



VERDIGRIS PROJECT

KBMF & BUTTE-SILVER BOW ARCHIVES

TOM HOLTER

The Verdigris Project

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Oral History Transcript of Tom Holter

Interviewers: Aubrey Jaap & Clark Grant

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Transcribed: October 2021 by Clark Grant

Clark Grant: Morning Tom.

Tom Holter: Hello.

Grant: How are you?

Holter: Good, how are you?

Grant: Good. This will be your seat here. This will be for you here.

Holter: I'm the head of the table?

Grant: Yes, sir.

Aubrey Jaap: You are. Tom, this is Clark Grant.

Holter: Hello.

Grant: Nice to meet you. I think you've met my girlfriend, Nora Saks. She's doing that podcast. She did some recording with you. She's making that show *Richest Hill*.

Holter: Oh is she the one with the radio?

Grant: Yeah, public radio.

Holter: Oh, yeah, yeah, she kept me up at the Mining Museum for quite a while.

Grant: Really?

Holter: I didn't know I could talk too much.

Grant: She'll bring it out of you, and hopefully we can too.

Holter: Huh?

Grant: Hopefully we can get it out of you too.

Jaap: Yeah, we'll bribe you with candy if we need to. We've got lots of candy.

Holter: What's that?

Jaap: We've got lots of candy. We can bribe ya. [laughs] So Tom, do you mind signing - it's a permission form that you're agreeing to do this oral history with us?

Holter: I better put my glasses on and make sure I'm signing the right name.

Jaap: Right there. And if you say anything you want restricted, just let us know and we'll make a note. And then that component won't be public.

Holter: Oh, I don't think I could say anything that I want - that I don't want known.

Jaap: Perfect. So like, you always have that option if you need it.

Tom Holter: Okay.

Grant: This thing is best if it's right up on you. I'm going to move it a little closer to you. Hopefully, you'll just forget that it's there. Yeah, this will be best right in there. Thanks, Tom. Mm-Hmm. OK, ready to roll.

[00:02:12]

Jaap: We're good? Ok it's May 3rd, 2019. We're here with Tom Holter. Tom, I'd like you to start, can you tell me a little bit about your parents and how they made their way to Butte? Did you grow up here in Butte?

Holter: I was born here in Butte, yeah.

Jaap: Tell me a little about your parents. How did they end up here?

Holter: Well, both my father and mother were born here in Butte, but my grandparents came from - well, some come from Italy, some come from Norway.

Jaap: Ok. And do you know how they made their way here, did they mine as well?

Holter: Well, I tell people, when they ask me that question, I told 'em, I says I think their horse and buggy broke down when they reached this point. [laughs] No, I don't know. Well, my grandfather on my dad's side, he was a prospector. He had something going up there in - what they called it, what the heck was that? I was told he was a foreman in one of the crushers here you know, but I don't know that for sure, but I was told that. And my grandfather on my mother's side, see he came from Italy. And my grandmother came from Italy, too. Will they grew up in different parts of Italy. And he ran a grocery store in Meaderville, which was mostly Italian.

Jaap: Mm-Hmm.

Holter: There was a community. We called it Little Italy, but he run the Simitari Grocery.

Jaap: Oh, Ok!

Holter: Yeah. In Meadville. Yeah.

Jaap: Ok. And tell me a little bit about your parents then. What were their names?

Speaker 2: My father's name was Bill, William, and my mother was Inez.

[00:03:55]

Speaker 3: And why did they do for a living?

Holter: Well, my dad, most of the time worked in the mines. And he had heart problems in his late thirties or real early forties. See, he died when he was 44. We don't know what he died from. So he left the mines and got a job up at what we called the School of Mines, Montana Tech. He was kind of a maintenance man up there and, on I think it was June the 15th, he come home and - see he was kind of crippled on one leg from the - because he had a slight stroke - and my neighbor said she'd seen him get out of his car and run up the stairs and went into the house. What he did - he went to the house. He laid down on a bed and he died. We have no idea why he died, you know what happened. At then times, when he was dead, he was dead?

Jaap: Yeah, yeah. And what did your mother do?

Holter: Well, mother - while my dad was alive, she was just a housekeeper. And then after he passed away - first, she started working for a small insurance company that she was able to, later on, able to get a job in the hospital as a nurse's aide. And she worked there until she was, oh, I think, almost probably in her 70s. She died at the age of 97.

Jaap: Wow.

Holter: Yeah, well, but I was in the service when she got that job. I was in the army.

Jaap: OK.

[00:05:23]

Holter: You know, I got drafted when I was 19 years old.

Jaap: So, Tom, what year were you born?

Holter: Nineteen thirty-four.

Jaap: Nineteen thirty-four?

Holter: Yeah, eighty-four years old, well I'll be eighty-five in November.

Jaap: Wow. Yeah. Where did you grow up? Where was your family home?

Holter: Well, I was born in Meaderville, which was an Italian community. I was born in a house. I wasn't born in a hospital. I was born in a house on Front Street there, close to the Meaderville skating rink. And then when I was about six years old, my family moved to McQueen. See, the house I was born in, it was owned by my grandfather, and then he owned the house in McQueen. And when I was, I think it was six years old, we moved to McQueen, which was east of Meaderville. And that was mostly Austrian people. See, we were the *wops* and they were the *bohunks*. [laughter] And that wasn't a slang, you know. I mean, call me a *wop*, that was fine. And call them a *bohunk*. That's what they were, and that's what they wanted to be called, they were mostly Austrian. Mm-Hmm.

Jaap: Yeah.

Holter: Well, we lived in that house when my dad died and then I lived there - I got married and then I built a house for my mother in the backyard. I moved my family into the first family house there in McQueen and I lived there for 33 years until the company bought us out.

Jaap: Mm-Hmm.

Holter: Their 'public domain.' They bought all the houses of McQueen, and moved the - forced the people from McQueen, Meaderville and East Butte to move out. And that was in 1967. And the house that I'm in now - we brought that house.

Jaap: And you've been there since 67?

Holter: Mm hmm. Yeah.

Jaap: What was it like when moving out? Was that hard for you?

[00:07:14]

Holter: Well, living in McQueen, you didn't want to go anywhere else. That was a great place to live.

Jaap: It was beautiful.

Holter: Yeah. In fact, when we got married. You know, I was working on a few different jobs. My wife, she always thought about moving to maybe California. Then, after we moved to McQueen, she didn't want to move out of McQueen. Yeah, she was Irish. Well, Irish and *bohunk*, Irish and Austrian. Her mother was Irish and her father was Austrian.

And they were both from Butte, both born and raised here. She died 13, almost 13 years ago.

Jaap: And what was her name?

Holter: Barbara.

Jaap: Barbara.

Holter: Yeah, the last name was Flanick. Yeah, but her mother was a Ferriter. That was a pretty well known name here in Butte, the Ferriters.

Jaap: Mm-Hmm. So we'll backtrack just a hair. Where did you go to school?

[00:08:10]

Holter: Well, I went to grade school at Holy Savior. That was in McQueen. And then when I graduated Holy Savior, I went to Butte High. I was going to go to Central. In fact, Brother O'Dwyer from Central, he talked to my mother and said if I played football, I wouldn't pay any tuition, but I would probably have to help clean a room once in a while. And she said, no, my dad wanted me to go to Butte High. I was 11 years old when he died and I don't remember him ever saying anything about me going to Butte High, but I think she had it in her mind that she wanted me to go - so I went to Butte High.

Jaap: Mm-Hmm. What were some activities you did as a kid for fun?

Holter: For fun? Well, you played all the sports. We played football, basketball, baseball. At that time, we had grade school baseball. There was no little league. It was great school baseball. And I played baseball for the Holy Savior. And then later on, I played intermediate league – that's before you go into the Copper League, and you played in that until you're 18 years old. That was a great league. That was - the McQueen club sponsored that when it was all in McQueen. And I played intermediate league and then I got drafted. Then when I come back, a couple of years, I was back, I played for McQueen in the Copper League play for Jim Keller. He was the manager, you know, but then the second year, I had to give that up because then I was two shifts at the Mountain Con. Every - you know you do two weeks day shift, two weeks afternoon shift. Well, when you're afternoons, you can't play ball so I had to quit the Copper League.

Jaap: You were only six when you left Meadville, but do you remember anything about Meaderville?

Holter: Oh yeah, I remember my grandfather's grocery store very well. In fact, I used to - on Saturdays - I used to help my uncle, see my uncle and my aunt, they were brother and sister. Neither one of them married, but they all lived there. And I used to help him deliver orders in my younger days. I used to love that. And then when I was 14, he'd let

me drive. We delivered in a two-door Plymouth. He did let me drive. So I was I was driving when I was 14 years old, without a license of course.

Jaap: Of course.

Holter: Yeah, that's why I used to like to help down there, especially at that age when I could drive.

Jaap: Yeah. Did you guys deliver to homes or restaurants or other groceries?

Holter: Homes, yeah. And he had customers and Meaderville, and some of them in McQueen. There was a couple of customers down the Flats. One customer was on Walnut Street and but he had another few other customers too. I can't remember the streets they were on, but they bought stuff from him. Mm-Hmm. Yeah.

Jaap: Did he get a lot of his stuff - was it from Italy? Do you know?

Holter: Oh, no, no, no. The store in Meaderville – they got a lot of the stuff at – it was the – let's see, what the heck was the guy. Oh, I can't think of the name – the Meaderville Mercantile! That was the name of it, so that was a little bit further north from my grandfather's store. Then the Miners Market was right next to my grandfather's store. That was another grocery store. And then there was another one called Guidi Brothers. And I can remember when I was a little kid – they had Guidi Brothers Sausage and Salami. I always thought that was their names. When I was a little kid. [laughter]

Jaap: Sausage Guidi and Salami Guidi.

Holter: Yeah, well, that's how it was: Guidi Brothers Sausage and Salami. [laughter] When I was a little kid, I thought that was their names!

Jaap: Oh, that's wonderful.

Holter: Then they had a bakery there, the Meaderville Bakery. Boy they had good bread, good breadsticks. Very good. Then my grandfather - a lot of people would order bread through him, you know. And then he'd get it through the Meaderville Bakery. And a lot of times he'd send me down there to pick up whatever was ordered. I used to like to go down there when her husband wasn't there because - if he wasn't - he was a grouchy son of a gun. But if he wasn't there and I went down there, she always treated me a little bit, you know, give me a little bit of French bread and a piece of salami or something. I used to love that. But I didn't like when he was there because I didn't get nothin.

Jaap: Oh, so when you're 19, you were in the army, can you tell me a little bit about that?

Holter: Yeah. See, I was going – my future wife Barbara - I started going with her in May of fifty-three. And I got drafted in 1954, in September. And I thought, well, I hope

she'll be waiting for me when I come back. So I asked if she wanted to get married. I give her a ring and she waited for me. And then when I got back to, well, I was in there - I was in Germany for my, well, basic training here and then I was in Germany for nineteen months, but overall two years. Anyway, I come back and we did get married.

Jaap: Mm-Hmm. What did you do when you came back?

