

Mining Childhood

As far as the mines were concerned, it was something we were born and raised around, so we were used to it. We'd play back up there by the old claims, and we knew where they were, and we stayed away from them. But it was nothing for us to go sledding down in the winter. The ore dumps were great for sledding. Well, not with a sled either but on your rear end or on a little piece of cardboard. My mother would say, "Why don't you stay off those damn, dirty ore dumps" because when they get wet, they're kind of smelly, you know?

—Butte resident

BUTTE CHILDREN grew up with a keen awareness of the labors and landscape of copper production. Children negotiated the hilly terrain of their ethnic neighborhoods, precariously perched alongside dozens of gallows frames, those massive structures that marked the entrances to underground mines. At home and in their neighborhoods, children were keen observers of and active participants in cultural life. They bore witness to the myriad ways in which mines and mining shaped the intimacies of family life and punctuated the local landscape. They were socialized early to the boundaries of belonging and difference that marked the community along neighborhood, class, ethnic, and labor-management lines, and their accounts provide windows into children's understandings of mining life, attachments to home and neighborhood, ethnic identification, sense of belonging, and spirited community participation. They also illuminate some of the strife and struggle in children's lives and the hurts hidden beneath Butte's surface.

Rhythms of Life

The sights, sounds, and smells of mining infiltrated the lives of Butte's working-class children. They knew the tone of bells that signaled danger



Butte children grew up with a keen awareness of the labors and landscape of copper production. Photographer N. A. Forsyth caught these three youngsters on an outing circa 1909.

and death underground. The rumble of ore trains reverberated beneath their beds. The constant fans and whistles of the mine yards were noticed more in their absence than their presence—their eerie silence accompanying a strike or shutdown in the mines. John Sheehy, son of an underground miner, was born in 1918 and raised in Uptown Butte, his family home surrounded by the Original, Stewart, and Anselmo mines. The sights and sounds of mining remained a vivid part of John's childhood memories.

There was always a background of industrial noise. The several gallows frames were always at work, whirring away as they paid out or recovered the cables up over the idlers and sheave wheels and up and down the shafts, some for half a mile or more in depth. The trains rattled back and forth, and they were so heavy that they caused a rumble around them. . . . Each mine blew its work whistles at the beginning and end

of each shift and for lunch periods, day and night, so that we always knew the approximate time without a watch. . . .

When you see pictures of old Butte, every time you see a smokestack there was a forge below the smokestack. So if you see seven smokestacks outside of a building, there were seven forges down below that the blacksmiths worked at. And the purpose was to sharpen the bits that they used down below in the mines. They brought them up every day, and they resharpened them in the shops. And that's why they had so many smokestacks running. With all the mines, they had to keep the tools up. . . .

Those tools, they called them "buzzies." They were actually jackhammers, and they worked off compressed air. They were not electric or gas. And that compressed air came to each mine through a network of pipes. Those pipes were a foot in diameter. . . . I could walk on them, so they were quite large pipes. And where they came to a mine, there was a junction that took an offshoot to the mine from the main line. And they built a box around that—fairly high—half the size of this room. And they were warm. The heat of the compressed air would raise the temperature in that box. They called them "hot boxes."

Near where we lived on 621 North Montana Street, the Butte, Anaconda & Pacific Railroad ran right next to our house. There was a tunnel that ran right underneath Montana Street for the train to pass on to go on up the Hill. . . . [I remember] the first time Rita [my fiancée] came to our house. I brought her home so the folks could see her. We were sitting in the living room, and the train passed underneath. The house was shaking, and we were talking normally, and poor Rita over there, she thought there was an earthquake or something. There was the song in later years called "A River Runs through the Middle of the House." Well, the railroad really ran through the middle of our house. We were that close.¹

Elinore Sterrett Shields Penrose was born in Butte in 1913. As a young girl, she and her family lived north of the Anselmo Mine. Her father, who sold real estate, believed that Butte was going to develop on the Hill north of the mines. He built a cement-block house north of town that provided Elinore and her siblings a bird's-eye view of the mines: "We lived near the Anselmo Mine, which was just about as close to the city as any of them. When we were coming home from school, we'd go by [the Anselmo], and about then the bell would ring, the four

o'clock shift would come on, and the others would come out. Then there was a special sound when there had been an accident, and the women from the neighborhood, if they had a man on that shift, would be pretty scared."²

Elinore's childhood memories captured the provocative images of mines and mining.

We had a sleeping porch upstairs. It was a two-story house, and my father was a fresh-air bug. The sleeping porch faced the mountains, and it had great big screen windows, and for many years the whole family would sleep out there. They would take the carts out of the mines and dump them into big ore wagons. They had great horse-drawn wagons. From the sleeping porch, I can remember, early in the morning on a snowy morning, watching the fellows that drove these wagons up to the mines above our house to pick up the ore. It was so cold that they didn't ride. They walked, and they'd be slapping themselves and keeping the horses going. A lot of that sort of ore from the smaller mines went down to the Pittsmont Smelter. They smelted the ore, and they had huge fires in the furnaces. Now, I am not positive how they got the copper out of the ore, but there was a lot of slag that is not copper but is just waste. From our house, we could see a great wall—it was probably forty feet high—that had grown from the Pittsmont Smelter. And there on top of that wall was a track, and the little pots of melted slag would come on top of that wall, and on a very cold, wintry night, you'd see the red-hot slag run over the edge. But it has done terrible things, too. Dad told about one fellow he knew: it was very cold, and the slag had a crust on it, and the fellow couldn't get it to dump, so he got on top there with a shovel, and he went clear through with loss of his legs.³

The rhythms of mining formed the backbeat of community, and children as well as adults could tell the time of day by the mine whistles. Children invented their own names, such as "hooters," for the whistles that marked the shift changes in the mines. Many families geared their lives around shift work, constantly accommodating the family schedule as mine workers rotated among day, afternoon, and graveyard shifts. When there was a strike, there was silence, no "hooters" by which to measure time. One daughter of a miner spoke of a visitor asking how her family could stand living so close to the mines with the constant noise of the engines and bells. She recalled, "It never bothered us. The

only time they ever bothered us was when they stopped. Nobody could sleep. It was horrible. Funny how it shapes your life.”⁴

Youngsters registered the subtleties of their surroundings as they absorbed the details of mining life. Lula Martinez and Frank Carden grew up on Butte’s East Side, where mining carved the contours of their childhood terrain. Lula’s family lived on East Galena Street.

We were all surrounded by copper dumps. Waste dumps . . . but then we called them the copper dumps. And the ore bins were a little ways down from where we used to live, where a little car used to come from the Belmont Mine and dump the waste or the ore into the bin, and we could hear that at night. . . . And then at six o’clock in the morning, there was a train that came with cars, and they would dump the ore from the bins . . . load it onto the train cars, and the train would pull it away. And it would whistle while it went.⁵

For Frank the mine dumps served as his playground.

In the neighborhood, there were numerous mine dumps, which were the despair of our mothers who had to wash the dirty clothes we got playing on them by hand. No electric washers in those days. You could find some of the funniest dirt on the dumps, all of it taken up from the bowels of the earth. No one knew what it contained, but it never seemed to hurt anyone. I remember a light-yellow dirt, which if wet by rain or snow would stick to you and your clothes and your shoes like glue. If you came home with this on you, you would really get bawled out and maybe a few licks of the razor strap in the bargain.⁶

Patricia was raised in Walkerville, a small community immediately north of Uptown Butte. She grew up playing on an old ore dump that she and her friends dubbed the “Rising Star.” She vividly recalled the sound of the cages carrying miners underground being lowered down the shaft, the cranking of the wheel in the gallows frames, and the reverberation of the ore trains. For Patricia, though, it was the smell rather than sound of shift change in the mines that is fixed in her memory. “I can remember the miners coming home. They walked home. They didn’t have cars. If it was shift change and the miners were coming home, there was that medicinal smell from when they came up from the dries [miners’ changing room] where they’d take a shower. They must have all used the same kind of soap. They all had this medicinal

smell. And they always carried their buckets under their arms, and they always had that tired look.”⁷

Other children recalled the anticipation of shift change, when the Hill was thick with miners carrying their lunch-buckets. Young news-boys knew it was time to hustle to their street corners with the daily papers as miners were returning to town. Miners were their best customers. Bucket girls, who worked in boardinghouses preparing lunches to be carried underground, had the timing and tastes of the miners indelibly marked in their memories. Some youngsters would hurry to the mine yard entrance at shift change to ask miners for fruit from their lunch-buckets. Some waited outside the dries or at the corner bus stop to walk home hand-in-hand with their fathers. Others would eagerly await their chance to rummage through their fathers’ lunch-buckets in search of a leftover treat. As Danette Harrington and Linda Raiha, two Butte women who grew up in mining families, recounted:

[Linda] My father always brought me something out of his lunch-bucket, always saved something.

[Danette] Yeah, it was wonderful, wasn’t it?



In a community devoid of grass and trees, ore dumps often served as playgrounds. They were well suited for sledding and such other activities as digging one’s own mine, the pursuit of the “Young Prospectors” in this circa 1909 image.



The miners carried their lunches in buckets like the ones held by these men standing in the hoist that will lower them to their worksites in the depths of the mine. Children waited for their fathers at the end of the shift to see what had been saved for them from their dads' lunches.

[Linda] And it might be half a [cookie], a piece of an orange slice. It didn't matter.

[Danette] And as soon as he came in the door and put the bucket down, I would be there to see what I got.

[Linda] And we used to fight because the first one there would be the one who got it.

[Danette] No, see, I didn't have to fight because my brother wasn't there with his eye on the bucket like I was.

[Linda] I can remember with my dad we would just walk right down to the mine yard and wait for him. We'd walk to the street where the dries were and wait for him to come out of the dries.⁸

Children were also well aware of the sounds that signaled the imminent toll of death and disaster in the mines. Few mining families escaped loss of a loved one or close friend to the mines. Children knew the realities behind the euphemisms of mining. Frank, Richard O'Malley's childhood friend in *Mile High, Mile Deep*, bluntly described the death of their neighbor, Old Man Powers, at the Orphan Girl Mine: "A fall of rock. That's what they always say when about a ton of ore hits

you in the head.”⁹ Children recalled both the sounds of disaster and the responses. Their mothers would get together and go to the houses of the injured men to stay with their families while the wives of the injured held vigil at hospital bedsides. When deaths occurred, neighborhood women helped with funeral arrangements and were there for support in the hard days that followed.

John Sheehy described the toll that mine accidents took on families and the many widows in his neighborhood who struggled to support their young families.

