Caitlin DeSilvey:  This is Caitlin DeSilvey and Minie Smith on October 1, 2007 at the home of Michael Nelson and Linda Nelson in East Missoula. We're doing a recording for the University of Montana archives. We're going to begin by asking you...Actually, let's just alternate here. What are your names and where and when were you born?

Michael Nelson:  I go by Mike Nelson. I was born in Missoula, of course. Lived all my life in Milltown. This is my wife, Linda. Her folks were the founders of Missoula.

Linda Nelson:  Yeah, great-grandfather.

MN:  Well, that's what I mean, anyway. And we've been married for forty-one years.

Minie Smith:  So Linda, where and when were you born and what was your maiden name?

LN:  My maiden name was Schultz and I was born in Orfino, Idaho. I've lived in Missoula since 1950.
MN: Go on and say who your great-grandfather was.

LN: Oh, my great-grandfather was Frank Worden, who was one of the co-founders of Missoula, with Captain Higgins. So my family has been here forever.

MS: So that answers how long you've lived in Milltown and Bonner. So did your family live here or did you move...?

MN: No, I was born in Milltown. Both my parents, my dad was the first one born out of eleven children in the United States. He had five brothers and sisters that were born in Norway. He was the first-born here. My mother was born in Milltown.

CD: What was your mother's maiden name?

MN: Carlson.

CD: OK, so she would have been first-generation Milltown then.

MN: Right.

CD: Can we ask some questions about his mom's family to fill that in? What was the story of how her family ended up here?
MN: They were Swedish immigrants. They came, oh, I would say in 1905, I would believe. My mother was born in '16. They were mill people that worked at the mill. They were actually raised at what we called the Duck Bridge, my mother was. You remember hearing about the Duck Bridge up there. Of course, the freeway went through and took their house out. My dad was raised in Milltown for most of his life.

CD: And his family moved there when he was a small boy, then?

MN: Yeah, when he was just born, in 1906. The oldest daughter was born in 1900, that would be the oldest sister. She went to the first grade school before there was ever a Bonner School. The Bonner School up at the very end of Bonner—maybe you're aware of that? That school, I think, was only in existence for about six years, seven years, and then they built the Bonner School.

CD: OK, so when your dad's family came over, they came straight here then.

MN: They did.

CD: They had all these kids and then they came over and they had their last child, and that was your dad.

MN: No, he was in the middle. They had five after that.

CD: I see. And did your granddad work at the mill as well?
MN: At the mills, yeah.

MS: And your granddad's name was Nelson or...?

MN: Nelson.

MS: Not Nells, but Nelson.

MN: Lars Nelson.

LN: Did he work at the mill too?

MN: He worked at the mill too. He also worked at the Milwaukee Railroad at different times.

CD: So when you were born, was your dad working at the mill?

MN: He was. He spent forty-some years there.

CD: What work did he do there?
MN: He was a blacksmith, a welder.

MS: This was the Anaconda Mine.

MN: Mmm hmm, Anaconda.

MS: Did you ever move out of Milltown?

MN: Never did. My mother and dad finally kicked me out at 22 years old so I could get married. I didn't want to leave home. [laughter]

MS: You didn't go very far. [laughter]

CD: So this little house, let's talk about where your house was.

MN: Well, it was across from Harold's. It's actually across from the old Hammond Boarding House, which most everybody would know where that is if they were acquainted with this area. When I was a kid, these houses extended out here where the freeway is, all of them. That took that out. I had a paper route from 1953 till '63, and I knew everybody in Milltown, everybody, I mean I knew who their folks were. There were four nationalities. There was Swede, Norwegian, Finnish, and French. You know, I knew everybody who was related to everybody, who was running with everybody, I mean, it was a neat place to grow up. I mean, you knew everybody. You didn't dare talk about anybody either, because they were intermarried all the way along, you know.
CD: Right, pretty short grapevine too for word to get around town. So how many kids were in your family that lived in that little house?

MN: Five at one time, five children.

CD: And you lived there till you were 22?

MN: Yeah, I did. And we still own the house.

CD: Is it rented now?

MN: To my son.

CD: Oh, okay, so it's still in the family.

MN: Right, and then I also own the house next door to it. We rent that one out. I didn't want to let my roots get too far away, so we kept it.

CD: So when you moved out when you were 22, did you move up here or did you move somewhere else?
MN: No, I can show you another house we lived in. This house right over here, it was the old Syre Boarding House. We lived there a year when we were first married. And then we lived—do you know where the Copper Shop Apartments used to be many years ago? You know where the old chateau...?

LN: It's just this side of the post office.

MN: Yeah, we lived there for a year and then we lived in Piltsville for a year, and then we moved here.

CD: Oh wow, so when did you build this house then?

LN: Oh gosh, seventy... two, I think, we moved in here.

MN: Right, and a little quick story on this house—Linda and I moved it up here all by ourselves. We paid $150 for it. But of course we've added on about three times since.

MS: And the house in Milltown that you own, you own the land underneath it?

MN: We do now. At one time Stimson owned it, I think, with all this pollution supposedly under it, they didn't want to take the responsibility of it so they just did here two years ago sell us the land in Milltown. We own the houses but we own the land and we pay to rent on the lease.
MS: So all the houses now in Milltown are... the ground is privately owned?

MN: Right, except I think the store and maybe the very end house belongs to Washington Corp., the railroad. I think there's two houses here and the store still on railroad land.