Holter: What's that?

Jaap: Where did you go to work when you came back?

[00:13:38]

Holter: Well, see, when I got out of high school, the first job I had was an apprentice carpenter and I knew the foreman on the job. Well, he was from Meaderville. They called him Fatty Maffei. Everybody had a nickname. His was Fatty Maffei. His real name was Andrew. And he hired me because he was a foreman. He hired me as an apprentice carpenter. We worked on them houses by St. Ann's, and then up McGloan Heights.

Jaap: Sure.

Holter: And when we finished on St. Ann's, I was working for Kenwood Realty – we worked up at McGloan Heights. And when that job was finished, there was no more work. So I went to work for the railroad. I was a Gandy dancer. You know what a Gandy dancer is?

Jaap: Tell, tell us what a -

Holter: You're laying railroad track. So that's what I was - working on the Gandy crew for the Great Northern Railroad. And when I was working on that job, I got drafted. And then that was in 1954, I got drafted. Then when I come out of the service, I thought, well I'm going to go see if I get on with the Carpenters again, so I went to the Carpenters Union and they sent me down south of Butte to the Safeway warehouse – you know where the Safeway warehouse is? And they just started that job and I was on that job from beginning till end. And when we finished that job, Cahill transferred me over to the Texas Avenue Bridge. We rebuilt the Texas Avenue Bridge. And then when that job was done, there was no more work. So I thought, well, and that was the beginning of the strike in 1959. That was a long strike here. Well, I was bartending at the time too, at Martin's Bar. Well, when the strike ended, I thought I'd see if I could get on with the Anaconda Company. So they did hire me and they hired me to work in a stope at the Con. But when I went up to the Con - I knew this very good friend of mine, Frankie Castelloni - he was running slime - so he got me as his partner. So we were slime runners. When you're running slimes, you take the waste rock mixed with water, and you fill in the stopes. See, you got shaft miners, You got drift miners, raise miners and stope miners.

Well, after a raise miner raises, finishes - he follows a vein of ore up probably to the next level, which is 100 feet, he's not mining that vein of ore out either - he's just driving a raise. Then the stope miner comes in, and every set of timbers, he drills and blasts and gets all that vein, that rock out of there. That's got to be filled in. And when that's filled in, he goes above that and does the same thing: drills and blasts, gets all that rock out of there and you fill that in with slime. Then the water drifts off and goes out of there down into the pump stations. And so I was running slimes for about three years. My partner got transferred down to the Berkeley. I didn't know I was going to work, who was going to be about partner then, so I thought, well, I'm going to transfer to. So I went down, talked to Jim Carden, and he did, he said, yeah, we got a job for you as a - mining down in the Berkeley. I was mining underneath the one of the crushers, mining out a big room so they could mix the copper ore with the regular ore. And I was doing that job and my boss come up and told me and my partner we got to get out of here because the ropemen are working above us and it's going to be dangerous. So we got out of there and went up and I was talking to one of the ropemen - I didn't even know what a ropeman was at that time. See, now at the Anaconda Company, we had 13 different unions. And the ropemen, they belonged to the Ironworkers Union.

And when I came up there and the Ironworkers were doing their job, I was talking one of them, Jimmy Jelavic, and I was talking to him. He told me what the ropemen did. And what I liked about what I heard, it was all straight, mostly straight dayshift. And he said, You know, he says, we are hiring people, he says, or boss or foreman is hiring. We're going to hire some people. And I said, who do I talk to? So he told me up here on Main Street - see at the Original mine, that was the headquarters. So I left a little bit early for work there. And I went up and his name was Ray Barrett. I went up, I was talking to him and he interviewed me and talked to me for a while. And of course, he asked me what my name was and I says well, Tom Holter. He says, you related to Bill Holter?. I said, Yeah, he was my dad. He says, well, I worked for your dad at the BlackRock mine. And then he asked me a few questions, he said, you ever have any construction work? I said, yeah, I worked as an apprentice carpenter. He said, go back and tell Emmett Murphy, he was my foreman, tell Emmett Murphy to get you a replacement. When you get you a replacement, report to me. So it took three days. I went down there and I, you know, the next day I told Emmett, and he said, well, we'll get somebody for you. That took three days. And that night, when I was getting off shift, he said report to Ray Barrett tomorrow. Then I was on the rope gang for 23 years, until I got hurt.

[00:18:37]

Then, on the rope gang, we worked mostly underground. We all did all the heavy work underground. You know, lord all the heavy equipment, raise all the heavy equipment. If there was a wreck in the shaft, that was our job, we had to go pick up that wreck in the shaft. Yeah, we had a lot of underground work.

Jaap: Yeah, can you tell me a little bit about the duties of a ropeman? What were some of the duties of the rope gang? Can you go into a little more detail about some of those?

Holter: Well, we used to lower what we called motors. They're called trains, them underground trains. See, that was our job because anything that a miner, that the surface miner couldn't put in the cage, we had to lower it. And we had a special cage that was made, it was called a long tom. It was a long cage. It just had four corners, just bars on four corners and a top and a bottom. And all that heavy equipment we had to put on them cages we had, you know. We had to put it so it'd be down like this, coming down, set it on the bottom so it was still tight on top and then we used to tie it off with rope, and send that to the different levels.

I mean, I'm talking about the motors, what people call trains, the ore cars and all kinds of different equipment, all that heavy equipment. And that was our job. And then when we did that, we took over - we took over the cages. The station tenders, you know, they're the miners that work underground ground that you send the cages to. And they load and unload the cages and, you know, shift men to different places. Well, they went off to the side and we took over the cages, so we had to know how to ring the bells. There was a certain way of ringing bells, you know, if you're working on the cages.

[00:20:20]

Jaap: Can you tell me a little bit about ringing the bells?

Holter: Yeah, I can. Now see if you want to go to a certain level, there's a code of mine bells. Well, I'll say now the 3200 ft level. That's the bottom level of the Orphan Girl mine. I give - in fact I just got a call this morning - I got to give an underground tour there at 8:30 Tuesday morning. [laughs] But anyway, there's a code of mine bells. If you wanted to send the cage to the 3200-foot level, you got to remember how to add and divide. Well, me, I've been out of high school for what, 67 years. I in the mines, you know, working that job, I had to remember my arithmetic. So if I want to go to the 3200 foot level, what you're doing at 32 plus 10.

Know when I take it now - Tuesday morning, I think I'm taking some high school kids underground - and I always give them this question. I'll tell them, I want to see how good you people are. And I tell them, I says, in my days, we called it arithmetic. I said, I don't know what you're calling it now. So then I asked them, I said, what's 32 plus 10? Of course, you know, most people tell me 42. Yeah, well, what gets them kind of mixed up, I says, now divide five into 42, how many times does five go into forty two? And of course they're looking at me and they start figuring and figuring. Well, they give you all kinds of numbers.

A lot of them get it right. And of course, you know five into forty-two goes eight and two fifths. Well, that's the bells you give to go to the 3200 foot level. You give them eight bells: one two three four five six seven eight, you pause, and then you give them two bells. When the engineer gets eight and two, he knows he's got to go to the thirty two hundred foot level. But what surprises me - now, every year I get the fourth grade from West, you know, West Junior, that's the grade school. And I get the fourth grade from Central. Now, when I give them kids, both the Butte kids and the Central kids, I give

them that question - and they answer me right away. I'm surprised - they give me the answer right away. And I tell the teachers. In fact, this makes the teachers happy – I give that question to a lot of high school kids, and they can't come up with the answers as fast as your kids can. And that's the truth. But them kids from Butte and from Butte Central, they do, they come up with that answer quick. And it happens like that just about every year. But a lot of high school - I never, I don't, they don't send the high school kids here underground. They don't – they come up there for tours. But we get kids from all over the state, all over the state.

Jaap: Yeah.

Holter: And a lot of times them kids have a hard time giving me the answers to - but that is the code of mine bells. But there's other bells you have to ring too.

Jaap: So why does it - do you know why it works like that? Why do you add 10 and then divide by five?

Holter: Well, that's just a code. See, every five levels it changes. Yes, it goes from, well say from, from 36 to the 40. From I mean the 30 to the thirty five, it's eight one eight two eight three eight eight four eight five, ok? From the thirty six to the four thousand, it's nine one nine two nine three nine four nine five. OK, so every five levels it changes, but the engineers, on a lot of the levels, they have a chart on how to ring the bells. If there's no chart there and if you don't know how – [laughs]

Jaap: You'll be all over the place.

Holter: You don't know what the heck you're going to go.

[00:24:05]

Holter: Yeah, and to stop it, when you get to that level - of course it's got to slow down - if somebody is on the station, he'll grab the shaft bell and give one bell .If not, you've got to reach out from the cage and give him one bell and then he'll stop. That's a stop signal. If you're all through with him, you don't need them anymore, you got to clear him. You give him two bells, stop, give one, and then you give them two: two, one, and two. When he gets that signal, he knows that he could go wherever he has to go after that. You're through with him. But there's a lot of other bells too - much more bells that you have to ring because you're doing a lot of different things with the cages.

Jaap: Mm hmm.

Speaker 2: And then there's another - see that shaft bell - the only ones that could hear that shaft bell is the guy ringing it on the different stations and the guy up above that you give the signal to. There's another bell away from the shaft called a squawker. If you're calling for the cages, if you calling for, say the signal drum cage, you get on a squawker and you give him one long ring and then you give him the station that you want to be

picked up at. If you're calling for the double drum hoist, you give them two bells and then the number, or the station that you're at and then they'll come and get you on the double drum.

See, all the mines had a double drum and a single drum. The double drum was used to hoist the ore out of the ground. Then at the end of that cable there was one cage, on the double drum, always one cage and then underneath that cage, there was another cage, what we called a skip. It was like a huge square bucket. And when you drill and blast and brought the ore from inside the mine, you dumped them in the pocket and then from that pocket you dump it into the skip. And then you bring it up to the surface and dump it into the pockets up there and then from there, you know, it goes into other bins and there it goes to the smelter.

And the single drum cage - that had four cages on it, one on top of the other. And that took care of the - we used to call that the chippy hoist. And a lot of people looked at me, well, why the chippy hoist? They named it that many years ago because all day long it was chasing after men, so they called it a chippy.

Jaap: Interesting. I think it's interesting the language that was used underground, the bells that how - it's fascinating that through bells, they were able to communicate and understand one another.

Holter: Yeah. And there's another bell, and the engineers didn't like this bell. See the station tenders underground - they're the ones that took care of the cages underground. You sent the cages to them and they loaded and unloaded. And then you know, if they had to go to different stations, they would ride the cage to different stations to load and unload. And in an eight-hour shift, you got so much work to have to do. Well, sometimes the engineer for some reason is not cooperating with you. And it's not getting any better, and the boss ain't going to blame him. He's going to blame me. After a while, you got to let this guy know, hey get on the ball, because you know, we're not getting what we're supposed to get done right! So if that's the case, you load the cage, not with men, with equipment, and you're set up to where it has to go. And then after the cage takes off, you're still at the station, you give them 13 bells. And when the engineer gets 13 bells, he goes wild. Because you called him a son of a bitch. [laughter] And I, you know, you talked to Louis?

