaughlin side, they were masons, McLaughlin masonry. And my mother was the oldest of six children and she was a nurse, a registered nurse, and my father was a boilermaker for the company and was president of the union for a while, the Boilermakers Union here in Butte.

Jaap: When were you born, Sarah?

Sparks: OK, so there were six of us. And I was born June 6, 1956. And it's interesting because my parents bought the house I live in now on June 6, 1949. And so, yes, there were six of us. My brother Mick, he was killed in an accident in the Berkeley pit on July 4th, 1968. My sister Pat lives in Phoenix. My sister Kathy was a special ed teacher for 35 years. She passed away from cancer in 2011. I have a sister, Sandy, that lives here in Butte. Then it was me and then my brother Fred, who lives in Mexico in the winter and at Georgetown at our cabin in the summer.

Jaap: What did you do growing up? Where is your family home?

Sparks: It's on 13th Street up near Walkerville, it's on Missoula Gulch. And as I said, I've lived there all my life. Well, not me. I lived in other places. But when I was transferred back here to Butte in '92, I bought the house and have lived there ever since. And I went to IC, Immaculate Conception Grade School, North Central Junior High, Butte Central High School and Montana Tech. Graduated from Montana Tech in 1981, my goal was to work underground. And fortunately, I was able to be underground. I love being underground, I know some people don't like it, but I love the smell of it. I love the feel of it.

And I'll tell you a funny story of why I learned to wear bibbies underground. When you go underground, you have a battery pack for your light and a resuscitator. There's a number of things you wear underground and they weigh a lot and the belt weighed a lot. And back then I was fairly thin, probably only 113 pounds, a tiny thing. And one time we were collecting rocks and I had all these rocks in my hands. And I could feel that when we went down, I was talking to the miners before we went to look for some specimens and we were just coming back to change a shift on the Kelley, which was a large cage and I could feel my pants coming down.

And I said to one of the guys, take my rocks. And they're like, no, we're not taking your rocks. And my pants fell down. Well, right about then, they all turned to see what the commotion was. No, one of the guys said, "Where's that yacky blond that was with you?" And they all turn around and my pants are falling down. Well, I was so embarrassed. You know, I waited for the second cage because there's two cages on the Kelley. And so I didn't have to see the guys. But when I got up to the dry, they were all waiting there and they were clapping. And I said, "That's why you wear bibbies when you go underground."

Jaap: Oh, that's such a fun story, Sara. So what's your degree? What did you get your degree in at Montana Tech?

Sparks: I got my degree in safety and health. I took a lot of mining classes because of the accident my brother was in in the Berkeley pit. I really did want to go into health and safety for mining. Unfortunately, the mines closed the year I graduated, I think. And so I had to look at what am I going to do? A job came up with the state of Montana, the health department, to look at radon in Butte. Butte has very high levels of radon in certain areas of the community. So I went to work for the state. That job lasted a year. And my boss, Larry Lloyd, said there was a position opening in Superfund, it was a new division, in Helena, and he really wanted me to apply.

And it was funny because when I went for the interview, Larry went with me. They had never hired a woman before in that bureau. And Larry really wanted me to get this job. And so we go on this interview and the man would ask me a question and Larry would answer it. No, I'm not kidding you. This was in 1983. And so I got the job and I moved to Helena, and it was the beginning of Superfund really in the state of Montana. We had not yet looked at a lot of sites around the state.

Now, there was Butte, not Butte, but Silver Bow Creek, Milltown, Anaconda. They were added to the Superfund list in 1983. So the EPA was working on some large sites, but we had not looked at additional sites, smaller sites in the state of Montana. So for the next five years, that's what I did. I traveled throughout the state of Montana. I mean, I went to every small town. It was very interesting. I really got to see Montana and we sampled different sites to determine if there was hazardous waste associated with that site or not.

And so, as I said, I did that for five years and I went to work for the Environmental Protection Agency in Helena. To work also on Superfund sites, and that was July 21st, 1987. I'm getting old.

So then I continued to look at sites throughout the state, and added sites onto the Superfund national list. I did the work on Butte to list it as part of Silver Bow Creek because Butte was not listed. And I think that you can go back and look at the records from the Council of Commissioners, from Don Peoples and from the public, and look at the concern that Butte had at becoming a Superfund site. They did not want it. They felt like if Butte became a Superfund site, it would kill Butte or certainly put a damper on the growth of Butte due to the Superfund listing.

Jaap: So what was it like being the first woman hired in this area for these types of projects, Sarah?

Spark: That's a good question. There was a lot of discrimination. I remember one time I was working for the state of Montana and it was all men and one of the men thought it would be funny to throw a lit firecracker under my desk. And when it exploded, I have kind of bad nerves and I fell backwards and hit my head. And that wasn't the first time they had done stuff.

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However, that was the first time that it hurt physically, really hurt, and I walked out and my boss really thought that I had had enough and that I was going to quit. It was one of the main reasons I went to work for the EPA. I needed to get out of the state environment and the EPA was fairly new and a lot of people going to work for the EPA were coming out of the Peace Corps. So it was both men and women and they had, I think, a better working environment. There was zero policy about discrimination or abuse in the workplace. And so I really enjoyed working for the Environmental Protection Agency because of that. I remember one time, though, I went out, it was a site in Bozeman and it was affecting a woman's property. And she said to me, "Why did they send a little girl to do a man's job?" And it'd be interesting to hear what other people had to say about me. This is how I look at myself. It wasn't that I wasn't afraid sometimes or doubted myself, but I was determined not to show it. People either liked working for me or with me or they didn't like it at all and didn't stay around very much.

A lot of people did, contractors worked for me, and I always believed that I was responsible for the whole team. If you had something to say to somebody that worked for me, come say it to me and I take care of it. You didn't go after my people. I think that over the years I did run into a few engineers that did not appreciate working for or with a woman. I had one engineer, his wife said to me, "I don't want my husband working with a woman." And I said, "Well, then I guess he better go find another job." And so he continued to work with us, and I don't know if she had problems with it. I didn't have a problem with it.

Jaap: So what were some of those first steps, how was the public convinced to buy into Superfund here?

Sparks: It was interesting. The first site we started to work on . . . Let me back up. Based on the amount of contamination coming out of Butte, especially in the storm water, we had to list Butte, we had to address Butte to address Silver Bow Creek and the Clark Fork. If we didn't take care of the problems in Butte, we couldn't do anything else. And so I think that through discussions with the politicians, answering their concerns about how we were going to go forward and

naming Butte Silver Bow a potential responsible party, things started to move forward and we were able to list Butte. Once we listed Butte, where are we going to start? Well, to me, we start at the top of the hill and work down. That just made sense to me. So Walkerville, that was the top and so we decided that we would do a time-critical removal action. Another thing driving that time-critical removal action is the baseball field, the Shervon baseball field, we went up there and took a shovel of dirt and the mercury dripped out of it. Because those were silver mills and they used mercury to amalgamate the silver. And when mercury was spent, they dumped it on the ground. And that was a baseball field.