CD: So when you were a kid, what were your landmarks in Milltown? What businesses did you used to go to?

MN: OK, the businesses. Of course, the store was always there, and when I was a kid the main road went across the old black bridge, and this thing here was called the Missoula County Library. It sat over here. And there was a Smith Texaco station here. Well, when the road went through here, they didn't have room so they moved the library over here.

MS: This is 200 that you're talking about?

MN: Right. They moved that over here. This store faced the other way, you know, the store there. Now it faces sideways.

CD: Oh, its front was on the old road, OK.

MN: And then when I was a kid, the front was on this side.

CD: When did they put 200 through?
MN: ‘53, because I remember when I was a little kid at that house, it was just before the 4th of July and I had to be about six years old and you know those little lady fingers that you pop? I was popping them in the backyard and I heard this kar-boom. My dad was there and when they were building this bridge on 200 here, they had a crane setting on it and it fell through the deck and a man was killed. So I know it was 1953.

CD: That's how you locate the memory, yeah, that's good. So what about this road here? What businesses were in there?

MN: Let me think. There was no businesses here.

CD: Oh sorry, we're looking at where...

MN: Where I lived. These are just residential things here. There wasn't a bar up here before my time. There were about six bars in Milltown at one time. And when I was there, there were two. This was the Midway Bar, across behind the store. And the boarding house was next door and this was where the post office was for many, many years.

CD: And that's just across from the current store.

MN: Across from the current store. And the barber shop was right there, that was the barber shop. This was a gas station at one time. You went across the old bridge and then...
CD: Oh, OK. This is just one block up, east of the old bridge there was a gas station.

MN: Right.

LN: Wasn't there a grocery store where Payettes(?) live?

MN: Yeah, and this was called Reardon's Grocery Store. We tried to hold them up when we were kids. We really did.

CD: How successful was that?

MN: It wasn't. There was a Dufresne kid that lived right here and I can remember we put on a big old coat and a hat and we were going to go rob him and I fell off his shoulders. I think he was six and I was five. I mean, some dumb things you do when you're a kid, you know.

CD: So was this still a boarding house when you were a kid?

MN: Just getting over it being a boarding house.

CD: And what was that history? Was that just single mill workers that used to live there?

MN: Yeah, right. It was the old Hamma Boarding House.
CD: Is that the one that has the sign board up on it now?

MN: It is.

CD: OK, that will locate that for anybody who is listening who knows Milltown right now. It's the house that's closest to the highway as you're going over the bridge on the right.

MN: And the [inaudible] on the one end of it. And let me think of any other businesses that were in there. I think that's about it. They were all right along the old 200 coming across the old black bridge, which... And this was actually... There was a bridge here, but this was electric streetcar.

CD: And that was the streetcar bridge that went.

MN: Yeah, you know they took that out and put the newer one in here. The streetcar went this way and up to Bonner.

CD: Was that operating when you were a kid?

MN: No, I think it went down in '36 maybe, or '37.

CD: Could you walk over that old streetcar bridge?
MN: Oh yeah, many times.

CD: That sounds like the kind of thing a kid would like to do—jump off it.

MN: Yeah, that same Dufresne kid and I were doing some firecrackers. We lit the whole thing on fire one time when we were kids. Oh folks were mad at us. You know, you light things in dry grass and away it goes, you know.

MS: So what’s the biggest change that you’ve seen in the last fifty years?

MN: Probably the freeway going through, where they took I think twenty-one houses out of here. And some of those houses are still scattered around. They moved them in different locations. But in the Milltown area, that had to be the biggest thing that happened.

MS: The people whose houses were moved, did they leave Milltown?

MN: They stayed in the community, most of them, and some of them moved... Do you know where Griles (?) live, down in that area? Some of them are there. Some of them went to Clinton. My aunt and uncle bought some of them up in Piltsville and leased them out. If we had time, I could tell you where every one of them went if they didn't tear them down.

CD: You still remember?
MN: Oh yeah, because that was in... They didn't move those until the '60s. Probably from '64 to '65 is when that part of Milltown went out.

CD: Do you remember when people heard that the interstate was going to come through, how people felt about that?

MN: Well they really didn't have any choice. I mean, they didn't feel good about it, because there were some nice homes on the end of this. But being on lease land, I mean, the land was at that time Anaconda Company owned them and they didn't have any choice. And the highway did pay them for their house. But of course they didn't own the land.

CD: Did it change the way that people used the river, being cut off from...?

MN: Oh yeah, for sure it did, because there used to be channels down in here, starting about here. They called them the first channel, second channel, and third. When we were kids we used to ice skate down there. Coming off of this—where are we?—this road right here...

CD: This is the road right across from the.

MN: Harold's Club, going in front. And there used to be a hill called McCormick Hill, which there was a ranch down here, many years ago, before the dam was put in. They called it McCormick Hill, and we used to sleigh ride down that hill and then we'd skate on the channels when it first froze, then we'd move to the main river. We could skate all the way from Bonner Mill to the Duck Bridge, which was several miles, around there. It did really change the way we
used the river. Then we kind of went up here somewhat, or went up above Bonner and did our swimming up there at that time.

CD: Up in the Blackfoot area, rather than the Clark Fork. Were you calling it the Clark Fork at that point?

MN: We were calling it the Hell Gate.

CD: When did that switch over?