Jaap: Yeah. We talked to him a couple of weeks ago.

Holter: Did he tell you about the 13 bells?

Jaap: I don't know. I don't think he did mention 13 bells.

Holter: Well, usually he does - that's what he loves to talk about. In fact, we gave a talk at Butte High gym here a few months ago, and he got through this talk and he usually tells about the 13 bells. And I says, Louis, question! He looked at me and I says, did

anybody ever give you 13 bells? He went, whoaaa! And then he told the story about the 13 bells, and how he makes the cage bounce if anybody is on it.

Jaap: Yeah, he told us. Yeah.

Holter: Yeah, he gives them quite a ride. Yeah, Louis loves to tell about 13 bells. Yeah.

[00:28:10]

Jaap: Fascinating. So you talked about how you guys cleaned up wrecks in the shaft. That would be your responsibility if there was a wreck in the shaft? Can you recall any incidents of that that you can tell me about?

Holter: Oh, yeah. It seemed like whenever there was a wreck - see, when we were on the rope gang, we were on 24-hour call. We were on call all the time. That's what I liked about it, because we made a lot of money on the rope gang. We worked a lot of six and seven days, you know, changing cables and you know, for something to happen. Even down the Pit, if something happened down the Pit and they needed a ropeman, we'd get called down there too. So we were on 24-hour call. But if there was a wreck in the shaft, I don't know why, but it seemed like it'd always happen between two and five o'clock in the morning.

Jaap: Of course. [laughs]

Holter: And it always happened in between the stations. Of course, when I was low man on the totem pole - see, a couple men had to climb down the pump station to get to the wreck. And, like I say, being a low man on the totem pole, it was my job, me and somebody else, we had to climb down the pump station. You had the regular station and you have a pump station. We have to climb down the pump station to get to the wreck. And I've been on many wrecks where there was maybe six or seven hundred feet of slack cable. And what it does, is it coils, and then a twist. We used to bring little stulls of wood down to the little round stulls of wood.

And because we knew there was going to be some sort of twist in the cable and we try to get that stull of wood into the twist and tie it off with half-inch rope. If we didn't do that when the cable tightened up after they pulled it up, the cable would open up and it's a lost cable. I mean you can't use the cable anymore. And so we used to put that stull in there and when it untwisted, it come up nice. And by doing that, we saved the company maybe hundreds of thousands of dollars because the cables cost money.

Well, the Con and Kelley, they were the biggest cables. Them cables are an inch and seven eighths. The cables are about that big around. In fact, where we ordered the cable from - well it was back east where we ordered the cables from. When them cables come in, like for the Con and Kelley, they came in on big wooden reels. Just the weight of one of them cables was probably eight and a half ton. That's how heavy the cable was. And then it was our job to change the cables. A lot of times we wouldn't change the cables -

we'd take the cables off and cut so much off end. Because there would be some wear on the cable. Well, by doing that, the wear would change. You know, they wouldn't wear anymore but start wearing somewhere else. And so we'd do that. And if there was any little broken strands, that cable would have to come off because something's causing those strands to break. But see, in the olden days, the problems they had – them cables would break. Because there's one hundred and thirty different minerals underneath the city of Butte. And that water is seeping through the ground all the time because we have rivers, lakes, creeks, underground lakes, waters coming off the mountain. That water seeps to the ground, but it goes through the minerals and picks up acid. That water is very strong in acid, very toxic.

In the early days of mining, they found out as that cable was coming through, dripping down the shaft, it'd get on them cables and start eating them cables up all. They lost cables and they lost men. So they had to figure out a way to save their tables. They come up with a special kind of a tar, and that was our job. Well, we had a crew that did that. What we'd do, we'd lower the cage right below the surface of the ground and put timbers across. And we had wooden, square wooden boxes that would open and close. And it had a hole in the middle of it. And of course, we put that - that hole would be around the cable. And then we give the engineer two bells.

When he got two bells, we're telling him we want him to go down and when he's going down, we had buckets of tar and we'd pour those buckets of tar into that wooden box and it'd coat them cables up. And we had to make sure all them cables were coated with that special kind of a tar so that water wouldn't get through to it. And we had to keep doing that all the time because we had a crew that kept checking them cables and they were usually part of the crew. And I was, you know, on that crew several times that we had to tar the cables. And of course, I was on the crew almost all the time when we had to change the cables.

Jaap: And how do you go about changing the cables? Can you tell me about that process?

Holter: Oh yeah. See, like I say, them cables came in big reels. And we used to make stands out of mine timbers. And we put a big metal pipe through the middle, you know, through the hole and we set it on there. And then of course, we block, you know, put timbers on a block the pipe from moving, and then we'd have to make breaks with a timber. You put a like a 2x8 or a 2x10 timber or another timber on top. We use that for a break. And then at the bottom - it was sticking out in the bottom - we put the timbers across it and we had men pushing down on that so that that reel wouldn't take off, when you start pulling that cable in. And so we used to make our own break, make our own stands and make our own breaks and take that cable. Well, we'd have to take the old cable off and then put a new cable on. It took a whole shift to do that. We always did it on a mostly on a Saturday or a Sunday, you know, when there wasn't much activity being done at that mine. And so we always got to either a sixth or a seventh day working on that and them cables.

Jaap: Wow.

Holter: And then the High Ore cable, that was a flat cable.

Jaap: Oh, yeah.

Holter: And that flat cable was made by the rope gang, up in the Bell Diamond. And what they used to do is, they'd have several strands, you know, reels or short strands. And then they had a long needle with a wire, and there would be a man on each end. He'd stick that needle through them strands and the guy in the other come and tighten it up. And then he come back and he got tightened. That's how the cables were made by the rope gang. They used to put in double shifts. I think on a double shift, they probably got about 70 or 80 feet of cable on a double shift.

Jaap: And so they actually kind of weaved their own cable then, am I understanding that correctly?

Holter: Yeah, see them cables - there was different sizes. We had an eight foot. I think in the six foot and eight inch, I mean, eight inch and a six inch. There was a couple different ones because it was a couple mines that had them cables, but that was all tied by the rope gang up in the Bell Diamond. Yeah, so. That wasn't a good job.

Jaap: No that sounds pretty tedious.

Holter: Trying to [grunts] get that needle through all them strands, it goes, comes back and tightens up and push that through. And then you're supposed to get that much cable done, I mean, that's mandatory. You have to get that much done in a double shift. Well, there was two shifts: a day and an afternoon shift. You have to do it because hey, I hope you did your job right.

Jaap: Were there reasons that the flat cable is used sometimes versus the traditional cable?

Holter: Yeah, because it was a flat drum, flat cable drum.

Jaap: OK.

Holter: See, the drum was only that wide, you know and the cable...

Jaap: OK.

Holter: Let's see, what other mines? Well we have, up at the Mining Museum, we have on one of them hoists up there in the backyard, one of them cables that we made is still on there. One of them flat cables, it's up at the Mining Museum. It's interesting to see.

Jaap: It is, especially when you know how it's made, then that makes it even more interesting.

Holter: And, you know, I showed a few people that and they couldn't believe that the local people made them cables, by hand!

Jaap: Yeah.

Holter: Yeah. But we did. That's how it was made.

[00:36:17]

Holter: And they also had to be, you know, tarred, so that the water wouldn't eat them up. And see the High Ore - that was down at the High Ore - the High Ore for years was the main pump station. They had pumps on different levels that pumped the water up until it got to the surface. And then they changed it over to the Kelley. And then we put it on the thirty eight hundred foot level of the Kelley. And then pumps - that was that was our job too, to lower all them pumps down - that was on the rope gang. Them pumps were powerful enough to pull, to pump thirty eight hundred feet.

There was no other pump stations, from the thirty eight hundred clean to the surface. And then from surface, they'd they ship it over to the precip plant. And at the precip plant - that was a moneymaker - because they used tons and tons of tin cans. They'd come in, you know, and railroads full of tin cans. And they dumped the tin cans there and then that water that they pumped up there would go through a leach dump and from that leach dump, it'd pour over them tin cans and it'd eat them tin cans up. The water was so - it'd eat them tin cans up and it'd pick up the copper in the water. a little tin cans of the water source. And then that copper - when they shipped it to Great Falls - back then that's where they shipped it, to Great Falls - that was about 95 percent copper. So that was a moneymaker. That precip plant was a moneymaker.

Jaap: Yeah, taking your waste and make money out of it.

Holter: Yeah, all out of tin cans.

Jaap: Yeah, wow.

Holter: Well, how that was discovered - many, many, many years ago - I'm talking probably about late eighteen hundreds/early nineteen hundreds - see the copper crick used to go through Meaderville. See, people would throw cans, you know, food cans in that copper crick. And this one guy seen how the water was eaten up them tin cans and forming the copper. And he had his own little business. He'd pick up that copper. Well, the Company found out about it. They thought, well, they're gonna do something about it. At first it was called the copper tanks. And my great uncle, he died in the copper tanks. They found him floating in one of the tanks. That was my grandfather's brother.

Jaap: How did that happen? Do they know?

Holter: Nobody knows his name was Bartholomew. Bartholomew Shimatali. And see, he was my great uncle and his wife, she was my great aunt. Well, we used to call them Ceo and Cea. That's uncle and aunt in Italian. Well, we used to think that was their names. I used to call him Uncle Ceo! And Auntie Cia! I was a little kid. Because I thought that was their regular names. But his name was Bartholomew, and her name was Mariuch. Like my grandfather, his name was Michaeli and she was Magretia. Interesting life, in them days.

Jaap: Yeah, those are some Italian names. So you said you were hurt. Can you tell me about how you were hurt at work?

Holter: About what?

Jaap: You were hurt at work?

[00:39:34]

Holter: Yeah, I was. They figure my body traveled 43 feet before I hit the ground. I was supposed to go down to the Kelley mine that day, and Bill Barth – he was a foreman – see I was a crew boss at that time. He says, Tommy I want you take one of your men, we gotta move a tank down at the concentrator. So I took Tikki Hill with me and we went down there and this huge metal tank. And he said, now this tank is empty. So you know, I had to know what the weight was and he said, no it's an empty tank. What we had to do was pick it up and put it on a semi and move it about 200 feet and unload it again. Well, the night foreman put fuel into the wrong tank. He filled that tank with 2500 gallons of fuel. Well, I went up to our shop and I got some long inch cables – see, we used to call them chokers. And mostly in a situation like that, you would choke the chokers. You choke 'em, and put one eye through the other and then put the other eye into the hook. Well, what I did – it was just an empty tank – I straddled it. I just put the four eyes into the hook. And we picked it up and put it on the semi.

You know, and I couldn't understand why the hoisting engineer didn't realize that it was probably heavier than it should have been. Well, we unhooked it and we moved it and I thought, you know – this is the 30th of December – and it was cold and slippery and full of snow, lot of snow. So I told the hoisting engineer, or the one that was running the hoist, I says I'm gonna hook it up and I'm gonna ride it. We're just gonna hook it up and set it down. Instead of climbing down and climbing back up again, and then climbing down again, I'm just gonna ride it. He says ok, so I put the four eyes into the hook and of course I give him the signal and – see the fuel was kind of moving back and forth. And we raised it and the fuel all shifted to one side. And what happened – see I was on the top side and the cables, the whole tank flipped up like that.