I played on that baseball field when I was a kid. In fact, I can honestly say that we had mercury that we would play with and shine up dimes. And I can remember one time we were rolling it around on my mother's coffee table. She didn't appreciate it too much. So anyways, so we decided that we would start that time-critical removal action. We also had what we thought was a pretty good repository, and that was the Alice Pit. So we put together the legal work, the work plans. It takes months to do that. And it was like the day before we started work on the time-critical removal action, we were told by a mining company that bought the Alice that they were going to use that for mining and we could not use it for a repository.

People always say to me, you know, years later, "Why didn't you just use the Alice as a repository? Why couldn't you use your head?" You know, I'm like, yeah, well, we did think about that. It just didn't work out. And so that's why where the baseball field was, the Sherman baseball field is now a repository. We had to have someplace to put the material. So we built a repository in that area. But it was interesting because we had the public meetings about doing the removals.

Now, here's the thing about Superfund that I think a lot of people didn't understand early on, and that was when you go in and you tell a community or you tell parents that their child's health is being threatened. They're not really excited about you coming in and tell them that. Their first reaction is being very angry because their child's health is in danger. So we had a couple meetings up in Walkerville, and you have to remember that I knew a lot of people in Walkerville because I grew up right on the edge of Walkerville. I ran around with those kids. They knew who I was. I wasn't somebody from Denver or Helena. I was from Butte. And I'm in there telling them it's unsafe and we have to do this work.

They were not happy about it at all. What we did do is we found a couple nurses that lived up there that had credibility with the public and had them help us with the communications as we moved forward and people believe them. And so some of that fear went away, some of that anger went away. People started to see what the reclamation looked like. They liked the reclamation. They liked what it was doing for their neighborhood. Oh, we were putting fences around the areas we were reclaiming and we were using chain link fence and one day I come to work and somebody had stolen all of the chain link. And so we're having negotiations with Arco. And the Arco lawyer told me that he believed everybody over the age of six in Walkerville and Centerville owned wire cutters and they carried them in their back pocket.

So anyway, and you have seen over the years how, the participation from the community has developed in Superfund. One of the things that probably at the end of my career bothered me is a

number of people came forward about Superfund and how awful it was. And I can assure you they were not sitting in meetings for 25 years. They may have come out in the 26th year or something, but they weren't with us the whole time. And you listen to some of those people and they'll tell you how involved they were; they were not. We could not get people to come to meetings. My son used to come with me because I made him. So there'd be somebody from the public at a public meeting.

Jaap: How old was your son when he was going to these meetings?

Sparks: Oh, junior high, high school. Yeah. And so we had poor participation. And part of that was how long that Superfund spread out, the time frame. But the one thing I can tell you is we did a considerable amount of work each year in Butte. Millions of dollars. And many people worked for and with Superfund each year in Butte for 30 years with those time-critical removal actions, not being able to get a consent decree. Doing the time-critical removal actions. Just imagine if we waited until we got a consent decree and we got the consent decree this summer and we hadn't done any work yet. So much of Butte, much of the reclamation is completed.

Jaap: There's been a ton of work. It's amazing to really think about . . . And you don't realize it. We've had other people say it is so slow moving and that's the hard part. You don't you don't see the change. It's so slow.

Sparks: That's why we did the movie "Worth the Wait" that came out in 2015. And I've always felt bad that PBS won't show that, because I think that it really does give a good overview of what's happened in the Upper Clark Fork River. What does a billion dollars worth of reclamation look like? Well, watch the movie. You'll see. And I think that Arco is now saying it's closer to 1.5 billion dollars. And let me assure you, I made decisions every day that were . . . 60,000 dollar decisions were nothing. Million-dollar decisions were made all the time. And I remember my boss, one of my bosses once said to me, I was explaining something to him about a time-critical. And he said, "Sarah, could you just come in one time and not talk about millions of dollars and millions of cubic yards of material, just once." It's just the fact that we were talking about so large of an area and so much contamination.

Jaap: Do you think being from Butte and Walkerville gave you more credibility with the public here than if someone from Denver had just popped in? Or do you think it also made it harder?

Sparks: No, I think it did give me credibility. I always had my telephone number in the phone book. People would call me. People still call me and I say I'm retired. I don't know. "You know how to get things done, Sarah. You know what the answer is." One of the biggest questions I still get is, is it safe to live in Butte? Isn't that sad that we have not put together a good program in Butte to show that it's safe to live in Butte And it is safe to live in Butte. And that's what I tell people. I say I live in Butte, my son lives in Butte, my grandchildren live in Butte. Do you think I would live here or let my grandchildren live here if it wasn't safe? That bothers me. That really, really. And it always has bothered me.

Jaap: That is bothersome. It is hard, though, because then you have these studies come out that, you know, like there was a recent meconium study that Dennis . . . It just creates fear.

Sparks: It does, and it was totally wrong. And the newspaper should never have printed it. That's the problem with . . . the press needs to take more responsibility for their work. Do not put out . . . even my son called me and he's like, "Mother, is this study true? I have two little girls, a baby." And I'm like, no, it's not. And I'm ashamed of Montana Tech. And I worked with them for years on different projects. I'm ashamed that they allow a master's thesis to come out so incorrect.

Jaap: Yeah, it's really damaging. It's damaging to our community.

Sparks: Yes, it is. And I have told people before from the public and I've gotten into some trouble in the past when I was working, that I did not appreciate them using fear to get what they want. To tell someone, 40 percent of the reclaimed areas are going to fail. And unfortunately, one time I did say to a person from the public that, I said, "You're a goddamn liar." I don't recommend that to anybody. I just had had it. And that's why I'm not quite sure it's good to have somebody stay on a site forever. However, I can tell you that even during my tenure, we did some of those studies three times that they're doing now. Again, that's a waste of money. The results were always the same. So. There were times that I lost my patience. Yeah, and I'm not proud of it, but it is what it is.

Jaap: Yeah, it's hard when you work really hard and yeah. Can you tell me a little bit about negotiations, can you tell about how that worked?

Sparks: Being in that type of negotiations? When we started in the early 80s, it was lawyer driven. 28:47 And they were looking at the laws which were yet to be well defined for mining sites, and I could go into a lot. It's just confusing. So we would spend a long time in negotiations. We were arguing over if we should use the word, "a" or "the". The lawyers were . . . I mean, I just lost it, I am like, "Pick a word. We're going with it."

Jaap: How many thousands of dollars are being spent.