MN: It was always a Hell Gate where it met the Blackfoot, and then they called it the Clark's Fork going from there down, but it was always the Hell Gate River.

MS: Until it got to the dam there?

MN: Yeah, before it got to the dam. Where the two met then it was called the Clark Fork.

CD: That's when it changed. Do you remember when people stopped calling it Hell Gate?

MN: Well any of the old timers still call it that.

CD: Yeah, but it's just on the maps you don't see that anymore.
MN: Not anymore.

MS: So was it also called the Missoula River?

MN: I don't remember. Maybe downtown it was.

CD: Not in Milltown. [laughter]

MN: Not in Milltown. We didn't associate with those people downriver.

CD: So did you go to the Bonner School then?

MN: Yeah, I did.

CD: OK, all the way through to...

MN: All the way through.

CD: And then high school...
MN: There was just Missoula County High when I went. There was just one school.

CD: Were you bussed to Missoula for that?

MN: We were bussed. At that same time, Seeley Lake was still sending their students into Missoula. That was supposedly the earliest route for kids to get up in the United States. You know, they had to get up at four o'clock to get the bus.

CD: So, let's see, in the '60s, were you living in Milltown when the interstate went through?

MN: Mmm hmm. Just at the tail end of it. I don't know if I was gone before it was finished, but it was being built in the early '60s.

LN: In the Copper Shop Apartments...

MN: That was another section. You know, the whole thing wasn't done. Where the old chateau there when we were first married was the first place we lived and they were just building on this side of the Blackfoot River at that time, in '66.

MS: It took, what, five years to build it?

MN: Yeah, I think pretty close. Maybe from '63 to '66. At least three years, because it came in different... They'd do a section and then another section.
CD: So has the appearance of the houses in the Milltown area changed since you were a kid?

MN: Yeah.

CD: What was it like?

MN: Well, I'll tell you, it was a lot nicer, a lot better, when I was a kid. Everybody had white picket fences, kept their yards up, and I'm one to blame here too. A lot of junk in Milltown anymore. People have not taken care of.. Some of them have, but a lot of them are in shambles.

CD: Why do you think that is?

MN: Oh, people don't stay there, you know, they come in, they move. The property values have actually come up. When Linda and I got married... I'll point a house out to you here. It was the old Heckle(?) house, another Finnish family lived right there.

CD: Directly across the road from the boarding house.

MN: We could have bought that house for—$1000? $1100 or something like that.

LN: $1500 or something.
MN: All the furniture was in it. They had a well that supplied all the water to all these houses over here, so that brought in about $25 a month or something like that. And they had a ’49 Mercury with a suicide door that was spit polished all for $1500. And everybody says, "You're nuts. Don't buy it because you don't own the land under it." It's still a beautiful house but I can remember all the old clocks and the linens. It had a finished bath in the basement. Any other house, maybe eight, nine hundred dollars for the house in ’66, ’67.

CD: So do you think it was that sort of slight insecurity about not owning the land that just made people not invest in their houses as much.

MN: Well the thing is too you couldn't get a loan on it from the bank. I mean, you just couldn't. They lend a lot easier these days, but a dollar was a dollar back in them days.

CD: So when it was really well kept up, were most of the people who lived there working for the mill when you were a kid?

MN: Most all of them.

MS: So did the mill do things for the people living in those houses?

MN: No, nothing, but the other good thing was I think the lot rent was $15 a year.
LN: When we bought the land, it was up to $70 a year. They'd raised the rent up to $70 for a whole year.

MN: Well you can't even take a trailer house and put it on a lot for less than $200 a month, so it was really to your advantage not to own the ground. I mean, if that's the way...

CD: Because you're not paying taxes?

MN: You're not paying taxes on it, you're paying one little payment.

CD: And were they mostly long-term leases?

MN: Yeah, at that time.

MS: You mentioned a well over here. Did that come from the Blackfoot?

MN: It was right next to the river, the well was.

MS: Yeah, so it didn't have the contamination that the other...

MN: Well no, no. What happened there, I'll tell you what happened. In the mill yard over here—it had to be Champion—that had all their logs there and they were watering them down
with some kind of a preservative and that got into the ground water. So there's another well over there that supplies this part of Milltown with water and they put it in for the people.

MS: The Champion put it in?

MN: Yeah, the Champion put it in.

LN: Is that well house gone now?

MN: It's gone.

LN: There used to be a little house, a tall thing.

MS: So your water came from your house...

MN: We have our own well at our house.

MS: And you always had your own well?

MN: We always had our own well. No, can't say that. We packed water when a little kid, in the buckets. And then in 1950, I can remember, they dug by hand. The guys got together. It's a long ways. They dug it by hand, six foot deep, and we got cold water in the house. And then a couple
years later we got a jack next to the old wood stove and then we had hot water in the wintertime when the stove was on. Otherwise my mother would have to get the stove going and you add one of those things next to your thing and it would heat it. And then in '55 we got a bathroom. Everybody had outsiders before '55. Then I think it was a little bit later, natural gas came in. So we got natural gas. My mother burned wood until real late. She just loved her old wood stove, you know.

MS: She did all her cooking on the old wood stove?

MN: A lot of it. In the summer they had just a little two-burner electric stove. But she always cooked on the wood stove.

LN: Then you would go up to the mill to take baths and showers.