There were so many widows around. It’s hard to explain to people, but those mines were killing one a day, I think. And there were all those widows living in our neighborhood. Right next door to us was Mrs. Bennett, who had three husbands. She had a man named Sullivan, a man named Burns, and a man named Bennett. All three, she was widowed three times, and with different children from each of them. And there was Mrs. Hanley, down on Boardman Street. And Mrs. O’Neil, who my mother hired to help clean the house. And Mrs. Murphy, who lived two houses up from us. How they lived I don’t know except that the kids would sell papers. That was common in those days.¹⁰

Ann Pentilla told a similar story of struggle.

When there was a mine accident, if the man was killed, it was sure hard on the woman. She had to go out and scrub floors. That’s about the only thing she could do to raise her family. It was really hard. There was one woman who had twenty children. Her husband died when the children were very young. She was a midwife, and she rustled [railroad] ties, and she had a cow, and she baked bread, and she used to take in washing, and then the children would deliver the washing. That’s how she raised her children.¹¹

Knowing Your Place

The machinations of mining shaped children’s lives in both mundane and profound ways, but the stark rhythms of mining were tempered as they flowed and filtered through Butte’s diverse neighborhoods. Many Butte children grew up with a deep attachment to their neighborhood, a strong sense of ethnic identity, and a curiosity about the social

and geographic boundaries that shaped their lives. As Nancy Klapan described: “You grew up knowing the ethnic distinction of Butte neighborhoods. The East Side was always Austrian and Serbian, and the Irish were uptown a little ways, but they were all very distinct. And if you lived on the East Side, everybody knew, and you lived up above Park Street, you were Finnish, or you wouldn’t be living there. Meaderville was off by itself, and it was very strong Italian. And the whole town was very strong Catholic from the Irish.”¹²

Children came to know their neighbors and neighborhoods on their own terms. They absorbed the experiences of family and neighborhood life, observed the adults around them, tried to make sense of spoken and unspoken rules, and created their own understandings of place. For some children, a sense of cultural identity instilled in their families was further nurtured through ethnic neighborhood ties. Others witnessed and negotiated ethnic differences in their families and neighborhoods.



“This was my First Communion picture in front of the statue of St. Helena at St. Helena’s Church in Meaderville,” recalled Andrea Ciabattari McCormick. Pictured from left are Ernestine Sheehan, Andrea Ciabattari, Mary Ann Jones, Martin “Tino” Grosso (whose father ran the Aro Café), Jerry Brown, and Danny Horgan. Father James Gannon was St. Helena’s pastor and performed the Mass that day, October 25, 1959.

Bessie Toy Sherman came to the United States from England in July 1895. She recalled that “the day we landed in New York City was very exciting for me, for on that July nineteenth, I celebrated my ninth birthday.” Bessie’s father had come to Butte first and rented a house in Centerville, a neighborhood north of Uptown Butte and surrounded by the Mountain Con, Mountain View, Diamond, Moonlight, Raven, and Buffalo mines. The clapboard houses of Centerville appeared to cling to the hillside. In the early 1900s, the residents were largely Irish and Cornish immigrants. According to Bessie, “We came directly to him from New York, and the first thing I wanted to know was where I could go to pick some flowers. I had brought my flower basket with me. My dad was sorry to tell me there were no flowers growing wild anywhere. I soon found out that there wasn’t even a blade of grass to be seen.”¹³

Toxic fumes from Butte’s numerous smelters had left Butte largely barren of natural beauty, but Bessie adjusted readily to her new home: “In Centerville I attended the Trinity Methodist Church and was enrolled in the Blaine School. The big attraction for me in Centerville was the cable car, which went

from town, through Centerville, to Walkerville. I managed to get to Main Street to see it at every possible opportunity. Another fun thing that I remember is when several of us would run over to Pat Mullen's boardinghouse and stop at the window of the cook's kitchen. He would always hand us some biscuits, and we would thank him and run off delighted."¹⁴

After Bessie's family had lived in Centerville for a year, her father got a job at the Leonard Mine, and they moved to Meaderville. Meaderville was home to Italian markets, restaurants, and bars, and, for many years, wide-open gambling. It was also home to mines, mine dumps, and smelter operations, which residents referred to as "stink pots."¹⁵ Smelter smoke left a dense cloud over the neighborhood and took its toll on residents' health as well. According to Butte writer William A. Burke, "In winter mothers would have to take their kids to school and call for them again comin' home, for they would never find their way along in the smoke. They would wrap big shawls and 'fascinators' around the kids' heads, so they wouldn't inhale that sulfur. There wasn't a blade of grass or a tree in the town that the smoke didn't kill. The old-timers had to be hardy devils to stand it all, and at that half the town was barking their lungs out with the asthma."¹⁶

But Bessie was undeterred: "We liked it there. I was very happy because at the back of our house on Main Street there was a creek of clear water in which we could wade in the summer and go ice-skating in the winter. The tunnel mountain on the East Ridge was covered with sunflowers in the summer, and we called it our Sunflower Mountain. Now I could pick flowers and see grass."¹⁷

Marie Butori also grew up in Meaderville and shared Bessie's love for the neighborhood.

The Italians lived in Meaderville, and you knew everybody and everybody knew you. And in North Meaderville the English people settled, and they were really nice people. They were the ones that taught us how to make the pasties, especially Mrs. Pierce. She was a great person during that time, and she made pasties, and she worked on the elections, and we all got to know her.

Up above North Meaderville was the McQueen Addition, and the Croatians and the Yugoslavians and Austrians lived up there. And so we heard about all the different cultures, and we learned to get all the different food from the different cultures in this area and in Meaderville. The Irish lived up in Dublin Gulch, and they were a very different part of town than we were, and they usually just made stew and potatoes. People

didn't have any money and all the things we have today, and it was really, really hard living, but everybody was satisfied.¹⁸

Meaderville was settled primarily by immigrants from central and northern Italy. Many families raised pigs, chickens, and rabbits and cultivated bountiful vegetable gardens alongside their modest homes. Single-family homes were intermingled with boardinghouses noted for their fine cuisine and home-style hospitality. Homemade wine was a mealtime staple. The Ciabattari and Son Meaderville Grocery, Meaderville Mercantile, Sconfienza's Meaderville Bakery, and Guidi Brothers grocery and meat market kept residents supplied with the familiar flavors of Italy.¹⁹ St. Helena's Church served the neighborhood's many Catholic families.

Meaderville's institutions made an impression on young Marie.

There were the Guidi brothers, and they were really Italian, and . . . they had *salcina*. It was some kind of fish. They salted it, and they spread it out, and you could only get it from them. It was just like the shape of a fish and really hard, and you'd salt it. My mom used to boil it and cook it, and it was really good. And they made thick, thick blood sausage. It had raisins in it and a lot of stuff in it, and it was big like that [hands about six inches apart]. It was called blood sausage, and you cut it. Mmm, it was good. They were the only ones who really made it at that time. They had everything. They had real

Italian olives, you know, big ones—kind of shriveled, tasted really good. There were two brothers [Dominic and Alfredo], and Alfredo used to come around and get the orders, so he was at our house every Saturday. He was part of the family.

Most of the people there were Catholic, and so we had the Catholic church, St. Helena's, and the choir. We had Pochie, Pochanelli was his name. He was a singer. He had lost a leg in the mines, and so he'd climb up those steep steps with the stump and his other leg, and he would sing at the Masses every Sunday. He had a beautiful voice. . . . When we didn't have anybody to play the piano, Mrs. Cooney, who lived in McQueen with the Austrians, would come down

PASTIES

Have you ever eaten pasties? They're a half of a pie plate, and you cut out a round piece of pie crust, and you put in onions and potatoes and meat. Some put turnips in. You get them half full, and then you turn it over and make a nice little crimped edge and cut little slits in the top. When you were all ready, you put a little water in there so that you had sort of a gravy forming inside. That was a very famous thing for the miners because they were just the right size to fill the main part of their lunch pail.

—Elinore Sterrett Shields Penrose²⁰

and play the organ for us in our church so we could have Mass. People were devout Catholics.²¹

St. Helena's Church in Meaderville became identified as Butte's Italian parish. While the church contributed to a sense of belonging among the city's Italian Catholics, it also caused confusion at times for children growing up in Italian families outside Meaderville. For example, Bernice Favilla Maki grew up in an Italian family in McQueen, an ethnically mixed neighborhood adjacent to Meaderville. As Bernice recalled, "It was really puzzling for me as a child growing up. I could not understand why as a kid I had to go to St. Helena's in Meaderville when Holy Savior Church was only a block away from my house in McQueen. It was only later on did I realize why as an Italian I had to go to St. Helena's rather than Holy Savior, because it was the proper thing to do."²²

Lucille Martinesso Sheehan was also a Meaderville girl. Her parents emigrated from Italy in 1906, making their way straight to Butte, where her father went to work in the mines. As with many families of Meaderville, mining culture mixed readily with Italian culture in the Martinesso home. Her father made wine each fall, storing it in the dirt cellar of their home. She grew up with wine as a part of mealtimes, preferring a glass of wine and water to milk with her supper. Her parents were also avid gardeners, and they maintained a small subsistence farm at the family home. Despite Butte's reputation as an inhospitable place for crops, the Martinesso garden flourished. The home's south-facing windows were ideal for tomatoes and a year-round supply of herbs. The family also raised rabbits. Lucille's mother worked magic in the kitchen with her culinary talents.

Mother was a marvelous cook. A main dish was polenta—polenta and chicken. Then you'd have like a cacciatore chicken and mushrooms, and then you'd have all that gravy on it. Oh, it's so good. . . . The Italians really celebrate your feast day rather than different holidays. Mine is St. Lucy, and she is the patron saint of the eyes. Whatever I'd like, Mom would make it. We'd have a nice dinner, and, oh, it was so festive, really wonderful. And Mom was such a good cook. Most Italians were. They'd use a lot of tomatoes and lots of spices.²³



Lucille Martinesso Sheehan (left) and friend Columbine "Bina" Fontana Mazzola, Meaderville, circa 1925

Lucille's father died at age fifty as a result of miner's consumption. Her mother used her culinary skills to help support the family. As Lucille recalled, some of Meaderville's fine Italian cooks would serve meals in their homes to paying guests. For example, Pete and Clem Madlena began running an eatery out of their home in the 1920s, featuring home-cooked chicken, ravioli, and spaghetti.²⁴

A lot of people, they would serve these dinners in the home, the Italian dinners. Oh, and they were really good. . . . And people, like some of the ACM people, would call and make a reservation. Con Kelley would come to Mrs. Madlena's for dinner. And there would be, oh, say about fifteen, twenty people, and they'd have a regular Italian dinner. It was catered in their home. It was really nice. My mother used to help Mrs. Madlena. She was our neighbor, and she did a lot of that.²⁵

Tom Holter's grandfather and later his uncle ran Ciabattari and Son Meaderville Grocery, where Tom worked as a boy. One of the perks of the job was picking up bread orders from the Meaderville Bakery.