Sparks: Think about it, because at that time, you would have many lawyers sitting around the table, a few technical people like myself, those lawyers who are making hundreds of dollars an hour. And we were not moving forward at all. It was just very, very difficult. Couple things changed. The Supreme Court ruled on some mining issues. Superfund was getting to be a little older. We had a little more knowledge about how to get things going. And Arco brought in some really good technical people that understood that we weren't moving forward because of legal issues. It always amazes me that for a long period of time, the people making many of the decisions were all women. Sandy Stash, Robin Bullock and me, and I'm only talking about Butte, I'm not talking about, you know, because Anaconda, Charlie Coleman was the project manager there. The Berkeley Pit was Russ Borba. But it always amazed me that much of the decisions made on cleaning up Butte were based on, and I don't say that because men would have done a better or worse job, it just amazed me that those three positions could be held by women.

And I'll tell you, one of the things that I believe is that the lead abatement program came about because women were making that decision. They have children. They understand lead is lead. And it's the only place in the country, well, now Anaconda has it, but you have to remember, in

1994, we put together the Lead Abatement program. It was the only site in the country that had that. And to this day. And I could be wrong about this now, but up until I retired, Butte was the only place that had a lead abatement program that looked at all types of lead. Because lead is lead and children are affected by it.

So if you don't address all lead types, you can't tell a parent that their house is safe. And it never made sense to me. Thank God I'm retired. It never made sense to me that the agency would not look at lead paint on the outside of houses or buildings. They'd spend 30,000 dollars in some places to clean up the yard and leave the lead-based paint on the house. OK, weathering over the years the lead-based paint gets in the yard, you use a lawnmower, you throw it all over the yard, you come back in five or 10 years, you sample and guess what? You have lead in the soils. And it's like, "Well, how did that happen?" And I understand that the law, the Superfund law said that we would not address lead-based paint. What I said to them in Washington, D.C., is I'm not addressing lead-based paint, I'm protecting the remedy. That's what I was doing, is protecting. And when I say "I", I shouldn't say "I", we were protecting the remedy and that made sense to Arco. And so that's why they would fund something like that.

Jaap: So I'm sorry, I'm jumping all over the place, so the current consent decree, is it nice to kind of see this all come to a . . .?

Sparks: It is. We signed the record of decision on September 30th, 2006, and you may wonder why I remember that date so well, but my mother was dying of cancer and she was very close to dying. And they lived in Arizona. And I was trying to get to Arizona to be with my mother, but we needed to get that ROD out for the public. And so I stayed. It's one of the biggest mistakes I ever made in my life. We could have waited a whole nother year. It didn't matter. You know, it seemed like at the time it mattered. It didn't matter. So we signed that record of decision. And I think it was in 2009, the state walked away from the negotiation tables on trying to get the consent decree in place, but we had that record of decision and we knew all this work had to be done.

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And so I said, let's do some more time-critical removal actions. Let's get as much of that ROD done as possible. Why should we let the people of Butte suffer because people won't stay at the negotiation table? And so we did. We started them again and did most of the work. I am really glad that they are getting that consent decree. They worked hard. I think they're getting a good package.

You know, most people, and I'll just say this from being from Butte, you know, I know Restore the Creek and oh my God, we've got to put Silver Bow Creek back. What I've asked my whole career is that we don't have any water. I don't mind building a creek, if we had water, but we don't have any water. That's the first problem. The second problem is, well, I mean, you got to use some common sense. And so the second problem is, oh, well, we'll just build a cement channel. Does anybody understand how hot water gets in a cement channel in the middle of the summer in Butte, Montana? Disgusting. Yeah, and we're going to spend fifty million dollars so some person can say, "I won"? Yeah, and I'm saying it was no different than removing the

Parrott Tailings. I don't know what the state is going to end up spending, their cost estimates, they were wrong and they had to add additional money, you know what they're going to find out? The groundwater is contaminated and we're going to have to treat it forever. Could you imagine what we could have done with that 50 million dollars in Butte? I don't know.

Sometimes . . . This is how I look at it, if there was a health problem or concern to wildlife, of course, we were going to address the problem. What did the EPA care? We needed to make it safe. We weren't spending the money, ARCO was spending the money. Of course, we would make them spend the money, if it made sense and we could go to court and prove it. It's really easy when you don't have to go to court and prove something, when you just demand and you continue to scream until you get what you want. It's another thing to have to face a federal judge and say, here is the scientific fact associated with this project. We can prove it and move on.

Jaap: I'm really thankful. Just recently, we've had these scientists come and talk about this channel that needs needs put in because you'd really hate to see all the work that was done on that consent decree get held up over what sounds like a fountain to me, kind of, you know.

Sparks: Well, one of the things that my son is always saying, "Mother, write a letter, go testify, tell him the truth." And I'm like, no, I put my time in. There's really good people working on this. I believe that they can do the job they need to do to get the consent decree passed, and I believe they will. And my problem with me now is when I worked for the government, my mouth was curbed based on the fact that I needed a job to pay my bills. I don't need that job anymore. And I'm afraid of what I would say. And that's just the truth. I mean, I'm not going to dress it up any other way. That's one of my biggest fears, is I would say something inappropriate.

Jaap: I don't believe that. Anyone you'd like these directed at?

Sparks: And here's the interesting thing. Do you remember Bernie Harrington and he was the mayor of Walkerville? Bernie and I had this . . . He would tell everybody how much he disliked me and he didn't like working with me. He was probably red. He was more knowledgeable about superfund than anybody that wasn't getting paid to work in superfund. He read every report. We would have the wrong name of a street on a map. He would find it. And so we had a number of run-ins and, oh, one time, though, I had just come back from the hospital after surgery for cancer. I heard something outside, and so I got up and there's Bernie out pacing in front of the gate, and so I opened the door and I said, "Is something wrong, Bernie? Would you like to come in?"

And he said, "No, I just want to make sure you were OK." And I said, "Yeah, I'm OK, Bernie." He just gets in his car and drives off. So people you know, there are people like Bernie Harrington that didn't get as much credit as they should have for making sure that federal and state governments and the local government took the necessary steps to make sure that Superfund would work for our communities. Something might look great on paper, but it won't work for the community.

Jaap: Clark, do you have a few questions that you'd like to ask?

Clark Grant: I made notes as you were going there. Stuff I wanted to follow up on, why did the state walk away from the negotiations in that 2007, 2009 period?

Sparks: Yeah, and you guys will keep this. This won't go anywhere before the consent decree is signed, right? Before the state signs it. OK, before the state signs it. I'm trying to think about it. There were a couple of reasons. The Parrott tailings, they believe the tailings should have been removed and it wasn't addressed under the ROD. The reason they walked away from the table is what was in or out of the ROD. Water quality standards for Silver Bow Creek, they were concerned about that. I think those were the two main issues. Well, and then, of course, not only the Parrott tailings, but oh, what do we call them? The Diggings East.

Grant: Blacktail?

Sparks: No, not Blacktail. No, the berm was alright. North side. Yeah, they were concerned about those so. Of course, they had other things going on, like Milltown, other sites where they were doing negotiations too. But yeah, so they were they didn't want to negotiate until we reconsidered some of those sites. As you know, on the Parrott Tailings, we did not reconsider that. The State Natural Resources Damage Program took that over and are completing it now.