MN: Oh yeah, we'd go up to the mill, the men would. We'd go up to the shower room at the mill. My dad really didn't want us boys going with him because he always liked to go take a bath and then stop at the Midway Bar on the way home. That was a kind of a...

CD: So as kids you were allowed to go join him? And the women would just wash at home in the washtub or something?

MN: Right, in the tub, in a washtub, yeah.

CD: So did you work at the mill then as well?
MN: I did one year, when I was in high school. I lied about my age. I was seventeen and I lied my age to the personnel guy up there. "Oh yeah, your dad’s worked here, you go to work." So I was working and I was going to high school, my senior year, and I was struggling because I worked until two o'clock in the morning and had to get up. Well this friend of mine, I was born June 16th and he was born in May and they hadn't hired him and he went and told on me, that I'd lied my age. So Riley was the guy's name. He called me and he says, "Mike, I tell you what we're going to do. We're going to lay you off for two weeks," which he did. Well, I gained nothing, really, because I got laid off for the two weeks or three weeks I lied about. And Raymond went to work and I... [inaudible] summertime and I had a couple weeks of summer anyway before I went back to work.

MS: So what did you do at the mill?

MN: Oh I worked on the green chain mostly, then I worked down on the ponds—that was a fun job—where you slip the logs into the slip and they went up in the mill to be sawed. I remember it was cold one night and I was down there and something got jammed up. You know, I had never worked down there much and I went charging out there. Well the bark had built up on the water and it looked just like dry ground. Boy I went charging out there and I went [inaudible] and I damn near froze to death. It was early in the spring.

CD: That sounds dangerous.

MN: Oh yeah. What a shock.

CD: So you had one year and then that was enough for you?
MN: Then I went to Alaska for about three months and damned near starved to death. So we came back and a friend of mine, who lived in Pine Grove, McDonald Logging. I think when I left the mill I was making $1.63 or something and I had a job to go logging for $3 an hour. So then I went logging for a while. Then I went to work for the post office. Then I went to work for Montana Power. Then I went to work for the state of Montana and I went thirty-two years with the Highway Department.

MS: What kind of memories do you have of the dam?

MN: Oh I have a lot of memories of the dam down there. As kids we fished down there all the time. Got in trouble. You'd go out there on the spillway, you know, and the German brown fish, they tried to spawn about in August, you know. And of course there's no water coming over the spillway, or maybe just a little bit, and they'd try to jump up there and we'd spear them. The game warden didn't like that.

CD: Would you have homemade spears?

MN: Oh yeah. [laughter]

CD: What was the best wood for a fish spear?

MN: Yeah, then we'd ice fish down there in the wintertime. Oh there was a lot of memories. And then they had a swinging bridge above the spillway and we'd get out there and drive those two guys at the dam nuts because they knew who we were but we could run over the mountain.
and get off or. You know, they'd send the law after us every once in a while down there, playing around that dam. I'll miss the dam. I was really against them taking it out.

LN: Didn't your brother go over?

MN: Oh yeah, they'd get in rubber boats and go over that dam in high water.

CD: Would they? Just to through the spillway there?

MN: Yeah, over the spillway, down along, bob back up down there.

CD: When we were talking to Emmet Smith he was saying that he used to let kids fish out of the windows sometimes.

MN: They did.

CD: Did you ever do that?

MN: I never did got to. I was always in trouble down there.

CD: Right, so you weren't one of the ones who got special favors. [laughter]
MN: No, I didn't get to do the fun things, no.

CD: Did you go out in boats in the summertime on the pond—did you call it the pond or the reservoir?

MN: The reservoir, oh yeah. We were always on that river doing something on it when we were kids. Funny a lot of kids didn't drown out there. We'd ice skate all winter long and build fires and we'd go up to the Milltown dump, which was right up here. I don't know if you've been watching what they've been doing, but they had to take that dump out. It was all piled there. These channels went up to the dump and we'd get our sleds and put these tires on them, you know, and bring them down to the point, which was right here.

MS: McCormick Point.

MN: Yeah, down there. And we'd light those tires on fire and I don't know if you've ever seen black smoke. Come home and all you'd see was our teeth. Our clothes would be really, really bad from that smoke. Then we'd smoke these—I don't know if they call it driftwood or something like that—you'd get about one puff out of them before they burned your throat up. Did you ever do that when you were kids? [laughter] My mother taught me how to do that, believe that or not. She says, "We used to smoke these when we were kids."

MS: So did you speak English at home?

MN: My grandmother lived with us until she died in 1951, and she couldn't hardly talk English. Everything was Swede. I could understand her. I still remember some of it. My folks talked
when they wanted us not to know something, they'd talk Swede and Norwegian until we left home. But in later years it got to where you could understand everything. It was more English than it was Scandinavian.

MS: One was speaking Swedish and the other was speaking...?

MN: Well, they're so close to the same thing that they understood each other.

CD: Did most people in Milltown speak their native...?

MN: A lot of them did. When I was a kid, like the Boliers(?)—they were French—he couldn't talk English. And the CadgersI(?) were French and they talked French. But most of the time—and the Finns were very hard to understand—that's such a complicated. I don't know it's almost like... I don't know how to explain it. But most of the Scandinavians did learn to speak more English.

CD: So were there any community organizations you were involved with as a kid or did your family go to church?

MN: Lutheran League. The Lutheran Church was up here by the school. I belonged to that and we had a real big Boy Scout thing out here, from Cub Scouts all the way through. I belong to the Lion's Club out there right now and we sponsor the Boy Scouts. There were two kids in the Boy Scouts. Our troop had 120.
CD: Now they have two?