Meaderville Bakery made the best bread and breadsticks. A lot of times customers would order the bread and breadsticks through my uncle, and on his deliveries he'd go to the Meaderville Bakery. Sometimes I was with him or my aunt would send me down there to pick up the orders that they were going to deliver. They probably gave it to him for a lower price, so he'd make a cent or two on it. I was always glad to go down if [Mr. Sconfienza] wasn't there. He was a crabby old bugger. If he wasn't there and I'd go down there, his wife always gave me a little bit of a treat. She couldn't do it when he was there. I tried to time myself if she was there, and I'd try to go down there when he wasn't there. She'd give me maybe a little piece of cheese and salami and a breadstick, something like that. . . . I also remember the Guidi Brothers sausage and salami. For the longest time when I was a little kid, they had Guidi Brothers sausage and salami. I always thought that was their names. Sausage and Salami. And they made sausage and salami that were, oh, unbelievable.²⁶

Tom was born in Meaderville but grew up in McQueen. Tom remembered both the ethnic ties and the tensions among Butte residents and the labels marking identity and difference.

Well, see now, in McQueen, McQueen was a lot of Austrians. Bohunks. We had names for everybody. We were the wops, and they were the bohunks, and, of course, Meaderville was mostly Italians. McQueen was mostly Austrian. And East Butte was kind of a separation. Well, my wife's family lived in East Butte. Her dad was Austrian, and her mother was Irish. Now, can you imagine in 1953 an Italian kid from McQueen going with an Irish girl? Can you imagine that Irish family? I wasn't really accepted too much when we first started going together.²⁷

Ethnic identity and difference were only part of the story in Butte. Nicknames were also part of local culture, and once attached in childhood, they stuck throughout a lifetime. The stories behind the nicknames might be lost, but the names endured.

There was a guy—we called him Temporary Pete—and his mother made wine. We'd get wine from Temporary Pete's mother. I don't know how he ever got that name. Like I say, my uncle's name was Sousa, and then there was Fatty, that was his nickname, Fatty Maffei. And then Gianino, his name was Sparky, and his brother was Babe. They had names like that in Meaderville. And in Meaderville everybody has names—I can name names—I was Bull, and there was Boo, Jibby Eyes, Bones, Baffer, King, Oly, Lefty, Legs, Greek, Chip, Pal, Spike. I only know them by these names. Spike Pelletier, he married my wife's sister. And his brother was The Duck. I still call him The Duck. That's still how he writes it when he writes me Christmas cards—The Duck. That's how it was.²⁸

Ann Pentilla grew up in the Boulevard area on South Montana Street, which was home to many southern European immigrants, particularly Croatians. Her parents were Croatian. They had immigrated from Yugoslavia and changed their last name in the process, fearing prejudice against people with names ending in "ich." Hers was a tight-knit community "where everyone helped one another." Ann had fond memories of wedding anniversary celebrations in which neighbors would get together, go house to house collecting money,



Andrea Ciabattari from McQueen-Meaderville, 1955

and throw a party for the couple. Children were always part of the festivities that included dinner and dancing into the night.²⁹

Like many in her neighborhood, Ann's family had a big vegetable garden, a smokehouse, and a root cellar where they put away provisions for the winter.

In the wintertime, our dad used to get all set. We used to buy maybe twenty sacks of spuds. And then he would make his own sauerkraut—about two or three fifty-gallon barrels. Sometimes we'd raise a pig and then cure it and smoke it. . . . My dad used to go to the Metropolitan Market, and he'd buy a whole hog for about fifteen dollars. He would cut the meat in pieces and put it in a brine. We'd hang the meat on hooks out on the clothesline and have it dried. Then he'd smoke it. He had a certain kind of wood he used for the smoking, and he had a real huge smokehouse. That would be our food for the winter—sauerkraut and smoked meat. We had a basement that was all dirt. It was real damp down there. We used to have to stamp down the sauerkraut in the barrels with our feet, stamp it until all the juice came out. It would have to be solid. If not, it would get mushy and spoil. It would keep all winter. They used to do that with turnips, too, if they made wine. They would take what was left of the grapes, after the wine, mix that with whole turnips, and put it in a barrel, and that would sour. They had a certain kind of cutter that you used to cut it. It looked just like spaghetti when you cut it. Oh, it was the best tasting stuff.³⁰

While smokehouses and sausage making were familiar parts of family life for some children, others grew up with a curiosity about the social practices of their neighbors. Vadis Stratton spent her childhood on Walnut Street in the Race Track neighborhood, where, as she described, "there were a lot of Austrians." Vadis was not exposed to a strong sense of ethnicity and religion in her family, and she loved being part of neighbors' activities. She was both drawn to and, at times, repelled by the sights, sounds, and smells in her neighborhood.

They used to have big Austrian weddings, and we were invited to the weddings. And they had the best fried chicken and homemade *povatica*. I just loved that. The neighbors next door, in the fall, would buy a couple of pigs, and they had this big framework, and they'd hoist the pigs up on there, and they'd

stick 'em in the throat, and the women would catch the blood. They had to stir it all the time. They'd make blood sausage. And I used to watch them. I really never got over it. I was fascinated by it. I had to see everything. But I don't like to see things killed.³¹

Butte's East Side may have been the city's most ethnically diverse neighborhood.³² Grant School, Sacred Heart Parish and School, and the East Side Neighborhood House were community institutions. Some described it as a tough neighborhood where children grew up learning to defend themselves or run fast. Others remembered it as a neighborhood infused with a spirit of cooperation forged from struggle.³³ Lula Martinez grew up on Butte's East Side. Her family was Mexican, and her parents had migrated north from Texas following her father's work building the railroad.

When they finished on the railroad, they finished somewhere close to Butte, so they stayed here, and he went to work in a mine. But he didn't work a year before he was killed in a mine. My mother had five children when he got killed, . . . so she stayed. But my mother couldn't read or write English. She was only Spanish. She remarried in a year, another Mexican from Mexico who couldn't read or write English, and had more family. Then he died from the result of the mine also. She stayed, raised her children here. I suppose one of the reasons why she stayed was because of the fact that she couldn't move. With eleven children, you don't. . . .

[In our neighborhood] we were surrounded by different nationalities. We had Vankoviches and Joseviches and Biviches, and we had Serbians, and we had Chinese. We had *italianos*, *españolas*, and Mexican people. We had the whole United Nations around on the East Side.³⁴

John Mazzola grew up on Butte's East Side as well. He was the fourth of five children, born at home on East Park Street. John's father emigrated from Italy at the age of ten. An uncle helped his father get as far as St. Louis, and then his father went to work as a water boy on the railroad, making his way over the years to Livingston, Montana. Once in Livingston, he learned of the mines and the possibility of better wages in Butte and decided to try his luck. There he met John's mother, one of fifteen children of an Italian immigrant family. John's maternal grandparents ran a boardinghouse on East Park Street.

John's was one of a handful of Italian families who lived on the East Side, and John grew up with a keen understanding of the cultural geography surrounding him.

Up above us there was a place called Dublin Gulch, where people of Irish descent lived. West of Dublin Gulch was a place called Hub Addition—mostly English; then Centerville, mostly Irish; then up here was Finntown—Scandinavians mixed up with a few Chinese, a few blacks, Armenians, Turks, Chinese, Serbs, and the other side of the Serbs. They all spoke the same language, but they didn't like each other—the Serbs and on the other side the Croats. The Croats were Catholic, and the Serbs were Serbian Orthodox. They spoke the same language, cooked the same food, everything. In the Old Country, they didn't like each other, but here they did. They got along wonderful. Down south of here was a place they called Parrot Flats that was a mixture of everything, too.³⁵

After his grandfather died, John's grandmother lived next door to John's family, and John often served as her guide and interpreter in Uptown Butte.



In Butte single men often lived in boardinghouses, which were frequently run by the widows of men killed in mining accidents. This boardinghouse pictured circa 1900 is a railroad section house whose residents included children and pets.

My grandmother couldn't speak English. She came here as a young girl with her husband, had all of her kids here in this country. She could speak four or five European languages, but she couldn't speak English. When I was a kid, I used to take her Uptown to go shopping, and she would tell me what she wanted. She pointed at the [merchandise], like peaches, spinach over here, string beans over here. That was the way she did things.³⁶

John's grandmother passed along a love of music to his mother. His mother was a strong woman, full of spirit, who loved to sing grand opera. His grandmother worked hard to instill that love of opera in John as well.

My mother could play a little bit of everything. . . . We had a bunch of old, beat-up instruments. In our house, we had a mandolin, a banjo, a guitar, and a thing they called a xylophone. They'd get together, the older folks, my mother and aunts and uncles and all that. They'd all sing and play. My grandmother lived right next door to us, and when all the kids were out playing marbles and having fun, once a week we had to go to her house and listen to Italian opera. I hated it, but I thank God that she taught me that because I love it now. She sold me to it. I was the smallest of the boys, and I'd have to roll the Victrola, you know, wind it, and then she'd go through the *mutetto*, they called it in Italian, the pantomime. . . . We'd go over to listen to opera, and she'd make some kind of little cookies, and we'd have tea. I'll never forget, when I went in the army, in 1943, big cities would have opera, and we'd go to town, and GIs could go to the opera free. I would go and take my buddies with me, and I'd do all the interpreting. I'd sit there and tell them all about the opera, and they loved it. I knew about it, that was part of my culture, part of raising kids.³⁷

Although he learned the fundamentals of opera, John only learned bits and pieces of Italian from his grandmother. His father wanted the children to be "all American," and that meant English speaking. At the same time, John's father kept Italian traditions alive. Despite the challenges posed by the Pittsmond Smelter, which left its clouds of toxic fumes over the neighborhood, John's father kept a vegetable garden and grew flowers for his mother. His mother would buy two or three lugs of peaches each summer for canning, and every fall his parents would buy grapes to make wine.

Most of the people on the East Side made their own wine. You could buy a ton of grapes for fifty dollars. And, there again, they'd bring them to your door. The railroad would bring them in, and they would deliver them to your door in twenty-pound lugs. Concord grapes—they made a wine they called “dago red,” and it was good wine. Today's wine is full of chemicals and stuff.