Grant: Using restoration dollars?

[00:44:47]

Sparks: Correct. Well, and the deal with it is, that 50 million dollars that was there is what Arco paid for the Parrott Tailings. So they just use the money that was given to them for the Parrott Tailings. So they didn't have to use it on the Parrott Tailings, but then they decided that that's what they were going to do.

Grant: In those final meetings before the state stopped coming back, what was it like? You know, people pounding the table or?

Sparks: No, I don't think that people were pounding the table. It was just an agreement to disagree. But they didn't believe that EPA was going in a way that was good for the state or for Butte.

Grant: Do you think the stigma of Superfund has done more harm than good? Kind of like the lockdown for the coronavirus?

Sparks: No, not at all. I am just amazed at what we have done in Butte from rebuilding the stormwater system in Butte, the parks, the trails. Most people wouldn't even know it's a Superfund site if it wasn't for the mining that's going on now compared to what it was. I think that it's . . . everything from raising the first tea we had for the archives to raising money came from Arco that five hundred dollars to move forward. Most people would have no idea how much Superfund has affected this community for the good. I think what the stigma is, is not Superfund. It is the outrageous stories that are placed on the front page of the Montana Standard, I don't even read it anymore, I don't get it anymore. And there was a woman reporter that was

here recently in the last few years who did . . . her stories were so wrong and so inflammatory that they hurt our community. And I can't understand, why KXLF or PBS or the city of Butte does not take some of the information that we put out and publicize that. And we would not have that, I don't believe that we would be affected at all by Superfund and the stigmatism associated with the Superfund site.

Jaap: Yeah, I think my opinion is I think Butte Silver Bow, anyway, has really let other people tell the story of the community and then say, why do people think this? Also you have to grab a little and you have to tell people. And it's also hard, I think, when you have people in the media outlets here who are members of like Restore Our Creek, and they're the ones generating the media. It's really hard to only have one narrative being shot out in your paper and radio stations.

Sparks: Right. Exactly. And to have reporters who wouldn't even talk to the people that know the truth. That they would find people that would tell them what they wanted to hear, and that was sad for me, that was really sad. Yeah.

[00:48:54]

Grant: Another one on my list here. Do you think there are detectable human health risks from the current mine?

Sparks: Well. Besides mining accidents, I would say that we did sample the air for 30 years . . .

Grant: In the Greely?

Sparks: Yeah, in that area, you know, we never found heavy metals. Now I can't tell you about silica, but for the heavy metals. I mean, and people are always afraid, like they'll see fog coming off of the Berkeley and they'll like, oh my God, what kind of metals are in the fog? And I'm like, "They're heavy metals. They're called that for a reason. Think about it." And they're like, "Oh." So my concern was the dust. Yeah. And I can tell you that when we did . . . we had so much data that we were collecting every day, every week, every month for 30 years that we just ruled it out. However, when we were doing the Granite Mountain and the repository at the Granite Mountain, and we also said that we were going to leave over 100 acres unreclaimed up there because that was our trade off for taking the mine waste dumps and the historic significance of them in Butte, a major concern of people that lived here, that if we reclaimed every dump in Butte, where would our history be?

So we left the hundred acres that we made a deal on that. So we did a year long study, well, it actually only ended up being nine months because we never saw one hint of heavy metals. We had three air monitoring stations up there. Nothing, nothing. And the only time I can remember even seeing a hit on an air monitoring station is when we had one located right on the road itself when we were doing the work at LAO and taking the material up to Timber Butte. And so somebody put one right on the road and we did pick up one hit of something. I can't remember which heavy metal, but there was a hit. And so if you were laying on the road when the truck went by, you might have got an exposure.

Jaap: Pretty safe.

Grant: Well, when you drive past the concentrator now, I mean, at least, I can taste something in the air. You know, it tastes like metal. I mean, when I did a tour of the concentrator, went inside, you know, I got the sense of what that Moly smells like in the flotation units. And when I go to Three Bears or something, you know, and I drive on Continental there, I taste it.

Sparks: Did you taste like . . . are you talking about the reagents?

Grant: I don't know what it is.

Sparks: I notice sometimes I smell the reagents or something. The reagents associate it with the concentrator. I'm not and I couldn't definitely tell you that. But if you think about when you're in the concentrator and you can smell those reagents, it possibly could be that. But I think that it's good to question MRI. If you have a question like that. What is really important is not let people get poor information out there is to actually get a hold of somebody and say, I smelled this, why am I smelling this and explain this to me. Yeah. So that'd be a good question for you to go to . . . what's their environmental person, Mark Thompson. Have you tried to talk to Mark about that?

Grant: Yeah, we've talked.

Sparks: Does he tell you it's the reagents?

Grant: He didn't. He's like, "Well, we'll have to see exactly what you're talking about," you know, so.

Jaap: Oh, you can smell something like if I rode my bike to work, I could smell it. Right at that spot on Continental.

Grant: Well, and then I hear Ed Banderob every week at the council meeting, you know, like maybe Ed's right, you know. Oh, I wish your facial expression could be recorded in the audio.

Jaap: We really need to start filming these.

Grant: Yeah, well, I had another question here. I was curious if you could talk more about your love of the underground. Why do you like it so much underground?

Sparks: Have you ever been underground?

Grant: Just once with Larry Hoffman.

Sparks: Did you like it?

Grant: I did, yeah.

Sparks: I don't get claustrophobic. I love the smell of dirt. It's one of the reasons I'm a gardener. One of my most favorite things in the spring is to get out and start moving the dirt and rototiller in the garden and stuff. Just that smell, that clean smell. And the colors. I've always been interested in the temperature differences as you went to different areas where the groundwater might be up to 115 degrees, how hot it was, just the appreciation of what it took to build the underground. I mean, absolutely amazing. You know, being on the boat in the Berkeley pit really reminded me of floating the Grand Canyon, and that's what it reminded me of because of the colors on the sun hitting the sides. And that's what it reminded me of. So that's what I can tell you about the underground. Yeah.

Grant: And what about the cages? Was it exhilarating to ride them?

Sparks: Now, I mean, it's dark. You know, it's like where are you getting on? I mean, not bright light, but then get off on the dry. And it was really nice because, you know, we used the Kelley, so I can't tell you about the other shafts in Butte. And like, of course, the Kelley was very nice compared, I mean, for mining. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Although I'll tell you. So when they were closing down the Syndicate the last time, they let us be the last to go through it. And so we went from the Syndicate up to the Moose up by the Granite Mountain Memorial. And so we stopped like at the Lex and you could look up the tunnel and you could see a little bit of light at the top of the Lex. And now the underground areas that I was in were much more developed than the Syndicate.