MN: Now they have two. Nobody wants to do it. The kids don't want to have Boy Scouts anymore. That's honest God's truth.

CD: Was that a Boy Scout troop that was Milltown and Bonner both?

MN: Yeah, Pine Grove, the whole area. And there was a teacher from up here. His name was Larry [inaudible]. Maybe you've heard of him. He taught at Bonner for, I don't know, oh God, probably thirty, forty-some years. But I mean he got us all going. And then all the parents got involved in it and they'd be... We'd camp all over and they'd take trips around Flathead Lake or down the Missouri River. It was a big thing when I was a kid, was Boy Scouts.

MS: Did you have a car?

MN: No, I didn't, not until almost I got out of high school.

MS: But your family had a car?

MN: They had one car.

MS: So on these trips you got there by...?
MN: Oh there'd always be some parents, like the Deschamps down here, that owned a ranch where we're living now. This was the old Deschamp Ranch. They were big at helping people or kids to get around. The Caras Nursery, old Jim Caras, he had a big van that he'd take all our stuff out for us and set up tents.

LN: Even though Jim didn't go to school out there, he was still in their Boy Scout group for some reason.

CD: Jim Caras was?

LN: Jim, yeah.

MN: We'd have Boy Scout dances. We had a real nice thing going out here. Then the old Finn Hall—you've heard of that, haven't you? Well they'd have dances down there. We'd go down there, go to them, when I was a little kid. What else went on up here?

MS: Did the whole family go to these dances?

MN: Oh yeah, the Finn Hall especially. The Boy Scout ones it was just us kids.

LN: And then the sports.
MN: Well there wasn't really too much for sports. We did have basketball at grade school and a little bit of softball in the spring, but if you wanted to play you went to town. We used to hitchhike. In high school I played football for four years. You hitchhiked in and out and made your own way.

CD: Would you know the people who picked you up half the time?

MN: Most of the time not. You always got a ride right away. There was always somebody.

CD: So we were talking about the Boy Scouts. Do you think one of the differences now is it's just an older population? Are there fewer families?

MN: No, I think there are just as many kids but kids just don't do that anymore. It's other activities like they're soccer players, they're so many activities that they all get spread out and there's no one thing out in this area.

LN: Plus I think at that time I don't think a lot of the mothers worked.

MN: None of the mothers worked.

LN: Where nowadays both of you are working and your kids are going here and there. It's just a change in the times, not only out there but I think it's all over.
CD: Were there any differences between you, your group, and the people that lived in Milltown and Bonner? How would you sort of capture some of that?

MN: Oh yeah. I can remember the two churches, the Catholics and the Lutherans, their churches were right next to each other. We'll you'd play with the Catholic kids all year long and then when you went to vacation Bible school you were not allowed to play together because they were the Catholics and you were the Lutherans.

CD: But you were at the same Bible school?

MN: No.

LN: The two churches are right next door to each other.

CD: Oh, OK, it was just at the same time.

MN: At the same time. They'd have their church summer group and we had ours. And we had a volleyball net right in the middle of it. The minister would say, "Now, you're not supposed to be playing with those Catholic kids."

CD: Really, the adults enforced it?

MN: Well, I don't know, it must have come from somewhere.
LN: I think it's because when the Lutheran Church broke away from the Catholic Church hundreds of years ago...

CD: Right, there's some memory about that.

MN: My old grandma Nelson, a lot of her offspring married Catholics, and I can still remember—she had an old Norwegian brogue—"They're really nice people even if they are Caaaatholics". She'd just spit that Catholic out. [laughter]

MS: Well you mentioned the Lutheran League. Can you explain what that was?

MN: Oh it was just for youth in the church where you got together and you'd sing and, you know, just a youth group within the church. Lots of the kids belonged to that at different times. Kind of just get-together.

MS: Was there also a difference between people who lived in Milltown and Bonner? Did people look at each other differently?

MN: Oh yeah, because most all the bosses lived up in Bonner, you know. There was always a little friction between the Bonner kids and the rest of the community like Piltsville, Finn Town, or West Riverside or Pine Grove. And they used to call—I know you've heard that expression—Silk Stocking Row, up in Bonner from there down. You know, those women would get their white gloves on and go to the grocery store. I mean, they thought they were pretty important up in that area.
CD: Even into the 50s.

MN: Oh yeah.

CD: When did it stop being mostly the managers' houses in Bonner?

MN: Well I think mostly just about when Champion took over.

CD: Oh okay, and that policy just kind of fell by the wayside?

MN: Well by that time people had big cars and the bosses lived in Missoula and wanted bigger houses. I think they were lucky to fill the houses in Bonner. The rent was cheap, and then it became nobody cared one way or the other, but there was a time at Bonner where you were a little ahead of everybody else if you lived there. And even moving from Milltown, if you got a boss's job, they would move to Bonner and then they were just a little uppity.

CD: Oh, I see, everyone would say, "Oh yeah, they're moving to Bonner."

LN: Don't you think when Anaconda Company sold out to Champion, that was another life-changing event, because Anaconda Company had been here forever.
MN: Well what happened when Champion bought it was that they imported so many people from Oregon into the mill system that then it wasn’t the same old four nationalities out there. Then the biggest change was you didn’t know everybody. You were guaranteed. if your dad worked at that mill when Anaconda had it, you were guaranteed a job if you wanted to go there.