We'd have wine on the table, a little pitcher of wine. My dad would have a glass of wine, my mother would have a glass of wine, my older brother would have a glass of wine. I could have one if I wanted. My friends would come and eat with us sometimes, and, boy, they loved it. Then we'd save all of the mash from the wine, and some of these older people, Croats, they'd come by, and we'd give it to them, and they'd make what they called grappo [a liquor distilled from muscatel grapes].³⁸

John attended Grant School and Holy Savior Church. He recalled the close ties among the children of his ethnically diverse neighborhood.

[We] got along very well. Later on when I was a little older, they started football leagues. They had Hub Addition, Englewood, McQueen Addition, Meaderville, and they had baseball games and football games. They got along good. We had block fights, too, you know. We'd meet the kids from Dublin Gulch and fight with them. [We'd have] fistfights. But there was no animosity. Nobody kicked anybody or anything like that. We were clean fighters.³⁹

Through street games, school activities, and sports leagues, groups of youngsters forged enduring bonds of friendship. As John described, youth “gangs” might defend neighborhood turf, but they also employed basic rules of respect.⁴⁰

Butte experienced a significant wave of Finnish immigration in the early 1900s, and Finns established their own enclave, Finntown, just east of the central business district along East Broadway and East Park streets. Maki's Grocery Store was a local institution, and many Finntown families weathered the strikes and the Great Depression thanks to the willingness of Alex Maki to sell groceries on credit. Ray Wayrenen grew up in Finntown and described the neighborhood: “The Finns had their boardinghouses: the Broadway, Tuomala's on East Granite, Kingston House, Central House on East Broadway,



Finntown and the Neversweat Mine, 1939

Suominen's on Covert, and the Clarence on East Park. There were also the saunas. The most notable was Isa Matti [Father Matt's] on Faucett Street. The Finns had the Finn Hall in the 300 block of North Wyoming and Finn Swede Hall on East Galena. There were dances and plays and programs there.”⁴¹

As a child, Ray made regular trips to the Broadway Bar to fetch a bucket of beer for his father.

My father was a miner, but he wasn't much to spend time in the saloons. He enjoyed a few glasses of beer at home when he returned from work, so he used to give me his miner's bucket—which was called a pie can—and twenty-five cents to go across the street to the Broadway to get a “bucket of beer.” Now, the Broadway at that time was run by a big guy (over six feet and 250 pounds) by the name of Victor Kontola, so he was called Condo Vic. Anyway, I'd come in with Pa's bucket and a quarter, and Vic would say to me—regardless of how busy he was, and the Broadway was always busy—“Let's arm wrestle to see who buys the bucket of beer.” So, here I am in my early teens—talk about selling beer to juveniles—I'd say,

“Okay.” I’d have to stand on the bar rail to do my best arm wrestling while everyone is watching me take on big Condo Vic arm wrestling. Naturally, Condo Vic would win. But every once in a while, he’d let me win, so he’d say to me, “You won. You get the old man’s beer. What ya gonna do with da twenty-five cents?” This, of course, was like a kickback. So, what do I do with the quarter? I buy a package of gum, a candy bar, and put fifteen cents in my pocket.⁴²

Ray’s childhood memories were also marked by the enduring presence of militia that kept miners under surveillance over extended periods of time in the 1910s and 1920s.

Our fathers were able to work in the mines when the Anaconda Company wanted them. Sometimes Anaconda closed the mines and had the National Guard protect their property. They even had machine guns. I remember one time in 1919 or 1920 when a Finn fellow came running off the hill on East Broadway with blood running down his neck from a bullet wound. During World War I, soldiers were quartered in the “Big Ship” [boardinghouse] in the 200 block of East Broadway. I remember the old barracks behind the Moonlight Mine. Then later the barracks were built on the north side of the 800 block of East Broadway, and soldiers moved there.⁴³

John Onkalo also grew up in Finntown when it was “teeming with people.”

It seemed like all families had kids. There were kids all over. In fact, the houses were almost skin to skin, and, boy, there was kids all over in the neighborhood. You knew everybody, and you knew who lived here and who lived there. If you wanted to see somebody, it wasn’t like now. . . . In those days, if you wanted to see somebody, you’d go in front of his house and you’d call him. Either he or somebody would open the door and answer you. There sure was a lot of kids. Kids all over the place.⁴⁴

Aili Goldberg’s father, a Finnish immigrant, had died in a mining accident in Michigan when Aili, the youngest of three children, was three months old. Her mother could not support the family on the meager widow’s benefit from the Michigan mines. She moved her children to Butte in the hopes of a better future and settled in Finntown. Aili’s mother began cooking at the Clarence boardinghouse on the

corner of East Park and Ohio streets, and the family lived in a rooming house across the street. Aili recalled:

It was very interesting living on the East Side. There wasn't a blade of grass there. Nobody had a piece of lawn or anything. You just lived with the old mine dumps for a backyard up there. . . . Mother cooked all the time. And wherever Mother worked, why, we would have our meals there, because that's one thing—she wanted to be sure that we had a hot meal, being she was gone all day. Now, the Clarence boardinghouse . . . it also had a rooming house. It had a barbershop, and it had a bar all in this one building. And that's true with some other boardinghouses, too. [With others] the rooms were directly across the street. I know of four boardinghouses that had rooms right upstairs.

. . . The Finnish boardinghouses all served the men that would come off shift at two o'clock [in the morning]. Now, they were the only boardinghouses that fed the men on the two o'clock shift coming off. They could come in and have a lunch before they went to bed. The Belmont House was run by Finnish people. Their clientele was some Finnish but kind of mixed. There was Irish, and there was Serbians, and there was English, and there was a little bit of everything. The East Side was predominantly Finnish, Irish, and Serbian. . . . Broadway was on the Mannheim [trolley] Line, and they said it was like a fish because it had Finns on both sides.

We ate with Mrs. Jackson in the Belmont House, which was right across the street from the Silver Lake. Mrs. Jackson was very good-hearted. She wanted us to eat our meals there, and there was no charge. And this is the way most of them were. . . . It was family style. Your breakfast was short-order, just like anything else. You ordered anything you want. But your noon meal, it was potatoes, and it would have stew. There was always one fried meat at noontime. But us children never ate at the table with the men. There was a little table on the side, and we would always sit there. And we always managed to come either before their busy time or after it had kind of slowed up. When we were smaller, we didn't want to be underfoot. . . . Lots of mothers worked, and a lot of women had their children [eat at the boardinghouses]. I liked the atmosphere of a boardinghouse. Guess it was different for a girl, maybe, because the men were very generous, and I was little, and it would be payday, and it was always a quarter or

it was fifty cents. And come the holidays they always had a little package for you. . . . Sunday, men were dressed up in their suits and white shirts, and they sat outside talking, reading the papers, and stuff.

At Riipi's [boardinghouse] Sunday was a big thing. Your Sunday dinner was quite a specialty at Riipi's. We had everybody. Dr. Crouse was one of our very best customers on a Sunday. It wouldn't be slumming because there was no slumming done there, but we had a cross-section of people. There were those that was wealthy, and yet they really did put out a real fancy dinner. . . . Chicken would always be, and there was always all you wanted to eat. And there was mashed potatoes, and there was roast, and there was your ice cream and your cake and fruit, and all the milk you wanted and all the buttermilk you wanted, and all the bread and the butter.⁴⁵

Aili enjoyed the youth activities and entertainment offered through the Finnish Hall, located near her home. The Hall was also a favorite spot of members of the Industrial Workers of the World labor union, who provided Aili with some early political education.

We had what we called Finnish Hall, which was a cross-section again of Finnish people. You either belonged to a church or you belonged to this group of people. And we always called them Wobblies, my mother did. They were IWW, Industrial Workers of the World. They would have big doings always for Christmas. There would always be a Christmas play for children and a dance afterwards, and then there were presents for all the children. Mother never approved of it too much. . . . She'd let us go to the plays because all the plays were in Finnish. . . . The one I remember best of all was the show of the Volga Boatmen. . . . You know, there's always been such a conflict with the Finnish and the Russians. It was actually about the Russians. They were the "Reds." Mother didn't think it was something we should go to, but it was very well put on, and the actors, I thought, were very, very good. As a child, I thought it was really quite wonderful. It was where the lower-class people were almost like slaves. They had little or nothing. They were being domineered by the Russian people. [The plays] would invariably be political. Oh, I saw a few, I guess, that were kind of, maybe, a little bit of a love story, but I think in the background always there was this political con-

flict. . . . I would say the majority of the [Finnish] people were Wobbly supporters. The Finnish Hall was very socialistic. . . . My brother called them the Wobblies. . . . He didn't like it either. The only thing was they accepted us kids fine because there was no father on our part to interfere with anything or what their feelings were. Mother didn't approve, and they knew Mother didn't approve but didn't care.⁴⁶

Thelma Karki Point Hjelvik was born to Finnish immigrant parents in Butte and grew up in the shadow of the Finnish Hall. Her parents, she recalled, "were caretakers of the old Finnish Hall for a short period of time. . . . This hall was the center of Finnish culture and entertainment. There was a dance floor and a stage. Numerous plays were put on, and the men had a gymnastics team. Dressed in white trousers, undershirts, and red sashes, they performed acrobatics, made pyramids, etc. There were no babysitters in those days. The children came to the dances and when they got sleepy would lie down on the chairs along the wall among the coats of the dancers."⁴⁷

Butte's large Irish community dominated much of the Butte Hill. Dublin Gulch, Corktown, and the Hungry Hill comprised tight-knit Irish neighborhoods that extended north and east of Uptown Butte and along Anaconda Road. Children grew up steeped in Irish culture, politics, and history. St. Mary's Parish, established in 1903, was a centerpiece of these Irish neighborhoods and the second home to many mining families. On Sunday mornings, the vestibule of the church would be filled with miners' lunch-buckets.⁴⁸ St. Mary's School offered Gaelic language and Irish history classes. Children kept up the practices of old Irish traditions and participated in the creation of new ones. As Vince Dowling remembered, on St. Stephen's Day, the day after Christmas, "Kids in the neighborhood would form a group and go sing songs at all the homes in the area. It was a sign of good luck if we came to your home and sang the 'wren bird song.' The neighbors always appreciated our efforts and would give us nickels and dimes."⁴⁹ At Easter children showed their solidarity to the cause of Irish independence by wearing Easter lilies. As Father Sarsfield O'Sullivan recalled, "All the kids in the neighborhood went to church the day after Easter wearing a cardboard Easter lily. . . . The lily was a tribute to the 1916 Easter Rebellion in Ireland. It was the way the Butte Irish showed their appreciation for the efforts of the rebels of 1916."⁵⁰

Catherine Hoy grew up in an Irish Catholic home on Anaconda Road with her parents, siblings, and grandmother. Her Irish grandmother was a great storyteller.