Well when it flipped up like that, the cables come together and they thought they had cut me in half. But what happened, then it threw me. And then my body – what they figured

had happened, my body went 43 feet, up and then back down again. Uh, I was pretty well busted up.

Jaap: Yeah.

Holter: Well I fractured my skull in three places. I shattered this ear drum. I busted this clavicle. I broke all the ribs on my left side and I fractured my back in five places. And I don't remember falling – I still don't.

Jaap: No.

Holter: Don't remember. They didn't think I was going to live for four days, from what I was told. And I was in intensive care for three weeks and I don't remember anything. Intensive care, but they said I was normal. I was talking to people. I knew who they were. I was acting normal. And the day they took me out of intensive care, it seemed like I just woke up, and I seen all these tubes inside of me, and at that time my son and the operator, the one who ran the crane, Eddie Skubitz – he walked in with my son. And I'm saying 'what the hell's going on?' because I don't remember nothing. And he walked over to me and he says, "Holter, you're the toughest son of a bitch I know." [laughs] What the hell is this guy talking about? So they told me. And I can remember saying 'oh shit.' I knew I was in trouble I guess because I remember saying 'oh shit' but after that I don't remember nothing for three weeks.

[00:43:12]

Jaap: Wow. How are you moving so good Tom?

Holter: Well, I guess I had good doctors. I still have to go to the chiropractor every month for my back. And of course Dr. Sorini was also taking care of me before he died. Yeah, he was quite a guy. See, his father was from Meaderville too, Ernie Sorini. In fact, Ernie and I used to sit at the old McQueen club, and right after, at the new club – if he was in there we'd sit together and talk about Meaderville, you know about the different people we knew in Meaderville – Ernie was quite a guy. And that was Dr. Sorini's father. But Bankensoss is the one who worked on me – actually he's the one they say saved my life. And of course he died several years later and when he died, Industrial Accidents sent me to Sorini, Dr. Sorini. But I'll never forget the first meeting with Sorini. He come in and we introduce each other and I told him, I says, I knew your father. I says, I'm from Meaderville. So him and I, we were talking about Meaderville for about 20 minutes. He says, I gotta see what the hell's the matter with you! [laughs] yeah, that Dr. Sorini, he was something else. He was a good guy. So I've had a few experiences.

Jaap: Well, it sounds like it, yeah!

Holter: Well and then my knees, Fort Harrison is taking care of my knees. And they want to replace them, and I said no way at my age. So they give me shots. Every three months I go in there for shots. Every six months, I get a major shot, and then the third

month, she puts in a booster shot. You know, to keep me going for the next three months. But my back, I still have my back problems – a little bit, not much. Little bit of back problems. But I do all my own housework, all my own yard work and everything. I do it. I gotta do it. Yeah, that's what keeps me going.

[00:45:28]

Jaap: It is, yeah. Yeah. So, what were some of your feelings as underground mining stopped? Can you...

Holter: Well, you're stunned. You don't know what's gonna happen. See, what happened – in 1981 is when I got hurt. And I was off for 9 months. I thought well, I don't wanna retire. I don't want to retire. So I went back to work on my own. The doctors didn't know I went back to work. And I went back to work on my own and of course, you know, I was having a few problems but I was doing the job. And that was in 1982 I went back to work in September. I thought, I want to get back in time so I'll have enough time so I can get vacation pay. In 1983, well I did. I timed it so I could get enough full shifts so I could get vacation pay. And then of course in 1983 is when they told us they were going to shut down. Well, I still was going to the doctor, this Dr. Bell, so I had to keep going to the doctors. And he told me, he says, Tom I don't like the looks of your shoulder. See, I couldn't raise my arm very well. And I said, what's wrong with my shoulder? He says, well you have a broken clavicle there and he says, I don't like the looks of that.

He says, you better go back to Dr. Murhpy. I says who? He says Dr. Murphy is the one who was treating you in the hospital. Well I didn't know that, and I never seen him after I got out of the hospital. So I went back to Dr. Murphy and he checked me out. He says you're ok and in fact I might release you. I didn't tell him I was already working. So then I was going to Dr. Blum at that time, the chiropractor, and I told him what happened. He was on the Industrial Accident Board. See, cause I was on the Industrial Accident when I got injured and of course when I got to work I reported and they didn't send me any checks. So he called a woman in Great Falls and she said you get him to another doctor. So they sent me to Missoula. And the doctor in Missoula, when he took x-rays, he said what the hell is the matter with that man? He says, your clavicle is broke. So they had to take a piece of bone out of my hip and put it on my shoulder and they had to bolt it to my clavicle up here. Then I had to go back a year later to take the screws out and make sure that it healed. SO they checked it and it was – it healed. They took the screws out, so.

Jaap: Wow.

Holter: People say that, but hell, I'm fine.

Jaap: You look fine! Yeah, it's amazing.

Holter: I'm fine. Of course in '09 I had a heart attack.

Jaap: Yeah?

Holter About 2:30 in the morning, I was in so much pain in my chest that I felt like I was being stomped by elephants. So I jumped in my truck and drove myself to the hospital. And when I got to the hospital, I was so weak I couldn't even sign my name. Then they had to fly me to Missoula and put stints in me. And then the doctor, about the third day, he come in. I thought I was going home. He says, oh no. He said, we gotta give you more tests. He said you had a bad one. And I said, what do you mean I had a bad one? He said, when I was putting the stints in, you were having a heart attack. So, he says we have to find out if there's any damage. So this young woman came in and she sat alongside of me, you know, putting that stuff on me and going through there. I didn't mind that because she was pretty good looking! [laughter]

They kept me in there for a couple more days and then sent me home. They found out what was wrong and then they sent me over to Fort Harrison. Fort Harrison has been taking care of me ever since. So being a veteran, that's nice. I've been going there since 1986 and I've had tremendous coverage. I mean, I've had no problems at Fort Harrison.

Jaap: Good.

Holter: They've treated me well.

[00:49:53]

Jaap: So Clark, do you have any – you've been typing a lot. I think you probably have a little list.

Clark Grant: I just made a list of stuff as you were talking.

Holter: Oh yeah?

Grant: And I wanted to go back over – in your grandfather's grocery store, what all did he sell?

Holter: Well, no meats. But all kinds of canned food and of course, sugar and flour. In face, I got part of his counter in my garage. And the front of the counter was like, glass covered, where you know, all the flour and that, not in sacks – it was just there. You used to pick it up in just buckets. And I got that in my garage. And on the back part of it was shelves. You used to open and close it. I got that full of tools. So I made sure I got that out of, you know – in fact I was offered \$1000 for it by an antique dealer. I says oh no. I said, this stays in my family.

In fact I told my kids, I says, when I die, this stays in the family. And one other thing that stays in the family too – I got one of them player pianos, you know, that you pump on it? And that's over 100 years old. And that was in my grandfather's front room in the grocery store. So I got that in my basement, and I said that stays in the family too. And

Meaderville – me and my sister, when we were little kids – see the Rocky Mountain Café was just about across the street from my grandfather’s grocery store. And the Arrow Café was two – the Miner’s Market and the Arrow Café – and Meaderville every night was loaded with people. See, the main highway went through Meaderville. It went through Meaderville, circled around, went up north to McQueen and then east of McQueen, and then up towards Helena and Great Falls.

Well, when people used to come in they’d angle park like that and of course, you know, at that time the semis coming through, they couldn’t get through. They used to have to go into different places and have people move their cars so they could get their semis through. But a lot of times – and people would be walking along right in front of my grandfather’s store – and either me or my sister would be outside and the other one of us would be inside – and then we’d holler, “People are coming by!” and then we’d play that player piano. And people sat and they listened to it. Yeah, so we had fun doing that.

Grant: Did he sell candy?

Holter: Well, I was the candy seller. Yeah as you got a little bit older, I was able to sell the candy to the kids. Of course I’d steal a piece once in a while.

Jaap: Oh, sure.

Grant: And was it busy?

Holter: Yeah he had a pretty good business. He had a good business.

[00:52:42]

Grant: Did he close before the pit expansion?

Holter: Well see, he passed away. And then my uncle and my aunt, they ran it, until the Company bought Meaderville out. See, my mother, they had to buy a house in McGloan Heights, because the Company, they owned the ground in Meaderville. In McQueen, we owned everything. So my aunt and uncle – of course they were brother and sister – at that time and then they bought a house in McGloan Heights. And my mother – the Company bought a house *for her* in McGloan Heights. They were kind of close together in McGloan Heights. But me, I bought a house out on Harvard. Of course, I didn’t get enough money for my house out on Harvard so I had to pay payments. None of us in McQueen got what the houses were worth.

Jaap: Yeah, those houses in McQueen were beautiful houses. They were really nice homes.

Holter: Yeah. And McQueen was a nice place to live. It was beautiful there. Everybody took care of their houses, took care of the yards – yeah. And the people were fantastic. At

Christmas, everybody would go to different houses, you know, and have maybe a shot of brandy or a shot of grappo. Everybody had grappo. You know what grappo is don't ya?

Jaap: Yes.

Holter: I got a bottle of grappo at home right now.

Jaap: Do you make it?

Holter: Oh no. My grandfather used to make wine and then he used to give the, you know, the mix for people to make grappo. But he made a lot of wine, my grandfather. See, where the store was, that was a big building. There was the store in front. And then off to the side was like his front room. Back here was the dining room, and then the whole back part was the kitchen and a bedroom and a bathroom – two bedrooms and a bathroom. So that took care of – and then in the backyard he had another house. And he used to make the wine in the basement of that house. And then he used to rent that house to different people, you know. Yeah, for a long time – see, McQueen and the Holy Savior church was Father Piernot. And my grandfather used to give him wine because, you know how you get wine in church? Well one time – I don't know what happened – him and my grandfather got into an argument so he quit giving him wine. And then I don't know where Father Piernot go wine after that but he got it from somebody.

Grant: Did you ever sneak any wine?

Holter: Well, you know when we'd have dinner – like Christmas dinner and that – they'd give us a little bit of a glass of wine because you always had wine with your dinners. Oh yeah. They'd give me a little glass of wine with my dinner.

Grant: What about like neighborhood games as a kid?

Holter: Well, see in McQueen they had upper McQueen and lower McQueen. And we used to play baseball on the streets and then later – McQueen had another ball field called the number 5. And that's where the Copper League practiced. We'd go down there if they weren't there. Up in the northeastern part of McQueen, we made our own ball field. Just – it wasn't much – but we'd go up there and play ball. And a lot of times we'd just play in the streets, and we always played football in the streets. And then see, at that time, there was no place kicking. You'd drop kick. And we used to practice drop kicking over the telephone lines. And all day long sometimes, we'd be kicking that ball over them telephone lines, so we were good drop kickers because we had a lot of practice. I'd drop kick it to him and he'd drop kick it back to me. Yeah.