MS: So the community of Milltown, the ethnic diversity changed afterwards, so people moved out and got different jobs.

MN: Right, and it got to be that none of the kids from the Bonner School—most of them, some of them did—they didn’t go to work at the mill. They went off and did something else. Then when you were living in Bonner, if you retired in the town of Bonner, you were not allowed to live in Bonner.

CD: They made you move out?

MN: They made you move out.

LN: You had to be working at the mill to live in a house in Bonner.

CD: So where did they go? They just would rent houses somewhere else?

MN: They'd buy other houses around. Or if they saved up enough they'd buy another house in Piltsville or go to town.
CD: So that's part of the reason why there isn't anybody still living in Bonner who has that deep history with the area.

MN: Exactly.

CD: Do you know anybody who's living in Milltown still, who you remember being there when you were a kid?

MN: Yeah, and I'm sure you're aware of a Dufresne, Theola and Leo. They're in their eighties right now. Leo and Theola Dufresne. They live...

CD: I think their parents must have been interviewed in the 80s.

MN: They were. It's that red-roofed house right there, on that street over there.

LN: Is it red or is it this one?

MN: No, it's that one, that grey one right there.

MS: He worked in the mill?

MN: He did at one time, but he ended up being the janitor at Bonner Grade School.
CD: Is that about it, when you think back?

MN: Well there's some of them living in Missoula, like Ellen Dussault. She's probably ninety... How old is Ellen?

LN: She's ninety-six, I think.

MN: She lived in that house there.

CD: But as far as folks that are still living in the area, the Dufresnes are about it.

MN: No, I don't think there's anybody left. Let me just go real quick through everybody.

CD: Mike's looking at the picture.

MN: You know, I don't think there's anybody here from the 50s.

LN: One of the kids that lived in this house lives just right up at Piltsville on Hellgate Drive, Jimmy Wallace. I don't know if you know...

CD: Yeah, he's one of the people that Judy has talked to us about.
LN: And he lived [inaudible]

CD: Your next door neighbor?

MN: Yeah, we own the house he lived in now. There's offspring living around, but I don't think there's anybody in Milltown right now that lived there as a kid. Like Jerry Buckhouse, he lives across from Jim Willis.

CD: Is that partly because folks are like you, they wanted to have families, they've ended up moving out?

MN: Yeah.

MS: Have the opportunities changed a lot for women since?

MN: Oh yeah. When I was a kid, all the mothers stayed home. They had gardens up in Bonner, you know, you raised big gardens and they stayed home and canned. You got your fruit in the fall and they canned the fruit.

MS: And the gardens were on the mill site?

MN: Yeah, on the mill site.
CD: Oh, so that was actually people in Milltown would go up and garden there as well as Bonner people?

MN: Right.

CD: Oh I didn't realize that was such a community lot.

MN: If you wanted to have a little plot to have a garden, they furnished the water and all that sort of thing. I only remember about two mothers when I was a kid ever working. They always had a little bit more because they both worked.

CD: When you're cooking on a wood cook stove there's not a lot of extra time for you to be doing anything else. [laughter]

MN: I don't think the opportunity for women was there at that time. I mean, unless you went somewhere and cooked somewhere or you went to a café or something. Very few of them—Peggy Rant(?) went to work for the Forest Service and that was about the only other one. [inaudible] Kolppa and her Finnish family. She ran the beanery at the Northern Pacific Railroad.

CD: Kolppa?

MN: Kolppa, yeah—K-0-P-P-... I don’t know how you spell it.
LN: K-O-L-P-P-A.

CD: I know Louise who lives here in East Missoula.

MN: That’s a cousin.

CD: So some of the other things that have been happening recently, do you know anybody who’s been affected by the layoffs that are happening now at the mill?

MN: There’s kind of where you lose me because I don’t know hardly anybody that stayed there and worked. They’ve either retired or when they get cut down... I think when Champion was at full force there was 800-something employees up there. What is it, down to 120 or something like that?

LN: And most of the people that—if they’re still working there—they were younger than you anyway.

MN: Yeah, right. Some of those kids got laid off, like Mike, he’d been there thirty-two years and got laid off.

LN: Maples?
MN: Mike Maples. So that had an effect. You're right at that wrong age at that time. If you have thirty-two years in at the mill, you're in your fifties. It's kind of hard to go out and get a...

CD: Retrained...

MN: Yeah, retrained.

CD: Yeah, one of the things that we—I can't remember who we were talking to. Oh, it was a teacher at Bonner who was saying there's actually only one family that he knows of with kids at Bonner School that were affected by the recent layoffs. The kids are coming from all over. Their parents don't work there anymore and there's people that work there that live in Missoula, so it just doesn't have that way that it's tied in really into the community anymore. So it seemed to him like it wasn't really shaking things up that much for people, although that would have been really different when you worked there. If that kind of layoff had happened it would have turned the place upside down.

MN: Right. I guess what I'm trying to point out is some of them have four generations that went to that Bonner School. Like my folks went, I went, and our kids both went there. Now my kid's living here, he's thinking about getting married, so there might be a fourth generation kid going there now.

CD: And your son's kind of counting on staying? He likes living in Milltown?

MN: Oh yeah, he's dependent on his mother like I was dependent on my mother.
CD: [laughter] She's not going to kick him out of the house?