Irish children kept up the ethnic traditions of their parents. The 1927 Boys Central High School annual included this photograph of Irish step dancers (top, left to right) W. McCarthy, A. Groo, D. Sullivan, T. Lally, R. Sullivan, and C. Slatt, and (bottom) J. Church, W. McGowan, A. Slatt, R. Grace, and G. Norton.

This aged grandmother of mine, she would gather most of the kids from around the neighborhood. They'd come in, and she'd tell them ghost stories about the banshees and the Little People and all that. She'd sit there for hours and tell us all those stories. Then the kids were too scared to go home, so my mother and my oldest brother would have to take the kids home. . . . Well, then the kids would have nightmares during the night.⁵¹

John Sheehy grew up in the embrace of an Irish immigrant family and community on Butte's north side.

We lived about a block from the Original Mine, two blocks from the Stewart Mine, and to the west about a quarter of a mile from the Anselmo. At that time, in those years, all that area was fully populated and crowded with houses and people.

My father and mother both came from Ireland. My father came from County Kerry and my mother from County Cork. They met in Butte, where my father was miner and mother, I think, was a bucket girl. My father lived in a boardinghouse

run by a Mrs. O'Neil. I am told that Mrs. O'Neil encouraged the romance that brought them together.

John's family home was a hub of Irish family connection and culture.

My earliest memories are of my father and mother going back and forth among the Irish families, visiting each other and mostly talking about the Old Country. . . . At our house at night, it was a great gathering place for women, Irish women. They'd come in their shawls. They always wore shawls. They'd sit in the kitchen around the fire—we didn't have gas at that time [and] people burned coal and wood—and just talk about the Old Country. They were great for reciting poetry. There was a little niche behind our kitchen stove where [my brother Ed] could kind of hide himself and listen to the old folks. And from that he learned all kinds of Irish poems. From the top to the bottom, he could recite them. In his later years, he always remembered those poems.

And there were always letters from Ireland. They would be referred to and talked about. We used to receive what they would call "letters edged in black." That announced from Ireland the death of somebody back there to the family. . . . My father received the news of the death of his mother some time in the 1930s. And news came as a letter edged in black, so they knew as soon as they saw the letter that there had been a death in the Old Country, as they called it.⁵²

Together these families built a strong community, weathered hardship, and found reasons to celebrate. Jule Harrington McHugh was born in Dublin Gulch in 1906, the eighth of the ten children of Mary and Pat Harrington. Her family home was a hub of social life.

All the "greenhorns" from Ireland would come, and almost every night was like a "shindig." Jim Rafter would play jigs and reels on his fiddle, and they would have square dances. Belle and Eva were great dancers. They would get a bucket of beer for the men and a bottle of Iron Brew for the women. It was like Coke or root beer. And the house would be jumping with a good time. . . . Growing up in the Gulch in my time . . . was memorable. . . . God knows, it wasn't beautiful, surrounded by the mines, . . . but we had something else. We had neighbors who were all caring for each other. We didn't have money. Somehow it didn't seem like we ever needed it in the Gulch.

There were so many things—we always had something to do—but we had time, and our families could always dump a shift to go to a friend’s funeral.⁵³

A strong sense of community prevailed in Dublin Gulch, even as the neighborhood diminished in size in the post–World War II years.

Danette Harrington and her brother grew up in the same Dublin Gulch home where her father and his ten brothers and sisters were raised.



Danette Harrington in her Dublin Gulch backyard, 1950

At one point, when my parents were young, there were over a hundred homes in Dublin Gulch. When I grew up, there were only eleven families left in the Gulch. It was like a family of eleven families. Everybody just went in and out of everyone’s home, and nobody had to knock. We all had telephones, but no one really used them. We knew everybody, and the kids were basically about the same age. The families spent a lot of time visiting. We all took vacations at the same time with the exception of one family. They used to go to Elkhorn, and the rest of us went to Pipestone [Hot Springs]. We all got the same cabins, and we all went to Pipestone at the same time.⁵⁴

Uptown Butte’s Irish community was also home to young Packey Buckley, who was born in a boardinghouse at 526 North Wyoming Street in 1914. He was one of six children, all born at home. Like many young Butte residents, he and his siblings grew up surrounded by an extended family of miners. As Packey remembered:

You had the Irish boarders that came from Ireland. They were told, “Don’t stop in America, go straight to Butte,” with a shipping tag on them: “Ship to Mary Buckley, 526 N. Wyoming.” . . . They weren’t boarders. They were just like family. I want to tell you that when my mother prepared supper and you and I were a boarder and something came out on the plate [and you didn’t eat it], she would ask, “Patrick or John, what was the matter with it?” And if you said that you just did not care for that, you never got it again. Just like a family, just like a family home.

There were seventeen rooms in the house with two men to each room, so that is thirty-four. I would say she had another fifteen on the outside [men who came just for meals], so

I would say [the boardinghouse served] in the vicinity of fifty miners. . . . Three meals a day if you slept in the house, and it was nine dollars a week. And if you stayed in another house and came for three meals and a bucket, it was seven dollars a week. . . . [My mother] would have people make beds, she would have people wash dishes, she would have people wait on tables, but nobody touched the stove, nobody. She did all the cooking.

In the seventeen rooms, there were one, two, three, four, five, six, seven rooms upstairs, and then downstairs there were two single beds in each room. My mother and Ellen slept down on the main floor where there was the kitchen, dining room, and front room and two bedrooms, and us boys slept in the basement. . . . My mother had to [start the boardinghouse]. . . . My father couldn't work. He had miner's con. He died when I was in the sixth grade.⁵⁵

Many Butte children, like Packey Buckley and Aili Goldberg, were raised in and around boardinghouses and grew up observing the habits of miners. Their family homes were 24-7 machines of cooking, cleaning, and feeding. Children sometimes slept in far-flung nooks and crannies as beds and bedrooms were precious commodities. Some recall boarders giving them an occasional gift or a tip for running an errand. Others report pilfering a bit of whiskey from a miner's private stash while he was on shift. The common memory, however, is of the respect with which boardinghouse residents treated women and children alike. For example, Collette Tarrant's grandmother ran the Hazel Block, a Finntown boardinghouse. As a little girl, Collette would walk to the boardinghouse to spend the day with her grandmother. The boardinghouse loomed large in her memory:

It was about four stories high. There had to be eighty or ninety rooms. In the Hazel Block, it was all single men. They were all what they called transit workers. They worked in the mines. When you would come into the Hazel Block, you would come up the stairs, and you would walk into a great big meeting room and card room. They had chairs set up along the walls and spittoons because they all chewed tobacco, so they had big brass spittoons. Then they had this great big card table at the end, and that's where the men would play cards. The basement



Vacationing at Pipestone Hot Springs in 1931 are (standing from left) Stella Lazarri Favero, Margaret Grosso, Mary Martinesso Ciabattari, Amelia Gross, and (seated) Violet Michelotti Botton.

is where they did the cooking, and they had the eating room where the men ate at long tables, probably like they had in the service. Over on the side, they had this long table where they put the bread, butter, sugar, cream, and the desserts. They would have cakes and pies. Oh, it was like walking into bakery. It was, well, for a little kid, it was like Christmas with all the cupcakes, cakes, pies, and cookies. I remember I used to go in and sit in the kitchen on a stool, and the cook used to let me sit there. They would have a great big copper pot, and they would be cooking stews, or they would be cooking potatoes, or they would be cooking spaghetti or whatever was for dinner that night.

I would go over and stay with my grandmother. Oh, I loved to run up those halls. I had a great imagination, like all kids. . . . I was a princess, and I was running away from the knight. When you go in and go up these stairs, there were these two swinging doors. And you come in, and there would be this great big room, and right along here would be all these chairs and rocking chairs where the miners would sit and gossip and talk. And I would go down the line, and, geez, I would get nickels and dimes, and, heck, I would walk out with two or three dollars.⁵⁶

By the early 1900s, Butte was home to a Jewish community of about five hundred people. They established an economic niche in Butte as jewelers, tailors, restaurant and grocery store owners, and clothing and furniture merchants. Henry Jacobs, a businessman and prominent member of the Jewish community, became Butte's first mayor. Writer Myron Brinig, the son of Jewish immigrants from Romania, grew up in Butte, the youngest of eight children. His father ran a men's clothing store on East Park Street, where Myron spent much of his childhood. Brinig drew on his memories of childhood in Butte and the hours spent in his father's shop in writing his first novel, *Singermann*:

The clothing stores of the Jewish merchants were on East Park Street. They caught customers with traps of words, and they were constantly dragging miners inside to sell them shoes, socks, suits of ribbed underwear, and maybe a suitcase to go away with. East Park was a beehive with its Jewish stores, its Greek restaurants, and its Irish saloons with swinging doors. . . . In his shop on South Montana Street, Rabbi Lachter sold kosher beef and butchered chickens on Saturday night. The room back of the shop was where he took the

chicken and slit its throat with a sharp-edged blade. Some said it was the same blade he used for circumcision—but they may have been talking for drama.⁵⁷

Dorothy Martin's family was part of Butte's Jewish community. Her maternal Grandfather Rosenstein and her Uncle Isador were both tailors. Her uncle started his own business in Butte when he was a mere fourteen years old. Dorothy's family also ran Rosenstein's Confectionary in Uptown Butte. After her grandparents died, Dorothy, her mother, and two uncles moved into the former rooming house located over the confectionary, and they converted it into their family home.