[00:56:35]

Grant: Were you outside a lot as a kid?

Holter: Outside?

Grant: Yeah.

Holter: All the time. Yeah, our parents used to have to call us for dinner. Oh yeah – we played outside. And then we had our own skating rink in McQueen. We got to be good skaters because we were skating all the time. Then we had our own hockey team. And we had tubers – we were playing hockey in tubers. And we'd challenge other communities that would come up and we'd play each other. I still got my skates at home. The ones I had as a little kid, playing hockey in tubers – I got them at home.

Jaap: You so mentioned upper McQueen and lower McQueen?

Holter: Yeah.

Jaap: So where was the boundary?

Holter: Well, see upper Mc – once in a while in the summertime, we'd go down to the skating rink and play, you know, either baseball or football with them. I mean there was no – we were all great friends. Well see, upper McQueen was like – I lived on Cottonwood. Cottonwood was the furthest one north. Cottonwood, Leatherwood, Ewe, Oak, and Spruce – that was upper McQueen. And from south of there was lower McQueen. Yeah. But we were all McQueen.

Jaap: Yeah just because I don't know if I've heard anyone talk about upper and lower.

Holter: Yeah, if somebody asks where you're from – I'm from McQueen! But when we're playing them guys, we were going down to lower McQueen. [laughter]

Grant: Nowadays would McQueen be in the Continental pit?

Holter: McQueen is covered over by a dump. You know where the – well all the water. Well you know where the – let's see, how do I put it? Where the main Berkeley garage is? You know, the main Berkeley garage? Well just east of there, that big dump there, that covers most of what McQueen was.

Grant: Ok.

Holter: Yeah. Well just south of there is open, but all of McQueen isn't covered. But just south of that dump, that big waste dump, is where McQueen was, and then there was East Butte. See the McQueen, East Butte, the Columbia Gardens, yeah. [pause]

[00:58:50]

Jaap: Did you go to the Gardens?

Holter: Oh yeah. Used to go to the gardens a lot. Yeah, we used to walk up there from McQueen, walk up to the Gardens. It wasn't that far – go down to East Butte, go a little

bit further and then head up to the Gardens. Always on children's day because that was a lot of fun on children's day. And the kids, they used to get a free bus ride. Well we'd walk up from McQueen, but from Uptown they'd get a free bus ride up to the Gardens on children's day. Yeah that was quite a place.

And see that was – as a ropeman, all them planes - the planes used to be on a big cable. That was the rope gang that used to change them cables. I was never on that job, but that was part of the job on the rope gang. Because the Company owned the C-

Jaap: Sure.

Holter: And they used to check and change them cables.

Jaap: Safest ride – amusement ride probably I'd imagine. If you have professional crews working on changing the biplane cables.

Holter: Then they had the roller coaster. That was fun. And then the merri-go-round. A lot of people think that this is from the Gardens – it wasn't. All them horses – well the horses were handmade. But the merri-go-round itself was from the Gardens? It wasn't. It wasn't. The reason I know – this uh, what the heck was his name – Teddy Burry, he was an electrician. And we were retired and he called me up and he says Tom, we might need your help. And he says I'll show you what we're doing.

On top of Castle Street, there was a pump house up there. And he says I want you to meet me up at the pump house. So I went up there and I says, what's going on Ted? He says we got a – well, we used to call it a merri-go-round you know – that we want to put together. I says, where is it? He says it's right there. Well there it was laying down on the ground. I mean, parts, all kinds of parts, full of grease and dirt. And I says, we're gonna put that together? He says we're gonna try to. I says where's the prints of it? He says we don't have no prints. I says, well you got a design? He says no!

[1:01:08]

And I says how the hell we gonna put it together? And where?! He says we're gonna put it together inside this pump house. And we did. Well there was ted and I – and John Shea helped us once in a while. And uh, what the heck was his name – oh – he was from McQueen too. Oh I can't think of his name. And there was two other guys. And what we did – we cleaned all them parts off and we figured how to put it together and we did put it together in the pump house up there. And it was wall to wall. It had just big enough to fill in there. Of course, we didn't have the motor or anything for it. I guess that place in Anaconda, where them young kids work, what do they call it? Oh it's a government project. They did, they put new floors and everything in it. And that's the outfit that they got together down there now.

But we put that together, and like I say – and it came from back east somewhere. It was shipped in from back east. Yeah we put it together. We got it all cleaned up and put it

together. And in the center was a huge pipe. And I wasn't there – they had put the equipment on it, on that pipe. And we got that pipe up – what we had to do – we put a set of eights. That's a set of blocks with ropes going through them. And I had to go down to the basement to figure out how the hell we're gonna get this hooked up, and I found a big – well it was a metal water tank. And I got over to where there was an opening in the floor and I put timbers across it. And we had to – from the rope up on top, we had to come down and put it on another block. So I was able to hook the block down there and hook it on to a truck. And that's how we raised that pipe.

And then we got the pipe up – and then the braces were 4 inch pipe, four 4-inch pipes holding that up. Then they found out when they put that in – six or eight inches wrong. So we had to lower everything back down again and move it to where it's supposed to be and then raise it back up again, so. But we got it done.

[01:03:28]

But I mean they're people that know what they're doing. Like I say, Teddy, he was an electrician; he was a good one. And I was an ironworker. Another guy was a machinist. McDavid was his name. He was a machinist, so we had people there that knew what was going on. So it worked out fine. Now it's all there, all different.

Grant: Have you been down there? [to Stodden park]

Holter: I haven't but I heard it was really nice. I heard they did a very good job on it. No I haven't had the chance to get down there. I'll get down and look at it. I'm glad they did that. Butte needed that.

Jaap: It's nice, yeah.

Holter: At first they was talking about putting it as Lady of the – see, I helped on the Lady of the Rockies.

Jaap: Ok!

Holter: Yeah and I helped work on it, as a volunteer, and then I volunteered as a tour guide since 1986 until four years ago. That's when I had a little blowout with the board of directors and I told them to shove it. I volunteered – I was a tour guide up there for, you know, volunteer tour guide for many many years. I loved it. I loved it. And the people that put it together – all they were was miners and a few construction workers that did put it together.

Jaap: What was your role in putting it together?

Holter: I did whatever had to be done. Yeah. One day you might have been a welder or a rodbuster, a carpenter, a cement finisher – you did whatever had to be done. I mean, there was no union. Everybody did the job.

[01:05:10]

And everybody got along fine! This Bill Barth, he was the main engineer on it. In fact, he was my boss when I got hurt that time. And Bill Barth, he was a good man. Very smart. He knew his job and he done it well. And he was good to his men. He was good to his men. I know a lot of times, we'd go up north to the Horseshoe Bend, and we'd have to change the – see, that's where they were pumping the stuff up, the waste from the mines, they'd pump it up there. And it'd be full of water and the water would drift off to the side. Well a lot of times we had to go – and they'd pump that water back to the concentrator. A lot of times we'd have to go up there and move the pump house and then change the pipelines, change the pump lines.

And that was always done in overtime. See, every four hours you got a meal ticket. You know, that was union. Every four hours you got a meal ticket. But if we were gonna work over four hours, and Bill – he's the only one that ever did this – we'd go down to the Racetrack Café and we'd eat down there. And then we'd go back and finish the job. But a lot of times, you just work through and get a meal ticket. And in them days, you could use that meal ticket any place you wanted. I used a lot of it at Lydia's. [laughs] See, I used to work for Lydia.

Jaap: Oh? Tell me.

Holter: When I was fourteen and fifteen years old – that was after my dad passed away – and my mother, she was like cleaning up and washing dishes and that. She didn't do it a lot of times, but I worked as a busboy; I was bussing for Lydia. And that was at the old Lydia's, not where it's at now, just south of where it's at now. And I always bussed for the – see, there was a front where they fed people at, and then a back. Well the front end was Lydia's sister Christansel, and then Rosella. They were the two waitresses. But I always bussed for them and I loved that because they knew I wouldn't cheat 'em when I cleaned up the tables. And I'd pick up their tips and I'd put their tips where I was supposed to. And at the end of the shift, they'd always tip me a little bit and then Lydia would pay me. But at 11 o'clock they'd shut down and she'd feed the help. You could have anything you want but steak. At 11 o'clock we'd eat, yeah.

[01:07:36]

Jaap: What was your favorite from Lydia's?

Holter: Well, now it's steak, but we used to have chicken and that. See Lydia lived right next to my grandfather.

Jaap: Ok.

Holter: Yeah, Lydia, and then her mother was Atelia. That was her mother's name. In fact, for many years one of her steaks was called 'steak Atelia.' Yeah. But Lydia and her mother, and her brother Otello lived right next to my grandfather. We were close friends.

Our families were very very close. And her other brother was named David. And he ran the place after Lydia passed away. [pause and laughter] I just hit it right a lot of times, lived in the right place and knew the right people.

Jaap: Yeah!

Grant: When you were young and just starting out in the mines, were there any old timers that would tell you about their experiences as young men?

Holter: Oh, not very often. You know, a lot of people, they kept it to themselves if they had bad experiences. They never talked about it too much. And I know a lot of them did, yeah. I know a lot of them did.

Grant: I'm mainly curious about how the mines were for guys in the 20s, you know, early on.

Holter: Well, it was hard because you know, there were no – there weren't unions. And I mean, the mining conditions were bad; the working conditions were very very bad. But see, when I went to work it was clean clothes, you took a shower, changed clothes, went back home – well, no you wouldn't go back home right away. You'd stop at a bar! And in them days, you stop in the bar – a lot of the bars – you bought the first one and the bar bought the next one, if you're coming off of work, coming off the mines. And of course, after that you have to buy two. But in them days, just normal, every third drink was a kickback. I know, I bartended for several years. People come in, they start drinking. Every third one was a kickback. That's gone. You don't see that anymore.

[01:09:50]

But when I bartended, we didn't have these special – hell, the fanciest drink in the house was probably a brandy and seven, or vodka and Squirt.

Jaap: [laughter] And now, yeah, there's lots of stuff involved.

Holter: Well I, on Sunday, I had to take a bunch of bartenders underground, women bartenders from the Headframe [Spirits].

Jaap: Uh-huh.

Holter: I had to take them underground, and then, after I got them down to the 100, they had a table set up. And I was wondering how the hell they were gonna do that. You know, they had tables set up and they all had a pasty dinner, all of us. But anyway, when they first come in, I had to introduce myself. And I said, I wanna tell you people something. When I was bartending, none of ya's was probably even born. So they wanted to know where I bartended, and I told them Martin's Bar and the McQueen Club, at the old McQueen Club. Well I was president of that place for sixteen years. I was president there when we moved to where it's at now. And then I had to meet with the Anaconda

Company's Bernie Harrington. They first offered us \$30,000 bucks to build a new building. And then after – I had 23 meetings with them – and they used to have Bernie, I mean Paffhausen and Dwyer. They had their own construction business. Bernie Harrington had them coming in for prices. Well after 23 meetings, I ended up with \$162,630. And I got a letter from the – and I was president – I got a letter from the Company that we could use any contractor we want. We don't have to use Bernie Harrington, but they did bid on it. But they'd have tried to cut everything down. After all the plans were made, they tried to cut down the size of the building and they weren't gonna give us any back bar, no kitchen.