And they were mining silver out of the Syndicate. So they had this ladder, this wooden ladder going up, this very small, the hole wasn't that big that they had built. And then there were drifts on either side that you could climb off of. And they weren't very big. And getting off that ladder over to that drift, and then they turned off the lights completely. I'm telling you, it doesn't take you . . . you know, you hear people talk about vertigo. It happens pretty quickly, or at least it did to me, it was like not knowing where you're at because that is total darkness. So I can tell you that I'm not quite sure I might have the same impression if I would have been in a situation where all the lights went off and I had to crawl out of somewhere or something I might not be talking about it like I'm talking about it right now.

Grant: Might not be such a fond memory.

Sparks: Right, exactly.

Grant: Did you ever see the pump station?

Sparks: Yeah, at the 3900 level. Amazing. Amazing. Yeah it was all cement. It was very different. Big lights. The pumps were massive. You got to remember they were moving like 4000 gallons per minute. You would not know you were underground when you were at the 3900 at the pump station. No.

Grant: How was the water coming into that room, just in troughs or do you recall?

Sparks: You know, there was and if you look at the photos, there are large pipes coming in everywhere and, you know. So I can't answer that question for you, but if you're underground and you can kind of see it, I think, at the Orphan Girl. Hmm. I think there's some places where you can actually see how the groundwater is weeping it and then it goes into the troughs along and they start to move it. And I don't know if they have to do any pumping there. But so you imagine when you have just thousands of miles and troughs and then you would have some type of system to keep moving that water.

Grant: Having seen those pumps, how did you feel when you heard they were flooded?

Sparks: It was a poor decision, as far as I'm concerned, we certainly could have looked at different ways of handling the groundwater under Superfund, if it hadn't happened. And I think that people that made that decision and you'll hear me say that on some other tape it, they would reconsider doing it today. I don't think they would have shut those pumps off.

Grant: We've talked to a number of people who said that either they were the guy or they know the guy who turned them off.

Sparks: Well, there was a guy here in Butte that did it.

Grant: Who was the guy?

Sparks: You know, I don't know.

Jaap: The elusive guy.

Grant: Who is this guy? Well, maybe a bit more to the point, who made the call?

Sparks: That came out of Arco. And certainly not, I don't believe it came out of Butte. Yeah, those decisions weren't made in Butte. And so I don't know who that person was. But I do think that they would have reconsidered. You have to remember that, I think the lawyers thought Superfund was new. They were just listing all these sites that they were going to get out of it, that they were going to be able to walk from it and that they weren't going to pay. Pumping that water and treating it was a lot of money.

And you have to remember that they were using that water in the operations and the operations were closed down. So where were you going to send that water? You had to treat it before you could discharge it. I mean, there were a lot of things about the whole situation, so I think they thought they thought they were going to be able to walk away from the whole responsibility of it. And it's really interesting. I mean, I listen to different people talk about things like the Berkeley. How much would the Berkeley fill up? A lot of people felt like that it would hit an equilibrium and it would quit filling up. Now, I'm not a hydrogeologist. So I couldn't explain any of that to you, but there was some real interesting studies done on the Berkeley and looks like they didn't pan out too well, but, you know, and I always say that, especially right now with people talking about models, garbage in, garbage out, you think that it might be good data, you're hoping it's

good data and you find out it wasn't. So that's how models work. Sometimes they're right, a lot of times they're wrong.

Grant: You were talking earlier about these million-dollar decisions and moving, you know, hundreds of thousands, if not millions of yards all the time, I was just curious if the scale of the cleanup gave you some kind of better insight into the scale of the industrial operations here. Did you develop a deeper appreciation for all the work that was done here having to clean up the mess it left?

Sparks: Oh, that's a good question. Because it took us so long to do so much work that the magnitude of it, the first time we put together slides, before and after slides, I had forgotten we had even done that kind of work. I'm like, oh, yeah, that's what that looked like. So I think that even for me that was lost on me for the fact that it took so long to do it. Yeah, that's what I'd say about that. I understand why people can't grasp it, because I couldn't either.

Grant: Did it seem insurmountable?

Sparks: I don't think I ever thought it was. It's amazing what you can do with a D11. You know, we had a couple options. Either we were going to clean it up or we push everything into the Berkeley, buy it out and push everything into the Berkeley and call it good. And, you know, we tried that with Mill Creek. And are you guys familiar with Mill Creek?

Jaap: Tell us about it.

Sparks: It's a small community outside of Anaconda, and we bought it out. EPA bought it out. And this was in the 80s, and I don't remember how many houses that were associated with that. It did not go well. It just did not. People first didn't want to be bought out, and then second, somebody'd get a house and instead of having . . . they'd buy a house and instead of buying a house with gas, they'd buy a house with electrical heating. So they wanted to be paid the difference in their power bills. There was so much that came with that that you learn pretty quickly. It's not a good idea to buy out a community, let alone a whole city. So pushing it into the Berkeley was not an option. OK, so I'm kidding, you know. You just start one dump at a time, one dump at a time and taking care of it, and pretty soon, you know, certain areas. Now, I grew up on Missoula Gulch, so three sides of me were waste dumps.

And it was amazing. We didn't really get to that work until like 97, 98 is when we started doing that work. It was absolutely amazing how nice my neighborhood became. I was just like, wow, this is beautiful. And today, everyday, there's a herd of deer now, 13 of them. And I think I told you last year, the moose. So my garage is not connected to my house. And so I have the back door and then I have a little shed and then probably 30 feet, 25 feet to the garage. And I would come out and I'd stick my head around that shed to see if the moose was there. And if it wasn't close, then I'd run to the garage, get in my car. And last year we had a bear. A number of the neighbors would come around the corner or open up the door and the bear would be there. Last month, there was an owl on the telephone post, huge owl. And there's a red hawk. Now you got to remember, we had nothing. We had nothing. They were great for we had motorcycles when we were kids and they were great for riding motorcycles. That's it. Not now. So the impact to

me, you know, because I remember what it was like, is huge. My granddaughters are going to think it was always like that. I don't know if that answered your question.

Grant: What about Arco, the purse strings for all of this? Did you ever have any sympathy for them? They didn't know what they were getting into buying this place, right?

Sparks: They didn't. I always acknowledged that. However, the law is the law. And I've got to tell you, I don't remember a time, and there probably was, but like the trail system there. You think, oh, it's not that much to build a trail. But first, before you ever begin to build a trail, you have to convert a railroad bed to a trail system. You have to look at every piece of property that would have gone to the adjacent property owners, turn that into a trail system. What do you think that costs? Think million dollars? What I'm saying is you'd ask for things. And you'd think, well, it's not that much money, but then you start to look at everything that you have to do to get to that point, you're like, wow, that's a lot of money.

Jaap: People are already walking on it anyway. Yeah, I just read a lot about this yesterday, actually. I was just doing a little newspaper searching and was reading about the trails and the argument of do you take out all the ties and then clean it or do you . . . and then that little company that had the little touristy . . .

[01:10:20]

Sparks: I think what happened there is when the little old lady hit it on Excelsior Street. That was the end of the little train, so. It would have been neat to have kept some type of rail system in place, but the liability is just too great. You just can't do it. When we were doing the work on the other railroad beds with Burlington Northern, they had a machine that you could ride in. Did you read about that?