They remodeled it. It was great—Rosenstein's Confectionary, on Hamilton and Broadway. We each had our own room, and the bathroom was down at the end of the hall. And the kitchen. Then we had a living room and a great big dining room. A lot of people were upset that mother was moving me—I was an only child—up into the rough part of the city. . . . About the time we moved, they were breaking up the red-light district. I was in the first grade. There were not many children living in the business district. The Hamilton Block, across the street, was always filled. And, of course, some prostitutes started moving into the area. And that's what people objected to. And then there was a bar on the side street there. I can still hear "Roll Out the Barrels." They played it all night long, I think. I played on the street, right down on the sidewalk, a lot. Or in the store. And I had a dog. The dog was close to me. He was right there. When I first got him, he was so tiny I used to carry him in a cigar box. That was his name. We called him "Tiny." When I went away to college, he was still alive. He stayed in the store, and my uncle was just crazy about him and took care of him all the time. Somehow he got out on the street and was hit by a car and killed, so they wrote this big article in the paper about the tiniest dog. Everybody in Butte knew Tiny because I carried him in a box wherever I went.⁵⁸

In Sickness and Health

Many Butte children grew up under challenging circumstances. Parents often struggled to keep houses warm and children adequately fed and dressed during Butte's long, harsh winters. Toxic waste from the mines exacerbated the difficulties of keeping children healthy, and

many families lacked the resources for basic health care. They relied instead on health practices and home remedies passed down through their families. Betty Henderson's mother had a standard cure-all for any number of illnesses: "My mother would dry up some onions and make a poultice out of onions and eucalyptus, and then they'd make a bag out of a rag and pin it on you."⁵⁹

John Mazzola's mother would give the children hot wine when they showed symptoms of a cold or flu, then she would rub their chests with olive oil and turpentine. John remembered, "It would take the hide right off you, but it sure cured the cold."⁶⁰ Vadis Stratton's mother made her own cough syrup: "We had a wood stove, and my mother used to take a pie plate, cut an onion in half, put it face down, let it simmer on the back of the stove, and let it make a syrup. And then she'd put in a little sugar, and that was cough syrup. It was good tasting."⁶¹

In Ann Pentilla's household, children and adults had wine with meals. "That was more for health than to be drinking," Ann recalled. "We had whiskey, too. We drank whiskey in the morning and wine in the evening. . . . It kept you healthy." Ann's mother used a variety of home remedies when one of the children was ill.

For flu and cold, you put turpentine on your chest with some lard. Melt the lard and turpentine and put it on your chest—talk about burn. We used onion syrup for coughs. You chop the onion up and fry it, mix it with sugar and water, and make syrup of it. We used to boil wine and drink the wine, then crawl into bed. You'd sweat it out and be well the next day. Flaxseed was used to put on the outside of your throat for sore throats. It was boiled like a mush and placed on a cloth. It was supposed to be a poultice. It would draw out the soreness.

We used garlic in everything. In fact, my mother cooked a lot with garlic. My mother flavored everything with garlic. And now everybody uses it, but in those days just the Slavics and Italians used garlic. My mother made blood sausage and put a lot of garlic in it. And that would be our lunch. Well, when we'd go back to school after lunch, it would be pretty potent.⁶²

Children in a Hard-Working, Hard-Drinking Town

Many Butte children grew up with a strong sense of belonging shaped by the rhythms of mining, infused with cultural identity, and grounded in the familiar space of their neighborhoods. Children witnessed the

habits and rituals of adults as they negotiated work and family obligations. They also struggled to make sense of conflict and tensions that, at times, violated family safety, threatened friendships, and ruptured community relations. Hardships and hurts challenged the innocence of childhood, and children bore the burdens of conflict and violence.

For some children, payday at the mines produced a poignant and problematic pattern in family life as miners carried out the custom of cashing their paychecks at one of Butte's many bars. For decades, miners got their paychecks every Friday from the pay offices on the corner of Quartz and Main. Women might be there, too, hoping to secure their husbands' paychecks before they were cashed in a local bar. When those efforts failed, they might resort to sending one of their children into the bar to try to persuade Dad to hand over what money he had left.⁶³

Waldemar Kailaya was raised in Finntown, one of ten children of Jacob and Susanna Kaiyala, who had come to Butte from Finland by way of the mines in Michigan. Waldemar wrote in his memoir of childhood: "There were four Finnish saloons located around Finntown. Two were located on East Broadway and the other two on East Park St. These were a great impact on many families, my own among them. I always had to meet my father at the pay office on payday; otherwise he would stop at the saloon and lose his weekly pay. At one time, he lost his full month's wages when I was not there to meet him. That caused a great hardship for a large family like ours."⁶⁴

Bars acquired legendary status in Butte, with the culture of mining often described as virtually inseparable from the culture of drinking. Pints and shots at the end of a shift soothed the harshness of the work and fueled the camaraderie of the workers. Many children looked forward to payday and the chance to stop by the neighborhood bar. Miners were often in a generous mood, pop flowed as freely as beer, and kids traded pennies, nickels, and dimes for "pick candy." Many Butte youngsters grew up with a child's-eye view of bars and drinking as part and parcel of family and work life. As Laurie Ugrin described:

Every Friday night was payday. The miners would cash their paychecks and go to the bar. They bought a beer and got a shot for free. My dad would sometimes be coming home late on Fridays. He used to go out every Saturday night, too, but I don't think my mom minded. That was our time together—Mom and the kids. Dad spent Sunday afternoons at Charley Judd's New Deal Bar, and he was always home for supper. Sometimes after we left 5:00 Mass on Sunday we'd swing by the bar and pick him up if he hadn't left yet.⁶⁵

However, when labor-management conflict flared and the possibility of a strike or layoff loomed, tensions fueled drinking and vice versa in many homes. Bonnie Stefanic grew up in a mining family. Her father and several members of her extended family worked in the mines. Bonnie recalled the heated union discussions in her home among her father and uncles as they pieced together information, reported rumors of impending layoffs, and fueled one another's fears. Bonnie would take up her strategic spot in a corner of the dining room, out of view of her father and uncles in the living room and her mother and aunts in the kitchen.

They'd start to worry about layoffs, and there'd be more drinking, more arguments. I remember there'd been a strike threat about 1956 or '57, and that was when the Company brought the West Virginians in [as replacement workers]. Once that happened, then it was, "The Company is going to try and break our union. They aren't going to pay us what we deserve. They are going to try to get rid of us." There was the fear that they were going to lay off everybody and even shut the mines down for a couple of years, then bring in all of these people from outside who don't know any better to go through everything we did. Only we'll have lost our homes, our history, and all that stuff.

The idea was that this was their home, everything they'd worked for, from the union to Columbia Gardens, the baseball leagues, all of those things. The idea of moving was terrifying. There was so much fear that rotated around the threat of a strike. It caused all kinds of family problems. Domestic problems were common. The man would be scared and start drinking too much, and he would get violent. . . . At least in East Butte, it was common that the men drank heavily, and the women didn't hardly drink at all. The women were busy. They were working, and they were resentful and angry and scared. So when this stuff started coming down, what I remember is the women being real secretive, whispering a lot. The men would be in the front room and the women in the kitchen. They'd be working, and they'd visit in whispering tones. Even when they talked to us kids, it would be in a whispering tone. We had to be quiet. We couldn't irritate any of the men. It was like walking on eggshells, and it got worse and worse before the strikes. Then once the strike happened, it meant the men would be out of work, and that meant they drank all day long. There was no money. The woman was angry, and the guy was angry, and it was an ugly, violent cycle.⁶⁶

Some children faced the chaos of violence and alcoholism on the home front as the dangers and uncertainties of life took their toll on their parents. Aili Goldberg described her mother's reaction to seeing a co-worker at the boardinghouse with a black eye. "We stayed in a rooming house across the street. There was a Finnish lady, and Mother saw her, and Mother said, 'What did you do? Fall down the stairs? Or did you get pushed by a cow?' Well, you know, there were no cows here in Butte on the streets, but her husband had beat her. So, that was Mother's first experience, and she just couldn't believe it. Of course, drinking and stuff was quite wide open."⁶⁷

As John Sheehy recalled, families were poor, and miners' salaries did not go far. Too often, alcohol exacerbated those tough financial conditions.

Very few had bank accounts. They probably kept their money in a tobacco can. They'd cash their check and take the money home. And, hopefully, they didn't stop at a bar on the way. There was a lot of alcoholism. We knew that there were women in our neighborhood being beaten by their husbands. They didn't talk about it as a gossip sort of thing, but they were aware. And you could see it in the kids. They were different somehow. The kids themselves were affected in a sad way. I remember one family was particularly bad. Mr. C. would regularly beat his wife. He would come home drunk. There was a lot of alcoholism.⁶⁸

For the most part, violence was a painful subject that few people addressed directly when revisiting memories of childhood. The references were more oblique—a sense of awareness and concern rather than detailed depiction. On occasion, the trauma of violence in a child's life was thrust dramatically before the public eye, as happened in the case of young John Isakson. The March 30, 1923, *Butte Miner* story reported "Boy Cries as He Describes Death of Step-Father":

Early in the morning in the Daly-Shea undertaking parlors John Isakson, 15 year old step son of Nick Kumpula, gazed upon the dead body of his stepfather, and although the boy's lips trembled as he spoke, he answered all questions relative to the tragedy in a little house in the rear of 358 ½ East Granite Street that ended when he fired a shot that almost instantly killed his stepfather. His replies were given in a firm, steady voice, ending invariably with the explanation, "I shot him to save my mother and sister." . . . Suddenly he started to cry, and

between sobs he told his mother and sister that he was sorry his stepfather was dead. "I didn't mean to kill him," he finished. "I just wanted to take care of you."⁶⁹

According to the news account, young John had been awakened in the middle of the night by the sound of someone trying to break through the door of the family home. As John started toward the stairs to investigate, the door gave way. His stepfather barged in, shouting at John to keep back or he would kill them all. John heard his mother and eleven-year-old sister screaming as his stepfather charged toward the stairs, one hand behind his back. In a second's glance, John caught a glimpse of a knife blade in his stepfather's grip. John grabbed his .22 rifle and fired a shot as his stepfather charged for him, shouting, "That's only one shot, kid." Having spent the only bullet in the gun, John, in desperation, took the barrel, shoved it into Nick Kumpula's chest, and knocked him down the stairs, where he crumpled and lay still.⁷⁰

John's mother, Anna Kumpula, spoke words of comfort and grief in Finnish to her son as she tried to grasp the enormity of the situation. Finding her words, she told authorities of her husband's relentless violence and abuse in recent months. She had told him to leave, but he repeatedly returned, threatening her and the children and victimizing them with his violent rages. Neighbors corroborated her story and expressed their empathy for John and what they saw as his justifiable actions.⁷¹

For some children, violence was an unspoken part of family life, kept behind closed doors. Some families experienced outbursts of violence seemingly fueled by the stresses, uncertainties, and dangers of mining itself. And on occasion children bore witness to and the brunt of violence against neighbors as the tensions of strikes divided the community into "us" and "them."