They cut the walk-in cooler way down. I mean – but for that same price! So I called a special meeting. I wrote everybody a letter and told them we were having a special meeting to build a new club. And I said, if you're not there, I'm gonna be your proxy vote. Well a few of them didn't show up, and the ones that didn't – I was their proxy vote. Well that morning, Biggs Jovic called me. See, he was a member and he was a contractor too. And he called me and he says Tom, is it ok if I bid on the Club? I says, you're a contractor; hell yes. So, Paffhausen & Dwyer couldn't come to the meeting because it was a private meeting. So I read off their contract word for word, everything, and I explained to them what they had cut off. And Biggs wrote his contract - he give us *everything*, everything we wanted. He even added a little more. He built a water pipeline so in case there's a fire, we can hook on to the pipeline, the firefighters, so they can hook on. He added that and even a few more things for that same price.

So who do you vote for? You vote for where we got the best deal. The next morning, I called Bernie Harrington – see, I didn't know that Bernie Harrington was gonna get a cut out of this from Paffhausen. And then I found out later that whenever he did the dealings with Paffhaus & Dwyer, they always give him a cut out of the contract. So I called Bernie – from work I called Bernie that morning and I told him, I says, Bernie, we got it settled. We're gonna build a club and we got a contract. He says, oh, Paffhausen & Dwyer? I says nope. I says Jovic. Well, he starts cussing me over the phone. I told him to kiss my ass and I hung up on him. Yeah. Yeah!

[01:13:26]

Then I found out, well he was getting a cut out of that. And then Paffhausen & Dwyer, they sued me.

Grant: Really?

Holter: Oh yeah, they had my name in the paper that I was fraudulent and malicious. They sued me, they sued Biggs, and they sued the Club. Well they lost. They had to pay for all the court costs.

Grant: Good!

Holter: Yeah, right now we talk to each other. But it was about a couple of months after that - see he had something to do with the Copper King Mansion, or the Copper King restaurant down there at that time. In fact, later on they kicked him out because he was doing some sleazy things down there. So anyway, I was down there one time with some of my friends and I was walking up the hall and he was walking down the hall. He says, oh Tom how you doing? I says, oh kiss my ass. [laughter]

Grant: When was that?

Holter: Oh, that was a bout three months after the sued us. [laughter] Yeah, but now we talk. I'm not gonna hold -

Grant: He's still around?

Holter: Oh yeah, he's still around, yeah. But I mean we're friendly now. But I wasn't at that time. You know, well he was suing me for \$25,000 bucks and the Club for 25 and Biggs for 25. You know, \$25,000 - that would have killed me. So anyway, but they ended up paying the court costs.

[01:14:52]

Grant: When you were forced to move out - that's the word you used earlier -

Holter: Yeah, they had that imminent domain law.

Grant: Did people oppose it?

Holter: Well, what could you do?

Grant: I don't know.

Holter: The Company, they ruled the whole State of Montana. They controlled the State of Montana. The Anaconda Company. No, you couldn't do nothing about it. And I got - for my house, they gave me \$14,500, which it was worth a lot more than that in McQueen. And of course I had to pay - let's see I had to pay - for the house I'm living in now I had to pay \$10,000 but my wife, she jewed 'em down a little bit. She was good at that. I thought I was good until I seen her talk! [laughter] But we got a nice house. It's a very nice house. Well I wasn't sold as much on the house as I was the garage because the garage had a big workshop in it.

Grant: There you go.

Holter: And that workshop - I got all kinds of tools - I got my welder in there. I can't weld anymore because I have a hard time seeing what I'm welding, but yeah. When I die, I think most of my kids don't even know what them tools are because I never trained any of them on that. They all went to college and got good jobs.

Grant: Was Harrington always the negotiator?

Holter: Well, I didn't deal with him on my house. Who the heck was – the guy I dealt with – I mean, he was a nice guy. He wasn't like Bernie. But of course, he couldn't give me any more than what the Company wanted him to give me.

Jaap: Was that Kraus you dealt with maybe? Kraus, I know he dealt with a lot of the houses.

Holter: What's that now?

Jaap: Kraus was his last name?

Holter: No no, no no. I can't think what his last name was. It was an Irish name. He was a nice guy. He was honest with me. He wasn't like Bernie. [laughter] Later on, when was it – 1980 – we were on strike.

[01:16:55]

So I went to Pocatello to work. See, when we were on strike, being an Ironworker, we could go anywhere to get a job. And in 1980 I went to work down in Pocatello. I was working for Idaho Iron. I was making big money down there because we were working six and seven days sometimes and sometimes overtime. I was sending home a lot of money to my wife. That was in 1980. In 1967, I went to work in Chicago. I worked on the John Hancock building in Chicago. We were 900 feet in the air. And I was on a 3 foot by 3 foot plank on the outside edge of the building. What I would do – my partner was the welder. I set everything up for him and I'd tack on a backup strip. And then I was the safety man when he was doing the welding. Yeah, he was a good welder. And then every pass, I'd have to get the engineers and they'd x-ray it. They'd x-ray every pass. So if there was a flaw in it, he'd have to cut it out. But he was that good. He never had to cut any flaws out.

Grant: They'd x-ray every pass on every joint?

Holter: Yeah. And see, it was like that, and see I had to – there was this little opening like that on the two pieces of metal and there was a backup strip and I had to tack the backup strip on. And when I got - and then first I've have to put the plank out, held by 4 ¾inch ropes to hold that plank. And I'd get on it and pack up the backup strip and then when I'm through with that, he'd get on. And then I'd have to set his welder up. If he wanted the welder to have more heat or less heat, that was my job to set the welders for him. And I was the safety man. And then I had to come home and work a mile underground!

Grant: I was gonna say!

Jaap: Yeah!

Grant: What do you prefer, 900 feet up or 900 feet down?

Holter: Well, they're both a little – you know – I didn't mind none of it. I didn't mind working up there. See when you go up – we got an elevator up to so many floors. And then we'd take the stairway and then ladders until we got up to the top.

Grant: Did you make good money then in Chicago?

Holter: Well, you know what the wages were then? \$5.85 an hour. That was *big bucks*.

Grant: Yeah.

Holter: In 1981, or in 1967 I mean. That was big money, \$5.85 an hour. Because we were probably making about 3-something here, or no we were making 2-something here. You know, when it was \$5.85 an hour we thought hell, that's great. Yeah.

Jaap: I'll go 900 feet up in the air, yeah. Sure!

Grant: Wow. Um, you were talking about Holy Savior. I'm sure you've seen this picture.

Holter: Oh yeah.

Grant: What do you think of that?

Holter: Oh, I hate it.

Jaap: Is that the Walk Hinick picture of the –

Holter: Yeah, you can see where the bell was. If there was a funeral – see I was an alter boy for seven years there. In fact, when I was in the eight grade, I was president of the alter boys. Well being in the eight grade, whenever there was a funeral there of course, Father Piernot had me – I'd be running the alter boys. And then I'd always have to drive to the funeral – to the cemetery with him and back. And that used to scare the hell out of me, the way he drove. [laughs]

[01:20:25]

And then a lot of times - if I wasn't you know, like in the years before that, we'd see the funeral coming. You know, coming from church. Or no, from the funeral home coming to the church, we'd see it down just south of us when it used to cross over to go into East Butte. And then we'd have to ring the bell. Well we'd jump out and ring the bell and then we'd ride up with it. We'd ride up with it! Hell that was a ball. But we'd ring that bell to tell that, you know, the funeral is coming. [looking at picture] See this was the church, and then the sisters' home was right here. And then the school was right here.

Grant: Now it's just buried huh?

Holter: Yep.

Grant: Do you think of that when you drive down Continental?

Holter: Oh, no. Not anymore. But now St. Helena's – that was in Meaderville. That's sitting up at the Mining Museum. They moved that. I was baptized in that church in 1934, in St. Helena's church. Yeah and then they moved the church and it's over at the Mining Museum. And I got a lot of memories in that church too. Father Hannah. I was baptized by Father Hannah at St. Helena's in 1934.

Grant: You mentioned being drafted and being in the army just briefly. What did you do overseas?

Holter: Well I went through basic at Ford Ord. And then I went to another eight weeks of basic – I went through sixteen weeks of basic training. Then after basic training, half of my company got shipped to Korea and we went to Germany because we still occupied Germany. See, Korea had just ended. And we were occupation troops in Germany. We still occupied Germany at that time. And I was over there for 19 months, in Germany, and see I was in the infantry over there for a year.

And after a year's time, my company went back to the States but I missed coming back by four days on my entry date. So I tried to transfer to other companies, you know, if I got in another company then I could come back to the States. But they wouldn't allow any transfers. But they did transfer me to the 62nd Transportation Company. They had 5-ton Diamond T tractors with 30 foot trailers. So for the next six months, that's what I was doing maneuvering those 5-ton Diamond T tractors, pulling a trailer, hauling German parts all over Germany.

[01:23:25]

And see, in the infantry, I was also a jeep driver and I had to take a European test for that. And then when I got on the tractor trailer, I had to take another test to drive that around Germany. Them Autobahns are nice; that's the only thing good Hitler did for Germany was build them Autobahns. And we used to try and race old comrade on the autobahns. And we'd get a straightaway coming up a grade; they'd always beat us coming up a grade.

Grant: Did you ever encounter any resistance being in Germany? Did they resent the Americans being in Germany?

Holter: Uh, the women were fine. But the men, eh, a lot of the men, younger men, they didn't like us being over there.

Grant: And did they tell you that?

Holter: Of we knew it. That's why we had our own bars that we went to. But we got treated fine in Germany though. I can't complain. I mean, I never got mistreated, I'll put it that way.

Grant: Did you have a favorite spot, back in Butte, did you have a favorite spot underground to work, like a favorite mine or a favorite place to have lunch?

Holter: [laughs] Not really. I had some unfavorites! [laughter] Like the Steward. Oh that was hot. The Steward and the Mountain Con, the bottom levels were hot. At one level at the Steward Mine we called it the Twilight Zone. Another one, we called it the Chinese Laundry. The Con, I can't remember any names there, but it was hot down there, probably about 100 degrees, or 120 degrees.

[01:25:12]

And of course when we went down there and was working in some of those hot spots, we had to protect our skin. You know what we wore? What do you wear when it's 20 below? Long underwear? Can you imagine what it's like when it's 120 degrees and you're wearing long underwear? It's protecting your skin from the heat. Then of course when you get out of the mine, the first thing you wanna do is go to the shower. And when we used to undress, we used to take our clothes and wash our clothes when we're washing ourselves. And then we'd hang them in the – well they call 'em dries and they were hot; they kept 'em hot. We hang 'em up and then when we went to work the next day, they were dry. Our clothes were dry.

Grant: I'm curious more about the pump room at the Kelley.

Holter: The what?