MN: When I left my mother was still buttering my bread. Those kind of people, you know, kids could do no wrong. And I did a lot of wrong I think. [laughter]

CD: So where did you two meet then?

MN: At Snowbowl.

LN: Yeah, skiing.

MN: We were skiing and ran into each other.

MS: What do you see as the impact on Milltown-Bonner of the cleanup? What's going to happen? How's that going to change the...?

MN: You mean the town of Milltown cleanup, or the cleanup of the dam thing?

MS: The cleanup of the dam and the river. How's that going to affect...?

MN: Well, I was just talking to Jim Willis just before you guys drove up and he was just at a meeting. It's the same old thing. You know down where the dam sits now, you know that road
that you get to the dam on? Well, they had a lot of problems there because that place that the Northern Energy owns, where the dam is, they were wanting to put some kind of a thing there. Well now these people down on the road—what do they call that?

CD: Well it’s Tamarack and then it turns into something else—Juniper.

MN: Juniper. They're bitching because they don't want the traffic going down there. So they're trying to get them to close the road. It just seems like one thing leads to another. Then they're fighting over the old black bridge in Milltown. They want to tear it out. Now they're trying to figure out what to name it. They were going to name it after somebody famous in Milltown, well there's nobody that famous. So I guess they settled on the Blackfoot River Bridge.

MS: That makes sense.

CD: That sounds sensible. [laughter]

MN: I mean if you name it after somebody then you're going to have a fight with somebody else.

CD: So do you remember, was your family still living in Milltown in the early 80s when it came out about the contamination and all that? Do you remember how they felt about that?

MN: Well I knew because the university took it upon themselves to come and check our well about once a month.
CD: Oh, that wasn’t optional?

MN: I think it was an option. And ours wasn’t affected. I don’t know why it would be that way, but across what I call the tracks, the railroad, this was supposedly all affected. Supposedly our water came off Bonner Mountain, behind the school there was something that came down. They checked it and checked it, but we did receive a new well here. What was it last year or the year before? When they started drawing the river down, our well went dry and they did put in a new well for us. The water’s a lot harder because it’s deeper.

CD: Were people surprised when they found out about the arsenic in the wells, or was that?

MN: Oh you know I don’t think people were really educated that well. Hell, we drank it for all these years and some of the people are 90 and 100 and we haven’t gotten sick. They made a bigger to-do over it than it really... I don’t know.

CD: It’s a long time from 1982 to 2007. Did you see attitudes about the cleanup and the contamination change over that time?

MN: No, not really. I hate to see it all disrupted like it was because you guys have seen behind the dam how pretty the islands and the water and the trees and all. Sure, there was poison underneath it but I just... And it was pretty behind the dam. The river people boated out there. Now there will be no boating.

CD: I loved kayaking out there.
MN: You'll do alright with that, but I mean... And you could still kayak with the deeper water.

CD: But that flatwater kayaking where you can nose in in all those little channels and stuff like that, that's different. It's real peaceful to do that. It's not like powering down the river.

MN: Oh OK, I agree with you there. You know, we duck hunted there, we fished. I just hated to see.

MS: Do the swans still come there?

MN: Oh yeah, every year my mother would get all excited because of the swans—I don't know where they came from, Alaska or somewhere—that was always her big day because the swans were in. It was really close to the first day of spring and everybody would go out and watch them. They were the big trumpeter swans. I'm sure they'll light somewhere on the river, but they used to like to go in that one area by the Duck Bridge. But things change.

CD: Yeah, I guess it's been a while since... Were you involved when they were talking about whether or not to take the dam out and how to go about doing the cleanup?

MN: I didn't get involved. You'd go to those meetings at Bonner School and they'd get up and start yelling and screaming at each other and people wanted this and people wanted that. I knew they were going to do what they were going to do.
MS: So what do you think the place will be like in 50 years, using your crystal ball?

MN: Well, I think eventually—and it's happening all over—you'll see a sewer system come out that way. It's already right... We own some down on the river and it's right to that point right now and I think you'll get a sewer system all the way out there. The only thing that kind of worries me is—and I don't know how much taxes are involved—but Bonner School at one time had two railroads going through it, the big ACM Bonner mill that did everything for the grade school, you had the dam. We never even bought pencils or paper. Everything when we went to school was all provided. I think they're going to have some tax problems out there. Oh and then a friend of mine was the one that bought the sixteen houses that they're going to move behind Bonner. You've probably read about that. So I mean I'm glad to see that.

CD: Is he going to move all of them? Is that the plan?

MN: The ones that will hold together. There's sixteen of them. You know where the ballfield is there? It sounds like they're going to go behind the town of Bonner in a sixteen-acre thing. And then he also bought the log yard, which is across from Town Pump down there.

MS: So he's going to fix them up and...?

MN: He'll own them and rent them.

CD: Do you have any insight as to how that unfolded where everyone thought they were going to get demolished and then there was this sort of behind the scenes thing going on?
MN: Well, I think there was some behind-the-scenes. When you turn that off, I'll give you my view on that.

CD: Alright, that's fine. [laughter] It's just there was a lot of sort of grieving and hands in the air going on about losing those houses. So do you think that development and new houses being built and those houses being fixed up, is that going to change how the area feels?