"Us" and "Them": Negotiating Belonging and Difference

Butte children learned to negotiate the complexities of belonging and difference in their families, neighborhoods, and schools. Many miners' children grew up with a consciousness of class differences, aware of who were "in the same boat" and who lived in a different social and economic reality, relatively unaffected by the vagaries of mining. Some children of miners distinguished their families from the "high mucky mucks" or "big shots" of the mines, taking pride in their working-class neighborhoods. Others became more aware of class differences once they entered high school and encountered young people from other neighborhoods who sported new clothes, had access to cars, and had traveled beyond

Butte. Many people who grew up in mining families spoke of getting through hard times by counting on relatives, friends, and neighbors who understood and shared their hardships. As Catherine Hoy remembered about her childhood in Dublin Gulch and along Anaconda Road:

Everybody was pretty much the same sort of people and [had] the same way of living because they had a certain income, and they didn't go beyond it. They lived within their income. They didn't try to outdo one another. If you did, you got in trouble. The kids wouldn't associate. If they thought you were a little richer than they were, they wouldn't associate with you. They'd think, "What the heck, she's too rich for me."⁷²

Catherine was well aware that hers was a world apart from Butte's West Side, home to many of the city's more well-to-do families. "They knew their place and we knew ours. That's all there was to it." However, she held clear memories of the handful of mine bosses who lived on the Anaconda Company properties at the end of Anaconda Road.

It was nothing to see their big cars drive up. Their big limousines and stuff like that. I remember the first time they had an automobile go up and down Anaconda Road. . . . It was an open car. And us kids, we would walk down, I'd say, two or three miles to get a ride. We would walk down Anaconda Road for maybe two or three miles to ride up to his [the mine superintendent's] house, which was on the top of Anaconda Road. And we would ride up there in order to get the ride. And then we'd have to walk home. But there was from eight to ten kids in this open car at one time getting this ride up and down Anaconda Road.⁷³

While Catherine described class differences as simply "the way things were," she also justified "petty stealing" from the mines as one way kids dealt with those differences.

Well, you know, in order to get money for the Fourth of July . . . for the Gardens and stuff like that, we would go up to the mines and steal their copper. And we'd steal their iron, take the wheels off the little cars, little ore cars, and sell them. We got about seventy-five cents for a wheel. A junkman would come around about once a week, and he'd buy it up. Sometimes we'd have about five or six dollars worth of copper or wheels and so forth. There was always mischief we could get into. Not like

[vandalism]—it is not destruction or destroying property. We didn't do things like that. We did a lot of petty stealing.⁷⁴

However, the strife and struggles of economic hard times brought differences of “us” and “them” to the fore. Strikes were particularly charged periods that brought differences between union and Company sympathies to the surface in memorable ways. Children took cues from parents, teachers, friends, and schoolmates in learning to make sense of divisiveness. For example, Kay Antonetti grew up with strikes as a fact of life:

Well, I remember the strikes. My dad was good, you know. He and my mother were both very charismatic. And I remember one of my friends in my class when I was a freshman at Central—I am still a friend of hers now—her dad had an upper job in the ACM. So when they would go on strike, he stayed behind the fence and was a scab. And that strike, our freshman year, it was when they threw the pianos out the window. And I know my dad said, “You be nice to her. Her dad has a nice, important job, and if he doesn't do what he is doing, he would lose his job. They're nice people. . . . Don't you ever criticize anybody because you don't know what it's like to walk in their shoes.” I remember driving around on East Park by the houses where they'd thrown things through the window, and I remember it was a scary time.⁷⁵

The strikes of 1934 and 1946, in particular, stand out in childhood memories. John T. Shea vividly recalled the 1934 strike when the Company brought in scab laborers to work “behind the fence.” He and his friends headed to the mine yards, ready to fight the men who had taken over their fathers' jobs. “We used to practice our pitchin' arms throwing rocks at those scabs behind the fence. They'd walk to work with paper bags over their heads, and we'd run alongside to get a peek at their faces, but lots of 'em you could recognize just by their shoes.”⁷⁶

Some children found the division of “us” and “them” confounding, and they struggled to grasp their parent's hostility toward those who went “behind the fence” during a strike. Betty Matesich's childhood memory of the 1934 strike illustrated her confusion and hurt.

We lived right next to the Stewart Mine. And behind the fence were what we found out later were scabs. In my mind, they were very, very nice men. And they always gave us an orange and a Hershey bar and a bar of Palmolive soap. And

when my father came home, he said, "Where did you get the soap, Betty?" And I said, "These nice men gave it to me behind that fence at the mine." So, he put all the soap in a sack, and he said, "Now, I want you to throw this back at those men." And I threw the soap and cried.⁷⁷

Marie Butori grew up in a family of seven. Her father ran a gas station next to the family home. Marie remembered the violence of the 1946 strike that resulted in damage to homes of workers accused of being scabs. She vividly recalled her confusion of being caught in the middle when trying to do a good deed for her neighbor:

I got in trouble myself 'cause we lived right next door to the foreman and assistant foreman of the ACM, and they had big family houses there. We had a house and gas station next to them. So, Mrs. Hagen [wife of the foreman] one day said to me, "Marie, I don't have some stuff I need at the store so will you go?" So I went to the grocery store, and I brought her home some groceries, and my dad came home and said to my mother, "Your daughter is going to get herself killed if she doesn't knock it off." He said, "Do you know she went to the store for Mrs. Hagen?" And Mom said, "No," and I said, "Yes, and she gave me two dollars." It was hard to get two dollars, but I never went any more, I'm telling ya.⁷⁸

Some youngsters struggled to make sense of changing alliances as their fathers moved from union jobs to salaried positions as "Company men" who had to "stay behind the fence" and keep the pumps dewatering the mine operating during a strike. With the change in job came a shift in perceived "us" and "them" loyalties, and parents took measures to protect children from possible repercussions. As one youngster recalled:

When Dad knew there was going to be a strike, he'd put us on the train to . . . go and live with my grandmother until the strike was over because he would have to stay at the mine and not even come out. They ate, slept, and everything there until the strike was over. . . . It was dangerous. In those days, they weren't just being nice with picket lines. They were throwing rocks. And miners' homes, if they knew that the "Company men" were at the mine and their family was home alone, there was a lot of destruction done to people's houses and that kind of thing. So he would put us on the train so that we'd be gone, and he'd stay there until the strike was over.

When I was older and then things weren't quite so violent, in my teen years, we would just stay here, and my dad would just stay at the mines. And the people went without. I mean, sometimes they were on strike for nine months to a year and a half with no paychecks. And those were hard times for people. But I was always the "Company man's daughter," who, probably if I would've known what was going on a little better, I might've been a little more nervous.⁷⁹

Another woman described a painful grade-school memory when a teacher asked the class for a show of hands if their fathers were on strike. "My dad had just moved from union job to salaried job. I raised my hand. I was still identifying with my dad being on strike, even though now he had to cross the picket line. A boy in the class yelled at me, 'Your dad is a boss.' It was humiliating. I tried to defend myself, saying my dad was taking a lot of risks crossing the line and that my family was affected, too. The boy yelled back, 'Scab. He crossed the line. Scab.' It was mortifying."⁸⁰

Helen McGregor's father was employed as a veterinarian for the Anaconda Company. Up until the strike of 1946, no one said anything to her father regarding his status during a strike and his role in caring for the horses that worked underground. During long strikes, her father took the horses from the mines and out to pasture. But in the 1946 strike, she recalled, things were different. After that strike, children whose families were divided along labor-management lines would call each other names. The 1946 strike was also the first time that anything was said to Helen's father when he went on the Hill to work during the strike. Helen recalled, "He had known practically everyone. He used to take care of the widows' cows."⁸¹

Tom Holter recalled the tensions of the 1946 strike as well.

Our next door neighbor in McQueen, Phil Trythall—everybody in McQueen had a name, his was Greasy—he was a boss for the Anaconda Company. He walked out. He walked out. He didn't stay in for the strike. And he got blackballed. His son and I were really close friends. Young Phil. We were like a month and eighteen days apart. And I can remember his dad, he wouldn't stay in like most of the bosses. He got blackballed. And the guy who lived across the street from us, Hank Matule, he did the same thing. Hank, he moved. His daughter Marcella was in my class. I was sorry to see them move. She was beautiful. She was the prettiest girl in the class.⁸²

Sarah Massey was five years old at the start of the 1946 strike. Her father was a supervisor with responsibility for keeping the pumps going. Her family home was violently vandalized in the late night hours of Friday, April 12. In June 2011 Sarah wrote an account of that terrifying weekend, which she donated to the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives.

The first sign of trouble came in the middle of the night when a rock was thrown through our living-room window. My sister Ruth was awakened by the sound of the breaking glass. Ruth and I were sleeping in our upstairs bedroom; mother was asleep downstairs. Mother hollered for Ruth to come downstairs, bring Sarah, and don't turn on any light. I remember being awakened by sounds I did not understand. My mother was yelling. I heard glass breaking and the sound of rock hitting the side of our house. It was very dark, and I did not know where I was or what was happening. Ruth and I were on the floor behind the kitchen stove covered in a blanket. We were both crying. I was five years old; Ruth was fourteen.

Our dad was not home. He was a supervisor in the mines and had been told to stay at the mine during the strike to keep the pumps going so that the mines did not flood. Later I was told that the supervisors had to cross the picket lines to get into the mines, and this angered the union, which, in turn, led to widespread mob violence throughout the city and the vandalizing of more than a dozen homes.

When the angry crowd assaulted our house, our mother tried a number of times to get help from the police, and when she was finally able to talk to them on the phone, she pleaded with them to come to our house. Initially, they did not respond. I was told that the police finally did come to our house later that morning, but when they drove into the alley at the back of our house, the crowd ran around to the front. And when the police drove down the street in front of our house, the crowd ran to the alley. After driving back and forth several times and without being able to control the angry mob, the police told my mother to leave the house immediately. Then the police drove away, leaving my mother, Ruth, and me alone in the house.

I escaped the horror by being taken to our Uncle Ray and Aunt Adah Sims's home. Ruth, however, stayed in the house with Mother. I was told years later that Ruth was terrified—screaming at Mother to get out of the house.



As Sarah Massey's account of her and her sister's experiences attests, the violence that erupted during the 1946 strike took its toll on children.

Ruth thought that she and Mother were going to be killed. Saturday afternoon, after the police had once again driven away, Mother went to the front porch with a gun and fired it into the air, trying to scare the crowd, but the mob continued to advance on our home, throwing rocks, painting obscenities on the house, and trying to break into the house. Finally, early Saturday evening, April 13, the day before Palm Sunday, my mother and sister left the house and went to Uncle Ray and Aunt Adah's house.