Grant: The pump room at the Kelley where the big pumps were?

Holter: Oh that was a huge, huge – they made a huge, huge room out of it. Very huge room. And they had, I forget how many pumps. They used to pump the water clean to surface from 3800 feet up. I can remember the first day we were down there when they started, you know, getting the water down into them tanks. And the water was kinda green, going down there, you know, very very toxic and kind of greenish in color. I remember watching that. Then one day, I had an experience underground. The bottom – see, they had these huge big wooden tanks made out of a special kind of a wood. And one day they were having trouble in the bottom of one of the tanks and they needed an ironworker rigger.

Well I knew what the job was; I'd done a job like that one before. Well I got sent down there, and I didn't take my rigger partner with me. I had another guy with me. He wasn't used to working underground. He worked mostly on surface but he come with me that day. And on the 3900 - let's see they were down at the bottom - I met the pumpman down that. And we went inside – of course we had all of our rigging. I knew what rigging to

take. We had a come-along and chokers and shackles and a chain block, because I knew what we needed. But I was told to go down to the bottom and I met the pumpman and we went inside. And when we got there, the pumpman said, this is the tank we're having the trouble with and I took a look at it. I looked at it and I said, you know, most of it has to be done inside the tank.

[01:27:36]

I'll probably have to finish it down here but my partner and I will have to go inside the tank and do most of it. So I told my partner, let's leave a couple of things down here that we won't need inside the tank, but we'll leave the rest of the stuff inside. So we went up to the 38 and went inside, went down the tank, and I was able to completely finish the job inside the tank, but it was almost 3:30 when I got done. So we got out to the station and I called the – see, each station had a phone on it. You could call from different stations. Certain people had a different ring. Well, the station tenders had a certain ring. I called the station tenders and I asked them if I could have the cage. I had to go down to the 39 and get my rigging. So they come right down and they give me the cage and they says go ahead and take the cage. They said, how long is it going to take you?

You know we have to hoist the shift. I said it ain't gonna take long. I'll just walk right in, get the rigging and come right back out. He says ok. So my partner and I took the cage and we went down and I told him, you stay here on the station. Stay with the cage. Because if he followed me, it'd take a lot longer because he's gonna be stumbling here and there and he's not used to working – I says I'll go in by myself. I'll get the rigging. You stay here with the cage. I'll come right back out again. I start walking in – the first thing you walk across is a pocket there where they dump the rock in, you know, and it's a deep pocket. I walked in a bit further and there's a crosscut doing a different direction, but I had to stay on the main line.

And I got just about where my rigging was and I had to go around an empty ore car. And my cable, my battery cable, got caught onto something on the ore car. And I'm walking pretty fast and it busted away from my battery. And there I am in complete darkness. And when I take people underground and I tell this story, I get in a place where I have everybody shut their lights off. And it's black. You can't even see the hands in front of your face. You can't see nothing! And I tell them, the first thing you do is lose your sense of direction. But I was alongside the ore car and I thought, well I gotta turn to the right towards the ore car and head towards the station. And what you do, you follow the track. And I started doing that and I remembered that crosscut.

Now, if that switch was going, switching going towards that crosscut, I'm gonna follow that rail and I'm gonna go in the wrong direction. I might go down there maybe two or three hundred feet and find another crosscut and go somewhere else. Well, they won't know where the hell I'm at. I thought, well I'm gonna try it anyway. And I started going and then I remembered that pocket. Now if I stumble and fall down that pocket, the fall is gonna kill me. They won't know I'm down there. They're gonna dump rock on top of me and send me to the smelter. Well I'd be a complete loss to them. I didn't even have the

gold in my teeth, so they wouldn't have got a damn thing out of me! And I thought, well my partner will come in and get me. I better play it safe.

[01:30:18]

So I'm in there waiting and my partner, he's out at the station and not used to being underground. Well, after about 10 minutes, the station tender started calling – the call for the phone on the 39 is the same number as for ringing the bells, it's 9 and 4, same number of rings. So they start hitting 9 and 4. Well my partner, 9 and 4, it's driving him crazy. He doesn't know what the hell it is. And then they thought well maybe – because see whenever they're ringing the phone there's a little red button on the phone that shines and he thought, well maybe this is the phone, so he answered it. And the station tender says, "Hey, we need tat cage!

We're gonna start hoisting the shift pretty soon!" He said, my partner hasn't come out yet. They said, well you better go in and find out why he hasn't come out. So I guess he started walking in, and by that time I was feeling my way out. I says he's not coming in, so I'll make it out there. And I don't know how far I got. I might have got 200 feet, 300 maybe. 50 feet, I don't know. I start walking and feeling my way out and he started coming in. Well I heard something, raised up and seen something, seen his light. And I tell people I seen the light at the end of the tunnel. And then I just followed him out.

Jaap: Were you terrified?

Holter: No. No I knew I was gonna get out of there sooner or later. They know I'm in there somewhere!

Grant: It happened so quick though.

Holter: Yeah. Yeah, like I say I was walking around that ore car and then all of a sudden everything went black. And like I say, you can't even see the hands in front of your face. It's just black.

[01:36:46]

I'll have to take ya's underground.

Grant: I'd love to, yeah.

Jaap: Yeah! I've never been underground.

Holter: Havent' ya?

Jaap: I haven't, no.

Holter: Well, if you wanna go down, ask for me to be your tour guide. See if our compressors are running – I run the equipment underground too. Nobody else does that but me. Well, the other ones, they've never worked underground, except Jim. He was an electrician underground. He wants me to show him how to run that equipment and I will, but these other ones I won't show them how.

Grant: Like a buzzy, or?

Holter: No, it's a drill, jackleg drill, and the mucker. The mucker with the bucket that dumps over. Yeah. I do run them two equipment. But we're having a lot of trouble with that compressor, so I hope they get it fixed so I can – in fact, I got a call this morning. I gotta go there 3:30 Tuesday afternoon I got a school group I gotta take down there 3:30 Tuesday afternoon. Then she wanted me to do it Thursday but I couldn't do it – I'm busy Thursday morning. And then Friday, I says no Friday we're having a – see we have a retired mineworkers. And that's when we have our lunch and our meeting, on Friday. So I says I can't do it Thursday or Friday. And then she called me this morning and asked if I could do it Tuesday. I says, yeah, I'll do it.

Grant: [laughs] You stay busy.

Holter: Yeah, oh I love doing it. I like doing it. Well them other young people, they give a good tour, but they don't run that equipment. But I tell them, I says when I break them in, I says I don't want you telling my private stories. I says, explain mining to them, but don't tell them my stories. And they don't. Because I have a few stories I tell about my experiences. That's the same when I went up to the Lady of the Rockies and I had to break in these young drivers, you know, they had to pay them. I quit breakin' 'em in because some of them were starting to tell my stories. So then I refused to break the kids in. I says no, I got my own tour. Let somebody else break them in.

Grant: Hmm. Seems like there's a lot of room for injury and accident on the rope gang. Anything –

Holter: Oh there is. Any gang. Anybody underground. You gotta be careful. You gotta be safe and make sure your partner is safe. A lot of injuries are taken – see there's 13 different unions. Now there's the miners and then the contract miners. When you're a contract miner you're driving, you're going shaft mining, you're drift mining, you're raise mining and stope mining. They got paid for how many cubic feet or cubic yards they'd move in a week. A lot of them got really anxious – the last thing you had to do was blast, when you got off a shift, that was mandatory.

The last thing you had to do was blast. At the Steward, they had a boss called *Did Ya Blast Johnson*. Well he'd wait for people to get off shift and come up out of the mine and he'd say, did ya blast? If they said no and didn't have a good excuse, he'd tell 'em to hit the road! Of course they could hire on the next day with a different boss, so – but yeah, *Did Ya Blast Johnson*. But that was mandatory. If you can, you're supposed to blast getting off a shift. Then the afternoon shift contract miners, they went underground at 6

o'clock in the afternoon, two hours after the blast. By that time, the blasting was all done and the dust was settled and the gas was settled and everything.

[01:35:04]

So they went down at 6 o'clock in the afternoon, two hours after the blast. And the first thing, when you get down there, you grab a bar. And you start hitting them, what they call them Duggans. You hit them Duggans to see if they're, you know, you wouldn't want one of them to come down on you. If you see a crack in it, you gotta bar that Duggan down. If not, you blast it down. But you gotta make sure everything is safe. You try to bar all them Duggans down so you can get in there and start cleaning all that muck out.

And a lot of them didn't do that. They were too much in a hurry. They wanted to make a good showing that week and make more money. If you were in a place where you couldn't get very far, you still would get union wages. But a lot of people, they always wanted to make over union wages, and a good contract miner did. Well the ones that got too much in a hurry, if they're in there and one of the Duggans come down on top of ya, we had a mortuary in Butte called Duggan's mortuary. And you didn't want Duggan to come and get you. But a good contract miner made a lot of money, good money. I never did contract – I did other things but I never was a contract miner.

Grant: What about nippers?

Holter: They were like warehousemen. See, each nipper had his own warehouse underground. Each boss had his own nipper and each nipper had a big room underground where he kept all the tools.

Grant: Hidden, was it hidden?

Holter: Oh no, no no. But the contract miners, they depended on the nippers to make sure they had the tools, the right tools to work with so they could make the money. But the nippers, they took care of all the tools needed and if the tools had to be repaired, that was up to them. If they couldn't repair them, they'd get them to a shop to make sure they get repaired.

Grant: Seems like a special kind of guy, a nipper.

Holter: Yeah, yeah. It was just like a warehouseman. He took care of the tools. He was the one that if you needed something, you went to him. If I need a certain tool, you got it from him. And like I say, each boss had his own nipper and each nipper had his own warehouse room. It was a big room, underground. And then them motors, a lot of them motors, or trains, are run by batteries. And at the end of the shift, you know, we had motor barns. And the batteries come in big boxes. When you raise the big boxes, all the batteries come with it. And of course they had to rig up a [inaudible] to raise tat battery box up. You push it over and put it on charge. You did that at the end of the shift; you put

the battery on charge and got the charged batteries and put them on the motor, ready to go to work. Yeah. So you made sure you had all the charged batteries on the motor because you don't wanna be inside two miles and run out of power.

You know there's over 10,000 miles underneath the city here?

[01:37:48]

Grant: It's hard to believe, yeah.

Holter: Yeah. A mile of water underneath us. On my tours – when I'm ready to take them inside this little drift, on surface, I tell them about the water and the mile of water underneath us. I tell them, I says, if you were at home, and watching TV and a special comes out and says that Butte, Montana has just had a major earthquake, will you pray that we can float? And they all look at me and say yeah. [laughter]

Grant: Do you think all those motors and all those toolsheds and all that is still down there?