Jaap: I didn't read about that.

Sparks: What was it called? See, I'm getting old. And it took up all the contamination between the ties and the railroad bed. And it would go out like three feet and dig it all up. So it was so quick to remediate all of the railroad beds. And then you just go back and it had cars where the contaminated material would go into the cars and then another car would come by and refill it with all of the ballast. And so, I mean something that would have taken hand digging or tearing out all of the rails, which would have meant shutting down rails to Butte. And you couldn't do that. We could do in days and so, yeah, that was really interesting working on those, but, yeah, I think that what we did with the rail system, turning it to trails, I think it's going to really benefit Butte for a long, long time.

Jaap: It's great.

Grant: Along those lines of public space, I've often wondered and I wanted to ask you if sites that are fenced like, say, in Walkerville, the nob I know, you know, portion of it is accessible from a certain entry point. Can we ever take the fences out, you know, these public spaces?

Sparks: I do know that the city of Walkerville won't do that because here's the problem: The four wheelers. And it's such a shame. But I call myself the Wicked Witch of the West Missoula Gulch because for a long time after we started doing the work, the motorcycles and stuff. But the second I see a motorcycle, I'm out there and I'll track them down with my car. And I'll go right to their parents and say that, you know, you're going to have to take care of this if they do the damage. I never have four wheelers around my house, but it was a real major concern in some of the areas. So that's why you see the fences. They were supposed to build an exercise trail inside the fence on the repository, going up to the knob, which I don't know if Walkerville has used the money for something else or if that will ever happen.

Grant: Yeah, I see benches out in the grass, you know, and I was like, should I walk out there or not?

Sparks: You can walk out there. And it was supposed to be like a trail system where you would stop at each exercise. It's like the baseball field we built up in Walkerville. Have you ever seen that on Ryan Road? Mm hmm. It is so beautiful. I would have loved to have a house built there. And so they lost the Sherman baseball field because that's where the repository is. So we built them that baseball field and it's never used. And the Job Corps did all the brick work for us and stuff. I mean, it's fabulous. It's a shame that it's not used.

Grant: I'm wondering where that is.

Sparks: OK, so you're going up Excelsior Street and you know where the park is. Yeah. And that's Ryan Road right there. Yeah. So you take a left and when you start to go around the corner on Ryan Road, farther out. But take the sharp corner, the baseball field is right up, setting up there, that road. Go look at it. It's nice.

Grant: I was also curious if I could follow up on the firecracker incident, you know, because you had said that was part of the reason you went to the EPA. Was anyone ever disciplined for that?

Sparks: No. And that's not how things were done back then.

Jaap: That's a very big statement, though, Sarah. I mean, that's really a painful statement to think they did. That's horrible to do to someone. And they weren't punished because that's how things are done. It's just really sad.

Sparks: Do you really believe that the glass ceiling has been broken?

Jaap: No.

Sparks: No, no, no, no. It just depends on who you're dealing with, you know? And I'm not a big one to scream discrimination or this is unfair because I see things happen to men also that I think are unfair. I think back then, here is another incident back then and we were losing funding at the state level, they were reauthorizing Superfund in 86. That's when Sarah came into play in 87. Stuff like that. So the state, they didn't know if they'd be funding the state, and so my boss came

to me and said, you know, somebody's going to have to get laid off and these guys all have families. And I'm like, I'm a single parent who's going to pay my rent, and I said, besides that, I have seniority, you can't lay me off. And they couldn't. So they found the money and nobody got laid off. I don't think they thought, you know what I'm saying? I don't think it was out of spite or . . . They were really like, well, we're guys we have families to take care of.

Grant: Institutional.

Sparks: Yeah, right. Thank you. Thank you. I don't think it was because they didn't like me.

Grant: You said that early on, you traveled all around the state, you know, looking at sites. I was curious if there were other notable or memorable sites, you know, that you came upon.

Sparks: What the gentleman at the state library used to say was that I was the only expert he knew about old oil refineries in the state of Montana. I don't think most people understood before we had the big oil refineries, like Butte had three oil refineries. And so depending on where you were at, like Lewistown, they had a pretty large oil refinery there, so they were spread out all throughout the state. I liked going and looking for them because, you know, most of the sites were scrapped during World War Two for the metals.

So there was nothing left. So it was kind of like just going out there trying to find cement or something. I liked those. It was interesting. Cattlemen use toxifine to dip their cattle in. So we spent a lot of time at large ranches looking for their toxifine baths. I remember one time we were in Wise River or Wisdom. Anyways, we were staying overnight in this hotel and it wasn't the greatest hotel. They had like wolves or something or, you know, some type of dog that was a cross with a wolf next door to the hotel, howling all night. And the shower, I just remember it had orange slime that you see from the iron. And I'm like, oh my God, do I keep the dust from the toxifine sites on here or do I get in that shower?

Grant: Go jump in the river.

Sparks: Exactly. I don't know why I remembered that.

Jaap: That's pretty horrifying.

Sparks: But it was very interesting. I'll also tell you one story that has nothing to do with hazardous waste sites. But we moved so much, you know, maybe work on a site that was small and you'd only sample and then move on to the next one. And more than once, I would wake up in a hotel and I wouldn't know where I was at. And so, you know, back then in those days, they usually had an ashtray or match books that had the name of where you were at. But sometimes they didn't. I would have to call the desk and ask where I was at. And I always wondered what they thought of me.

Jaap: Someone in room 112 is a little confused.

Sparks: You gotta have a good time. You got to have a sense of humor. I have a great sense of humor most of the time.

Grant: What about the people at these sites, were they skeptical of the government officials coming around? OK, so that's not something new?

Sparks: Oh, no, no, no. And really, I don't understand why people dislike the federal government so much. I don't. I've had people say, well, you know how awful the federal government is. I'm like, I worked for the EPA and we really weren't that awful. However, I guess, if you were committing a crime or polluting then like, I guess I could understand why you wouldn't wouldn't like us. You know, my married name was Weinstock. I didn't go to the Yack by myself. 1:22:31 That's just how it was.

I can remember one time too, this was in Butte. I had come from my I don't know if you guys know what a kirseal is, but anyways, you have these prayer groups after kirseal and I forgot to take my cross off. And I'm doing this public meeting and this guy stands up and says, "What's a Jew doing with the cross on?" I'm like looking around and then I realize that I have it on, but Floyd Bossert was there at the meeting and he's like, "Don't ever talk to her like that." But I'm not quite sure. And maybe I missed something and maybe you guys could tell me that. I don't know why people dislike the federal government. I guess it's somebody that we can blame when things are wrong.

Jaap: Yeah. Again, like the institutional thing, I feel like people just say that and people say it, not knowing why they say it. It just becomes . . .