The damage to our house was unbelievable. Dishes were broken, pictures were ripped off the walls, wallpaper stripped, clothes were stolen or shredded. Games, toys, dishes, pots, pans, household goods were all destroyed or taken. Furniture was broken and thrown into the yard. A three-inch hole was

drilled into our piano, and the vandals tried unsuccessfully to cut the legs off the piano. A large steel beam was lifted and rammed through our front window. Nothing but wreckage remained inside the house, the result of incredibly thorough rage.

Because I was only five years old, I did not understand why people had destroyed our house. I did not know what a strike was, and I did not know what “crossing the picket line” meant. The word “scab” had been painted on the outside of our house, and when I asked what that word was, I was told it was a bad word that the bad people had painted on our house. No other explanation was given to me at the time.

Monday, the day after Palm Sunday, Mother, Ruth, and I went back to our house. Someone from the newspaper was there and took our picture, which was featured on the front page of the *Montana Standard* on Easter Sunday, April 21, 1946, four days before my sixth birthday.⁸³

Sarah and her family moved to an apartment in Uptown Butte for several months while their house was being restored. Her family received donations of clothing and toys, including a tricycle for Sarah. Ruth went back to school, where she was the subject of name-calling and teasing. When the family returned to their restored home shortly before Christmas 1946, they received a surprise visit from men of the McQueen Athletic Club bearing gifts of toys, books, and clothing for Sarah and Ruth and household items for their parents.

Sixty-five years later, Sarah carried the memories of that traumatic time.

When I reflect on the damage done that weekend not only to our home but to the homes of other supervisors, it shocks and saddens me to realize that the young people and the men and women who participated in the rioting were being taught that violence and destruction was an acceptable way to deal with conflict. I also find it hard to understand how some people tend to oversimplify conflicting values, which then get reduced to “us” versus “them” and allows people to act violently toward others without ever really knowing who they are or what they stand for. Perhaps someday we will move beyond treating each other this way. I certainly hope so.⁸⁴

While few Butte children were the targets of mob violence as experienced by Sarah and Ruth Massey, strikes were defining moments of

childhood for many. Children experienced solidarity and support, deep uncertainty about their families' futures, and the painful divisions of "us" and "them." Adults still carry memories of childhood slights when they were teased at school for their hand-me-down clothes. Children "walked on eggshells" at home to avoid upsetting an "already upset household." Adult economic worries preoccupied children's thoughts as well. Children were often keenly aware of the fact the grocery bills were adding up, and power bills were not being paid. Some kids remembered strikes as times of "more drinking and no money." Some took on more responsibilities at home in order to try to keep things on an even keel. Some internalized the sense of shame their parents voiced about seeking welfare assistance. Some can still taste the free commodity cornmeal and powdered milk that supplemented their meals. Others recalled the tensions at home and their fathers' resentment as their mothers tried to find paid work or increase their work hours.

Families went without basic medical care. Children made do with old glasses and worn shoes. Christmas might mean a single present or presents for the younger siblings only. One woman remembered the 1959 strike as the year she got a box of crayons for Christmas.⁸⁵ Children did not ask for more. They witnessed the differences between their families and the families of schoolmates who were not affected by the strike. Some were amazed at the sheltered lives of some of their peers. "They just didn't have the same experiences that we did. They thought we were making it up."⁸⁶ Some recalled their peers as just plain cruel. In the end, children learned that mining was a "hard, hard" life that took its toll on everyone.⁸⁷

Celebrating Community

While strikes brought notions of "us" and "them" into sharp relief, childhood memories are also shaped by the joy of celebration. Sometimes the Anaconda Company displayed its corporate benevolence through generous support of community spirit at holiday time. The Hill glowed at Christmas with lighted trees perched atop gallows frames, and Butte children enjoyed Company-sponsored parties at Halloween and Christmas. The Butte Miners' Union also fostered community spirit with the celebration of Miners' Union Day. June 13 marked the anniversary of the union's founding in 1878. While the date honored the lives and labors of mining men, it also celebrated the contributions of all of the city's working men and women. It was a citywide holiday. Thousands would gather for a grand parade, speeches, an afternoon of picnicking and competitive games at Columbia Gardens, and dancing into the night. John T. Shea recalled upwards of ten thousand miners,

dressed in their best clothes, marching in the parade when he was a youngster in the 1920s. "I was never so proud in my life as to walk holdin' my father's hand. It was a great thing," John remembered.⁸⁸ Steve Sherick, who grew up in Butte in the 1930s, described Miners' Union Day as a "big deal."

They used to have a Miners' Union Day parade. It would start at the Miners' Union Hall, and they would walk all the way down, like the Fourth of July parade, and go all the way back. And the first one of those I was in, I must have been about four or five years old because I can remember my dad carrying me. A lot of guys carried their kids. He had his white cap on and his bib overalls, and we'd march back, get in the car, and go up to Columbia Gardens. At the Gardens, there were competitions. They had first-aid teams from every mine, and they had a lot of miners working then. And they had the mucking contest, and they had the drilling contests. And so that was a big day up there. [They had] sack races and ice cream [for the kids], and you didn't pay for nothing. The Miners' Union paid for that. It was great. It was really something.⁸⁹

Jule McHugh remembered the events of the day.

We would go to the parade, although it wasn't more than a march, but they had the Elks and the Eagles drill teams and the miners' band. . . . After the parade, we went to the Gardens, where they had all the contests. We weren't interested, but we watched them anyhow. These were the drilling and shoveling contests. But we loved the first-aid contest. Each mine had a first-aid team, and the contests were held in the pavilion. Everybody would be cheering for their favorite mine to win.⁹⁰

Vadis Stratton grew up with a more skeptical view of the celebration: "They used to fine the miners if they didn't march in the parade. And my dad didn't like walking in the parade, but they'd fine them if you didn't. And then they went up to the Gardens. But my mother mostly took me. Anything free. They'd give you ice cream. For the kids, you know."⁹¹

Celebrations extended beyond the reach of mines and mining. Sporting events were a core part of community celebration as were ethnic and religious holidays. Butte youngsters vividly recalled the twinkling lights of Uptown Butte at Christmastime and family trips

through Meaderville to witness the Meaderville Fire Department's elaborate Christmas display. Children in Butte's Italian community joined their parents in door-to-door holiday visits on New Year's Day, sharing food and drink with their neighbors. Jewish families gathered at the Finlen Hotel each year for a Passover Seder dinner. As Mary Trbovich recalled, Serbian youngsters could hardly wait for Easter and Christmas to come. "Our parents would prepare for two weeks in advance for each holiday. How they ever did this without refrigeration I'll never know. Of course, in those days we didn't know what it was so did the best we could and survived."⁹²

Following the Julian calendar, Serbian families celebrated Christmas on January 7 and New Year's on January 14. Starting at tender ages, Serbian girls joined their mothers in holiday food preparation at Holy Trinity Orthodox Church, preparing recipes handed down from grandmother to mother and daughter.

However, it is the "all-American" celebration of the Fourth of July that stood out in many childhood memories. As Mary Lou Kane Fitzpatrick described:



The elaborate life-sized Christmas displays created by the Meaderville Volunteer Fire Department delighted Butte children.

On the Fourth of July, the parade used to come out West Broadway to Excel[sior] Avenue. My Grandma Driscoll's house was in the 700 block on Broadway, so we would go down and sit on the porch and watch the parade go by. It had all kinds of floats and bands, clowns, the whole nine yards. . . . In the afternoon, we'd set off firecrackers. Every Fourth of July I had a new dress made out of something fancy like organdy. [Then we] lit sparklers, and by the time the day was over, I had a dress full of nothing but little teeny holes where the sparks had caught the clothes on fire. There was no such thing as jeans for girls back then. All the girls dressed like ladies.⁹³

Catherine Hoy remembered the Fourth of July as the time when “we really tore loose.”

We had the big parade, you know, and . . . we got a new outfit. Fourth of July and Easter and Christmas we always had new clothes. And my mother and grandmother and these other families, there was about, oh, five or six families, and they all had between six and eight children. So, we'd all cook up these big meals. Boiled the hams, legs of mutton. I don't mean lamb. I mean old mutton. And then boiled the chickens, you know, baked the bread, all that affair. Then put it in baskets, and we'd go to the parade, and then after the Fourth of July parade we'd all jump on these outdoor cars and go to the Gardens.⁹⁴

Bessie Sherman remembered a particular Meaderville tradition: “On the Fourth of July, my dad always got us a pine tree to put up in the backyard. It was a custom then. We would sweep the yard extra clean and enjoy the shade of the tree during the days of the celebration. All the stores in Meaderville would have a tree in front of their buildings, too.”⁹⁵

The McHugh household had one particularly memorable Fourth of July when Jule was a girl:

We always had fireworks. No big displays . . . but we always had fun. One night we sure had our own fireworks. Johnny brought home two roman candles. We had never seen one before and didn't know what to do with them. So, Ma lit one—in the house. Well, we were all running, and she was all over the house screaming. I think it must have been the longest roman candle ever made as the “shoots” kept coming out and hitting us in the behind, and Johnny was trying to get

it away from her. But, finally, it fizzled out. You can be sure we set the other one off outside.⁹⁶

Children of Meaderville took pride in the grand floats created each year for the Fourth of July parade by the Meaderville Volunteer Fire Department. These works of art took weeks to build. During the 1940s and 1950s, the fire department dominated the competition, taking top prize for best float year after year. The float themes invoked images and joys of childhood—the circus, the Playtime Unlimited Train, Cinderella, and Mother Goose—and each year some lucky children had the pleasure of riding on the float in the parade.



Children of Meaderville took pride in the grand floats the Meaderville Volunteer Fire Department created each year for the Fourth of July parade. These works of art took weeks to build and dominated the competition, taking top prize year after year. This one participated in 1956.

Children were both keen observers of and active participants in the social and cultural life of Butte. They acquired rich cultural knowledge as they moved in and beyond neighborhood boundaries and negotiated the complex relations of belonging and difference. As open-pit mining operations began to expand in the mid-1950s, significant spaces of attachment to neighborhood, ethnicity, and community belonging were lost forever.

Janie Payne's East Butte neighborhood was consumed by the Berkeley Pit. She described what it was like to be unable to return home: "It affects your roots in some ways. I cannot take my son to my old grade school and say, 'This is where I went to school. This is the neighborhood I grew up in' because it is not there. So to maintain our family history, it's all pictures. This is what the neighborhood looked like. This is where my uncle used to teach boxing. My great-uncle taught boxing to a lot of people in this community, and those places are now gone."⁹⁷