Holter: Well I know some of them are down there because - see like I say I was a crew boss. I had to take my crew to the Kelley mine, and they wanted me to take my crew down to the deeper levels of the Kelley mine and hoist them. This was about – we were close to getting to closing time. I knew something was going on. And he wanted my crew – we had to raise them motors up to the 1300 and push 'em in, the 1300. And I told the boss, I says, why the 1300? Why not bring them to surface? He says you do what you're told. So we raised them motors up and pushed them back into the drifts on the 1300-foot level. Well, British Petroleum knew what was going on. They considered them a loss. They made money on them. I can't remember how – but like the 44 and the 4600 foot level, we hoisted the motors up and pushed them back on the 1300 foot level. They made money on 'em.

Grant: On the loss...

Holter: Yeah.

Grant: What did you think when the pumps were turned off?

Holter: Ehh, I was sick. I didn't know what was going on. I thought, well what is Butte gonna do now? I thought well, something will happen. Of course, it did open up later on. Now see, then we had a steering committee. There was 13 of us.

[01:39:54]

Of see, there was 16 of us on the steering committee. Eight of us were from unions and I was picked for the ironworkers union, and eight salaried people. And the salaried people we had were great people; they were good people. And we kept having meetings about

how we can open up the place again. That's what our purpose was, to try and get this place open. Well after a while, we come to a decision. We're gonna try and maybe have an employee buyout, where it belonged to all the employees. But we weren't gonna have 13 unions. We thought we were gonna have two or three unions. We were gonna be union, but not 13. And we were discussing that and discussing that, and in our last couple of meetings there was a bunch of people like – uh what the heck was his name – Don Peoples and a few of the head people here, they'd come to our meeting. And there was some people from British Petroleum – I forget which city they come from.

They were listening to our meetings. And of course I didn't know what the hell was going on. They didn't want an employee buyout. And they started talking with Dennis Washington. Well my wife, she had the rheumatoids really bad and we had to go to a doctor up in Great Falls. And we were coming home and I was going across Elk Park up there. And a special bulletin come across the radio, I had the radio on, and it says that the Anaconda – the Butte mines will open up and Dennis Washington has bought it. I thought, oh those dirty bastards.

You know, and then Dennis Washington he didn't go union – and the unions helped him get that \$10M loan. The unions helped get that loan, and he wouldn't go union. And that place paid for itself in a year. Now he's a – he's a billionaire now, in Seattle. But uh, I thought...

An employee buyout - that would have been great.

Jaap: What do you think that today, and employee buyout the impact would have been, what do you think would have been different today, had that happened?

Holter: I really don't know. I don't know. It's hard to say. But we were really thinking about having an employee buyout and trying getting a loan and opening it up, just to get it opened up and get it going again. But I'm glad Dennis – I'm glad it opened up and they put a lot of people to work, so I'm not sorry about that. I mean, just the way they did it at first – but no, I'm glad. I'm glad. And it's doing good right now and it employs 350 people, so that's good.

Jaap: So Tom, this is kind of a broad question, so. What would you say the contribution of the Butte miner was? And underground miner...

Holter: Contribution?

Jaap: Yeah, their impact, their contribution. What's their legacy kind of?

Holter: Well, they kept Butte going. I mean, they made Butte what Butte is. In fact, I was interviewed by a lady a week ago – in fact, I interviewed her at the Mining Museum. She wanted to know where, I says, well, and she interviewed me once before too. And so she interviewed me up there. She had me for almost two hours I guess, yeah. She asked me, she says, what do you think about Butte? She asked, do you want Butte to get bigger? I

says no. She said, what do you mean no? I says I don't want Butte to be like Bozeman, Missoula, or Billings. I said I'd like to see some business come in just to keep the people of Butte busy, just to keep the people of Butte workin, but I don't wanna see Butte get any bigger. I like Butte just the way it is now.

[01:43:47]

You know, it's easy to drive in Butte. You go to Billings or Bozeman or Missoula, Christ you have a heart attack the way they drive over there. So no, I says, I like Butte just the way it is. I don't know if she liked my answer or not, but that's what she got. [laughter]

Jaap: I kind of agree with you, I like that. Get enough to keep us busy but...

Holter: Yeah. You know, you go to Bozeman and it's hard to drive in them – I'm used to driving here in Butte. And I like it.

Jaap: Yeah, I don't like whe it takes me longer than 10 minutes to get somewhere. Yeah.

Holter: Yeah. And I know where I'm going.

Grant: I like Walkerville even better than Butte.

Holter: Oh, Walkerville? Yeah. Yeah. Walkerville is quite a town.

Jaap: I do have one more question. You had mentioned at the beginning that everyone had a nickname. Did you have a nickname?

Holter: Bull.

Jaap: Bull? Can you tell us how you got your nickname?

Holter: I don't know.

Jaap: Ok.

Holter: Everybody in McQueen had nicknames. Mine was the bull. Yeah. Hell, I don't know how I got that name. [laughter] Well I'll tell you some of the names: Jibby Eyes. How would you like to have the name Jibby Eyes? And Chooks, Baffer, Bones. And let's see, Legs, uh, what the hell was it, uh King, Oly, uh, what the heck was – oh and then there was Spike, Boo, the Duck.

Jaap: The Duck?

Holter: Yeah, uh, Greasy. They were all my neighbors. Like the Duck, he was – The Duck and Spike and Boo, they were brothers. And Spike and I were brothers in law

because we both married sisters. And the Duck – Spike was a couple of years older – the Duck was my age. And him and I got along good, yeah.

Grant: The Duck and the Bull.

Holter: Yeah. Like I say, just about everybody had a nickname.

Grant: I just have one more question for you too, Tom. Do you think Butte's decline is over?

[01:46:10]

Holter: Oh I think so. I think so. Because we had the mines going here, and then we had that plant south of Butte – what is it a Simplot plant, south of Butte? And CCCS – that hires a lot of people. I think Butte's ok. And they figured they got at least 30 years of mining left.

Grant: Right.

Holter: Right, probably more. But like I say, I'd like to see at least a few more businesses coming in here to make sure everybody in Butte is working. I don't wanna see Butte change. Well you know, for years and years, we were the most hated city in the State of Montana. We were. Because our football team, a bunch of Butte miners' kids, we used to beat the crap out of everybody. And they hated Butte. Now, a lot of those people, like when I give them tours at the Mining Museum or at the Lady of the Rockies when I give them tours up there, a lot of people from out of town, you know, different towns in Montana, they say 'we didn't realize Butte was so friendly.' I say we've always been this friendly. But you don't wanna come to Butte and start a fight because you didn't get the best end of it. [laughter] Yeah, and a lot of people found that out.

Jaap: Well Tom, thank you.

Holter: Oh yeah. I enjoyed doing this.

Grant: Appreciate it.

Holter: Yeah. Now what's this all about, what is this?

Jaap: So, it'll be here at the Archives. So a lot of students come in and say I wanna know about mining and they can listen to this and so we'll have this here for people to research or listen to to get a feel about Butte.

Holter: Oh yeah, well that's good.

Grant: We can also give it to you to give to your family if you like.

Holter: What's that?

Grant: We can give it to you so you can give it to your family.

Holter: Well what would they play it on?

Grant: Oh, I could send it to them on an email.

Jaap: Yeah they could do it on their computers or their phones.

Holter: Yeah well they all got computers and phones except me.

Grant: Yeah, there you go.

Jaap: If you want a copy, do you do a CD player? Do you have a CD player?

Holter: I don't – no. I'm old fashioned.

Grant: I could put it to tape.

Holter: Well see I got a – whatta you call it – a VCR. Yeah, I got a VCR, but uh, yeah no. I got my phone so like if I come up here, people call me, they can press a button and leave a message. When the little light is showing, I can listen to the message. Like yesterday, I got your message yesterday. Where the heck was I yesterday? I was – oh! Every Thursday, there's a bunch of us that worked in the mines – we get together and have coffee and donuts.

[01:49:09]

Jaap: Oh nice. Every Thursday?

Holter: Yeah. And for a long time, some of us played pool. Of course, they still play cards and we tell a lot of lies. [laughter]

Grant: Is that down by McGruff?

Holter: Yeah, at the Marine hooch. Yeah, we meet there every Thursday. And like Friday – now we're gonna meet there Thursday – we have coffee and donuts. And then Friday, we have our meeting, the second Friday of every month.

Grant: Oh, that's once a month.

Holter: We have lunch and then we have the meeting afterward. And we've been having it at the country club. We pay dues every year. We pay \$40 every year per man. And that includes a guest, you know, if you wanna bring your wife or friend, yeah. This has been going on – they started this in 1986. I joined in 1988. And that's the year I started giving

tours at the Mining Museum. I started giving tours up there in 1988. And then that fire truck – we had the old McQueen fire truck up there. See, I was a firefighter at McQueen too, a veteran firefighter. Or not a veteran, a volunteer firefighter.

Grant: Volunteer, yeah.

Holter: Yeah and then this will be the 25th year that I'll be driving that in the 4th of July parade. Yeah, so they have me drive it every year.

Grant: It still runs!

Holter: Yeah, it's a 46 Mack. And see, I drove it on some of the fires because if the siren rings, the first man there is the driver. See, if you're there first, you open the big door and you drive it out and wait for some help to come. And you always know, as soon as you go, it tells you where the fire is. And then you drive that to the fire. I've been there a few times – of course, the McQueen Club is right across the street, so I got there pretty fast. [laughter] Well we always stopped at the Club after shift.

Jaap: Yeah.

Holter: Always. One year, I was just starting my vacation. It was a Friday. When I got off the shift, my vacation was gonna start, three weeks vacation. Well, when I got home – no I didn't go home I stopped at the Club. I thought I'd have a couple of beers before I go home. Well, I was in the Club – the siren rang. So I rushed over to the fire department and there was four of us. And we were told to go up to the East Colusa. There was a fire in the shaft at the East Colusa. And they wanted us to go up there and set up the hose. The fire was on the top part of the shaft.

So they wanted us to go up there with our hoses and, you know, put the fire out. We were there until about midnight. And so when we got back to the fire department it was around midnight and so of course, when you get back from a fire what you do is you open the shelves and you give yourself a couple of shots. So I did that and when I went home of course, my wife, when she heard the siren going, she knew I was on a fire.

[01:52:17]

I got in the door and everybody was in bed. And I got in the door and the phone rang. And I answered the phone – it was my boss Ray Barrett. He says Holter! He says, go up to the Original, change clothes, and go with Bugni. He says, you have to go up to the High Ore. Work in that shaft. I was supposed to be on vacation, so I had to run up to the – see, our headquarters were at the Original. I run up there and changed clothes. And it was me, and Guido Bugni was the boss, and another guy. So we went up to the High Ore, and we were there until about nine o'clock the next morning. We were workin, you know, we had to get stuff out of the - hook onto stuff and get them out of the shaft. But I made a good paycheck that day anyway!

Grant: All night long though!

Holter: Well I didn't get paid as a fireman, but from midnight until about nine o'clock in the morning, you know I got double time, well time and a half. And meal tickets, I got two meal tickets. Every four hours you get a meal ticket. So I had it pretty good to start my vacation. [laughter]

Jaap: Once it got started, yeah!

Holter: Well, that's all there is then?

Jaap: Alright, yeah. Yeah!

Holter: Well, it was nice meeting you.

Jaap: It was nice meeting you too, Tom.

[END OF RECORDING]