Grant: I think the assumption is that the government is not there to help, but rather to control. And so it's like a matter of individual liberty in most people's minds when they fail to realize, like the interstate highway system is maintained by the federal government and that affords people a lot of individual liberty and they utilize it freely. But I think, like you say, when when you're coming to correct someone's harmful behavior, they're polluting, then it becomes an adversarial relationship, you know?

Sparks: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Grant: I don't know. That's my take. But I just had a couple more questions and I'm working kind of backwards in time. You said you graduated Tech in 1981. I think it was, yes. And I was just curious if you can give us a snapshot of what Butte was like, you know, at that time. Just whatever comes to mind, the state of the city then.

Sparks: For me, well, it was bars. I always said that my life was bars when I was in college, then mine waste dumps and I used to be able to name every mine waste dump in Butte and now it's graveyards. So I don't know exactly what that says about my life. But, oh Butte, you know, and you got to remember that the fires that were happening in the 70s. So when I was in high school Uptown Butte was still, there was still a lot of uptown Butte left, compared to what it is today and the Gardens, of course, closed when I was a senior in high school. I got to spend my whole life, you know, going to the Gardens, things that, unfortunately, a lot of the younger people don't

get to remember. And I had a good time. It was our goal in college to go to every bar in Butte. Which we did, and of course, I was a bartender going to college, too.

Jaap: Where did you bartend?

Sparks: At the Room. And I worked at the Vu-Villa. Room 71 on Park Street.

Grant: Yeah, I think Mike Gamble told me about that place.

Sparks: It wasn't a bad place to bartend. As long as the Terminal and the Montana were open. When they were closed, Sally barred the door.

Grant: What about the fires?

Sparks: Yeah, I can't say much about them, I mean, it broke my heart, I was thinking about Penny's. I had loved going to Penny's and I was thinking about that the other day when that burnt down. I can remember standing, watching that burn down and the effect it had on Butte just yeah, there was so much hardship going on. So much loss. But I was young, you know, it didn't affect me all that much, and now I look back on it and think, oh, it's too bad that we lost so much uptown Butte. It's too bad that more people didn't stand up and tell the company, you're not getting rid of the Columbia Gardens. Because there wasn't a lot of people that stood up and said no. There wasn't.

Grant: Why not jobs?

Sparks: Jobs. Simple. Why don't we shut the country down because of the virus? We're destroying the economy. Now, I said that to somebody the other day, just let it be wide open, if I'm supposed to die from it, ok.

Jaap: Yeah, it's a really tricky line, I think, to play. How long do you hunker down and not . . .Yeah, and will it at the end make a difference?

Sparks: Will it make a difference? And I don't know. I mean, I'm being sarcastic. I don't want to die. I love being a grandma and stuff like that.

Jaap: Like what's his face that said grandparents would be willing to die for.

Sparks: Right, exactly, for their grandchildren. If there was a wolf that was going to eat me or my grandchildren, I'd certainly throw myself in front of the wolf, but . . . Yeah, because growing up and with the strikes . . . I mean, people, you know . . . People did starve. There weren't all these government assistance programs. People doubt me when I say this, but I can remember. And maybe they only did it once, but I can and I don't think so, I think they did it more than once. The playground on Ryan Road, they used to bring semi loads of elk and let them go right there. Now, that was right out our back door. I remember watching it. What were you going to eat? You had to be able to go out and hunt even though it wasn't hunting season. You gonna let people starve? No, you let them hunt.

Jaap: Who brought the elk in?

Sparks: I believe that it was the Forest Service, but those were after big strikes like the 68 strike or the 60 strike. I mean, we're talking nine months or more. In my family, it wasn't as bad, my mom was a nurse and worked. And my dad would go somewhere else and work. So it wasn't like we didn't have it. But I mean, our neighborhood, McGlone Heights, many of those people worked for the company. Their wives did not work. And it wasn't unusual to have six or eight kids. I'm sorry, I babbled.

Grant: That's what we prefer. I was just curious if you'd be willing to share the story of your brother's death in the pit.

Sparks: Sure. I mean, he was 23 years old. He had a son that was two. His wife was pregnant, six months pregnant. And I do remember this because they were at the lake. We were all at the lake, at the cabin. And I can remember my brother, Mick and I, and my brother Joe, Freddy Joe were down at the dock. And I remember my brother's wife coming and saying, he was working the afternoon shift, saying, come on, we can't afford for you to miss this shift, you have to come or you're going to be late. And I do. I remember standing there listening to her say that and then. We did not have a phone at the lake. In fact, there wasn't a phone even nearby. This was right after the strike of 68. So they went back to work.

I think at the beginning of June. So they were just trying to get everything back up and running and stuff. My brother was a boilermaker also, and he was welding on a crane. And they had a truck, and I don't know if you've ever seen the drill bits, how big they are. They hang off trucks. They have racks on them, and they moved the truck and had not tied off the drill bit. And one swung over and caught his head between the drill bit. And these drill bits are huge and the crane or the piece of equipment he was welding on. So. By the time they had to get a hold of my parents. And I remember because somebody was banging on the cabin door and they had been looking for us for a while because we had just bought the place the year before. So a lot of people didn't know where our place was.

And so my parents rushed to town. You know, they let him die. His brain was heavily damaged. I was 12 and my brother was 11. And it certainly changed our whole life. Yeah, because he was 12 years older than me. And you know, my next sister, nine years, next sister, seven and then five. We were kind of like afterthoughts. Yeah, so and you didn't sue at that time, you know. And my niece was born with cerebral palsy. Because a lot of times you'll see that when someone's under stress or something, and then the child will be born with cerebral palsy. But she came to live with us and I raised her a lot.

Jaap: Well, that's really hard. Yeah.

Grant: Thanks for sharing that.

[01:35:39]

Jaap: Do you have more questions, Clark?

Grant: My last one was just about your dad and I just want to hear a little bit more about him and his work and his union involvement. Sounds like your brother took after him?

Sparks: He did, yeah. He went into to be a boilermaker. My dad, he was a character. He used to keep a book of projects they made for bosses. You know, if the boss wanted a staircase, metal staircase for their cabin, or something. And then if somebody got in trouble from the union . . .

Grant: He'd pull his book out?

Sparks: He would. He would. And one time I remember this. One of the bosses got mad at him and broke his camera, smashed his camera, and they had to replace it. But he was a real decent man. Like Christmas Eve, Christmas holidays were a big deal to him, and I remembered this young guy that was an apprentice. The wife called on Christmas Eve and said that he didn't come home. They had a Christmas party or something. And I remember my dad, we had to put everything on hold so my dad could go find that guy and make sure that guy was home with his family for Christmas Eve. He was like that. He cared about people. I just wish he would have known he was Irish. And he was a dandy, I mean, he was one of these people that had ham radios and he'd get up in the middle of the night so he could talk to somebody in another country. And so you'd be sleeping and then you'd hear the radio going.