MN: Well I think everybody would kind of be for it. And I think you'll agree with me when you go through the town, it's unique, where the trees are all up and there used to be little sidewalks and they did keep the houses a lot better years ago but they kind of let them go to waste. And then up at the end of Bonner there were three extra houses. They tore them out—what?—a year ago? And then they piled all that dirt and bark and it looks ugly back in there. I don't think they had to do it that way. At least put a big fence up so you don't have to look at it.

CD: How long do you think Simpson will just hang onto the...?

MS: Yeah, do you think they'll survive?

MN: I don't. I just don't think they will.

MS: So then do you see some other industry coming in?

MN: Oh I think so. Something will come. I think it will be [whispers] Danny Washington. I think he's already looking at that, I really do.
CD: Watch this space. If you're listening to this in twenty years, you can tell us whether Mike was right or not. [laughter] What would you like to see down at the confluence there where the powerhouse is now? Is there anything you think that could go in there to help remember that history?

MN: Well I don't know. I think they could landscape it in some way and make a park out of it that people can enjoy. I don't think we need a bunch of buildings down there or anything like that. I don't know, have they settled on that thing up on top of the tunnel to look down?

CD: Yeah, they got the land secured and there's going to be an overlook there.

MN: An overlook, yeah.

MS: Did you ever hear anything about Riverside Park, growing up?

MN: My mother used to—you mean down where?

MS: Near the dam.

MN: Yeah, my mother remembers it well. They had a pavilion down there and they had a park and she can remember when the Indians used to come and camp there. They had carnivals. Well, W. A. Clark, was it, that owned the mill? He put on some big things down there. She remembered dances down there. What else?
LN: Where was it?

MN: Down there by Griles(?) trailer court, by the dam. Kind of hard to see now because of the way the freeway went through there, but yeah, I can remember just the last part of it. My dad, the welder and the type of guy he was, there used to be a big water tower down there, a huge one, and a big teepee burner. And he used a torch and that was the last I remember of it because they were tearing the buildings down in the early 50s, late 40s and I remember...

MS: These were the buildings on the old Clark Mill?

MN: The old Clark Mill, yeah.

CD: Or was that right down by the river there in that area they call the mud bog now?

MN: The mud bog—well it's right where Town Pump is. From there and then their yards were down further and that pavilion was just beyond that.

CD: Right, it's hard to picture that with the interstate going through, but it would have all been continuous going down to the river.

MN: It was all open, all the way through there to the river.
MS: So that pavilion was still there when you were...?

MN: I don't remember it. I just remember my mother telling me about it.

CD: Were there any other stories your mom and dad would tell you about being young in the area when you were growing up?

MN: Running the logs at Western Mill and my dad fell—I don't know if it was my dad that fell in or if it was his brother that fell in. They pulled him out with a pike pole, you know. He was under the logs.

MS: So your dad worked at the Western Mill?

MN: No, my grandfather did. I think I've got a check stub here somewhere in the basement where he got paid for the month and it was, what, thirty-two dollars for the month? I wish we had a lot of those old pictures out here. They're packed away somewhere. A lot of those pictures—do you remember ever going, when we had the old-timer's days at Bonner School and they'd set up about 1500, 2000 of these old pictures.

CD: Yeah, we've seen some of those because they just scanned them all.

MN: They did what?

CD: They scanned them all and made them digital so they can actually put them on the internet.
MN: Oh, I'm glad they did. A lot of those pictures were of my folks.

CD: Oh OK, so you donated them when they did the centennial thing?

MN: Right, my mother did. There was a guy out here by the name of Jack Demmons—maybe you know Jack? He was big into that and he interviewed my mother and they would get together and talk about old times. He actually spent a fortune on that, the Lion’s Club and Jack.

CD: I'm actually wondering. This is the list...This isn't really in the plan, but this is the list of people that already did oral histories. A lot of these were done in the 80s. I'm just kind of curious if you knew some of those folks.

MN: I know Rita LaVoie, I can tell you right where she lived.

CD: She lived in Milltown?

MN: She lived right there when she was growing up. Gendrow lived on the flat but he lived right—where's our old house—he lived right here.

CD: This is across the tracks from Mike's old house.
MN: Pat Thibodeau actually wasn’t... His wife still lives out here. She lives right down here by Briggeman's. LaForge and McClellan—Genevieve just died. She was raised up here in Piltzville.

CD: So these people were all on your paper route, huh?

MN: Some of them. Hazel Karkanen was my dad's teacher. That would be way, way back. She was my teacher, Mildred Dufresne. Lehti, old Buck Lehti, yeah, he lived right down in Pine Grove forever. Ornie Corrick, he was a great guy. George Neff lived down here. And then Jack Demmons, of course, he was the one we were just talking about. Oney Hames, that was from the Hames boarding house. George Batay, I knew her. She was the cook at school. And Hazel again. Buchard of Bonner, that must have been—I knew her. And then Nimocks, they live in Piltzville still, or he does. She just died.

CD: It will be interesting to see if in twenty years there are still people who live in the area. If your son's still there, then he'll have some deep history there.

MN: That Bert Nimocks is still alive, but he's kind of a different old guy.

CD: Well I think that's about...

MS: Do you have anything else that you'd like to...?
MN: Judy and Briggeman, Kim, and I went all the way around Milltown and I pointed out who lived in every house one night.

LN: Did they record that?

MN: I think she had a recorder. I'd tell her, "You'd better turn this off because somebody was living with somebody at that time that shouldn't have been living with them." [laughter]

MS: Well thank you very much.