And he built model airplanes and we'd go out flying them. And I'd have to find him, you know, run after him or whatever, if he lost control or whatever. I guess what I'm saying is he never quit learning about things. At the end of his life, oh, him and the computer and the TV set. And he lived at my house, after my mom died. And I worked with Jean Canada. I got him one of those where you just push the button and he would get a hold of me. Oh my God. And we were in the basement of the courthouse at that time. That thing would go off sometimes two or three times in an hour. Because he would work on the computer and open all the windows, you know, and he couldn't get it figured out. And he'd just be so upset and I'd have to go home and fix the computer. But, you know, the deal was he never quit learning.

You know, it didn't scare him to learn something new or something. And I always said the greatest thing with my dad is when they invented the remote control for the television because I'd be in the kitchen cooking and he'd say, "Come change the channel!" Oh, so potty training, remote control, certain things are real big in my life that might not be big in yours.

Jaap: I love the computer thing because my grandma, when she had a computer, she could only use it good enough to be really dangerous at it. And she called me one time, and she called me Spuddy. She said, "Spuddy, my desktop, they're like things everywhere." And she had saved everything on her computer to her desktop, like, made shortcuts everywhere. So they were just like layers and layers of shortcuts. Yeah. "I don't know. I don't know what happened."

Sparks: Yeah, I know. And like, the remote control I had for him was like this big. Have you seen those? And so that he could see it and I hoped that it would help. But he was a character. Oh. And he had a scooter. Oh. And so one time, they lived in Yuma in the winter and came to

our cabin in the summer and I was down there, I had just driven them back down for the winter. And I saw him out there, putting a series of batteries together. And I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm just looking at how this works." Well, he put more than one battery in his scooter. He put in a series of batteries to give it power and to have it last longer. And he took that scooter and drove it to the swap meet, which was very far away. And then the battery went dead. And so he got this person to call me to tell him that he was stranded at the swap meet. Well, what am I going to do? I can't lift this scooter. I have no place to put it, even if I couldn't lift the scooter. But I knew a guy that had one of those lifts on the back of his van. And I got him to go get him. I'm like, "What were you thinking?" And he's like, "It was great. It worked wonderful."

Jaap: My grandpa was very similar. He had a scooter and when he was in the nursing home, he took it everywhere. And he called my mom and said, "I tipped the fucker. I was in the laundry room and I just went up and . . ." And like it went up the side of the washing machine. I'm surprised he didn't kill himself on that scooter.

Sparks: Yeah, well, and my son was telling me a story about my dad at the lake. And my dad went up this mountain in the scooter and it started coming back down because it didn't have the power and it smashed into my son. And my son said, "I don't know how it didn't just break me in half, Mom." He's like, "Yeah, it's moving at a good pace and I just got behind it and it smashed him." But I don't know. But you know what, I don't know how I'm going to be. So I've got to be careful about what I say. I could be really nasty. So you just don't know.

Jaap: So would you like to talk about your involvement with the Granite Mountain Board? And I know you're involved with Our Lady of the Rockies.

Sparks: Well, I believe that it's very important to be involved in the community. And so Our Lady of the Rockies, Earl Casagrande, got me involved in that. And so we were not actually related, but his brother was married to my Aunt Rita and we all had cabins. And so Earl was very big in Our Lady of the Rockies and he convinced me to get on the board, which I did. I was on the board for a lot of years and I think I held a position there, vice president, I don't remember something. Vice president, I think. It was during the time that we were trying to get the tram. Or they were. I always believed that if the lady wanted the tram, we would have had the tram by now. That's just my belief. And I decided that I didn't want to be on the board anymore, but I always took a week off vacation to make the pasties, and I loved doing that.

Unfortunately, this year because of the coronavirus, we couldn't do it. But we're hoping that maybe later in the year we're still going to be able to do it. I love making the pasties. I spent a lot of years on Safe Space and helping them find a new building. That's why I got on the board, was to head that up and did head that up and headed up the move to the new place and headed up their festival of trees, couple two or three times, raising that money for them. And then, yeah, the Granite Mountain Memorial. That was my most favorite job that we've worked on in Butte. And I wrote a grant to get the money to build the initial . . . that money came from EPA.

And that's because Jerry Walters came into our office all the time and it was like, she just wouldn't let it go, and so it was easier to write the grant. And we were able to get that money to get that started, and of course, my uncles did a lot of it and my cousin Mike McLauchlan, did a

lot of the brick work for us for free. Because we only had 40,000 dollars to start that out. I still go and lay brick every year. Yeah. Usually it falls on my birthday, of course. Yeah, that's just when we do it, is usually on my birthday. And now Butte Silver Bow is helping us. They have the last couple of years. just believe in whatever I can, you know, with the archives, I'd love sitting on this board and being part of people allowing me to be part of what's going on. I am now working on a new board to site a halfway house for men coming out of treatment or the WATCH program. It's a NIMBY situation.

Grant: The Spirit House?

Sparks: Yes. We'll see how it goes. I'm not as nice as some of the people on that board. They're really nice people, and, you know, the deal with siting a safe space or anything else is you have to educate people. It's all fear. And then people spread fear. Yeah, and what came out of the commissioners, some of those commissioners should have had to resign for not . . . When did it become okay to not tell the truth? I mean it's almost like a badge of courage to stand up there and not tell the truth. Is it my imagination or is that how I feel about things these days? But sorry. So that's what I'm working on right now. All those things.

Jaap: I don't have any more questions.

Grant: That does it for me.

Jaap: Do you have any parting words?

Sparks: I don't think so. Thank you very much.

Jaap: Thank you. You've been on our list since the start.

Sparks: I appreciate it. Thank you.

Grant: You have a lot of institutional knowledge and did a lot of work here and you've left a legacy, so that's why.

Sparks: My father was part of the mining, and I got to be, and my grandparents. I got to come back. And it went full circle. So that makes it nice. And it's not perfect by any means. Sure is beautiful, though. If you sit down in the flat and you look up on the hill. It is the way it should be. It's unfortunate that the mining is eating away as much as it is. When you think of 50,000 cubic yards a day. Wow. Wow. It doesn't take long.

Jaap: You know, I drive that way every day. And I wish I would have taken a picture like once a month for the past 15 years because it's amazing. It just and then you don't notice anything for months. And then all of a sudden you say, oh my God, the whole mountain is vastly different.

Grant: You're coming south on 15. You can see the Berkeley now.

Sparks: I noticed that. You know, years ago when they were looking at having the tailings ponds out west of Butte and they were buying up all the property and stuff. They platted that whole area west of Montana Tech for housing development. And I always told people, you know, when you're bringing in nurses or doctors or their wives in and stuff, don't take them over here to look at houses, start that building out that way so they can't see the mine. My house, I have the greatest view of the whole of Butte except the mining.

Grant: I love Walkerville.

Sparks: And it's so beautiful. You wouldn't even know it was there. You wouldn't even know it was there. So I used to say, just get them building that way, you know, just keep people away from this side of town.

Grant: Thanks very much. That was excellent.

[END OF RECORDING]